

# **Breastfeeding Practices in China and Ireland**-The Chinese Mother in Ireland Survey

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## Background

The long-term and short-term health benefits of breastfeeding are well recognized. World Health Organization (WHO) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life [1].

Migration to another country may lead to some changes in breastfeeding practices.

Decrease in breastfeeding rates have been commonly reported in some Asian immigrants in Western countries, owing to:

- A lack of family support
- A need to work or study
- An increased interest in Western norms
- Language barriers
- Inability to maintain the traditional postpartum practices
- Acculturation

Chinese immigrant mothers studies reported:

- Lower breastfeeding initiation rate<sup>[2]</sup>
- Decline in breastfeeding duration<sup>[3]</sup>

#### Breastfeeding in Ireland<sup>[4]</sup>:

National (47%) vs Non-national (80%)

Chinese population in Ireland: One of the largest ethnic groups, taking up 3.1% of non-nationals<sup>[5]</sup>.

#### Objectives

Chinese-Irish mothers gave birth in China (CMC)

VS

Chinese-Irish mothers gave birth in Ireland (CMI)

- Breastfeeding initiation & duration
- Factors influencing breastfeeding practices

#### **Methods & Study Procedure**

## Samples:

- Chinese mothers
- Born in China
- Have been in Ireland for > 6 months

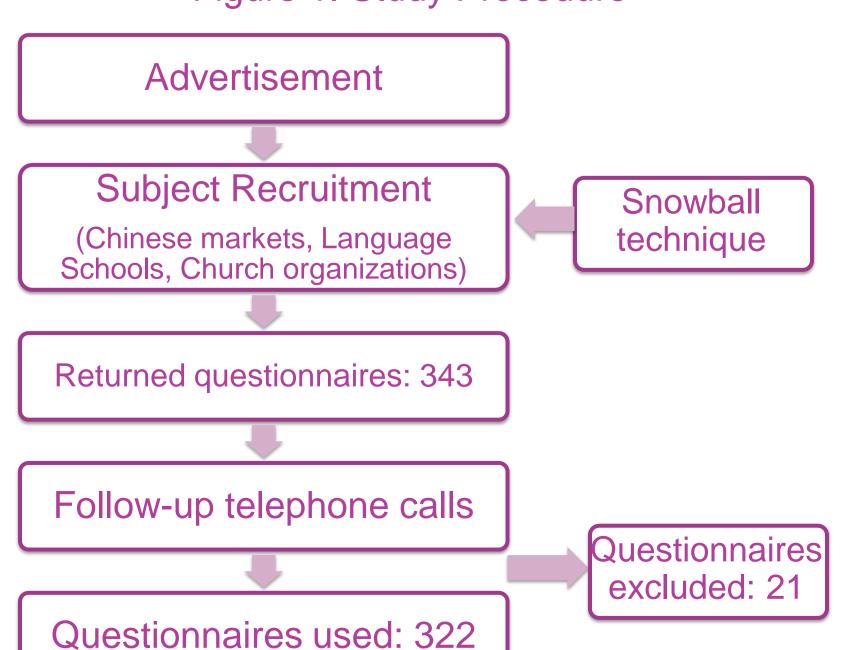
Instrument: Cross-sectional self-administrated survey (written in Chinese)

Data Collection: Mailed questionnaires

Data analysis (SPSS version 15)

- Frequency
- Chi-square

Figure 1. Study Procedure



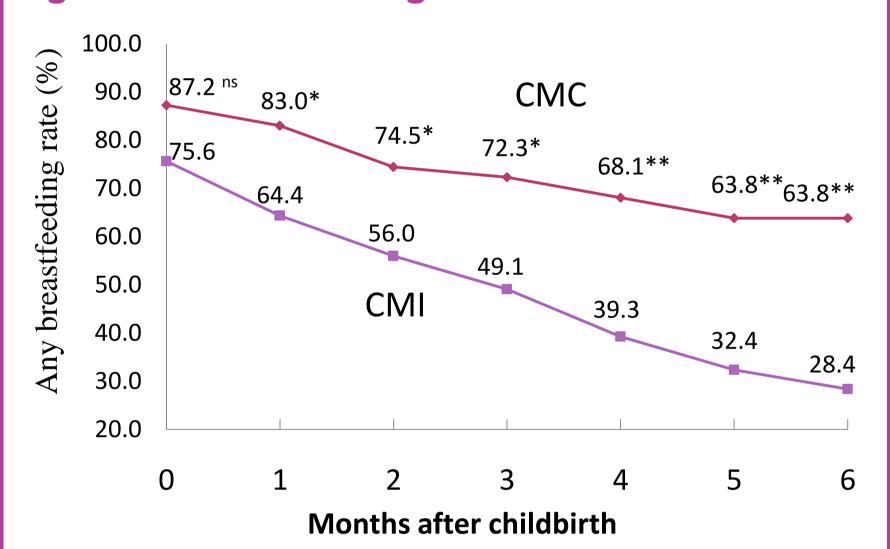
#### Results

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

	CMC	CMI
	(n=47)	(n=275)
	No. (%)	No. (%)
Maternal age (years)*		
20-25	27 (60.0)	81 (30.1)
26-30	10 (22.2)	111 (41.3)
>30	8 (17.8)	77 (28.6)
Marital status		
Married	43 (91.5)	232 (84.4)
Single/Divorced/Widow	4 (8.5)	43 (15.6)
Education level		
Primary/Secondary	23 (48.9)	133 (48.4)
Tertiary	24 (51.1)	142 (51.6)
Mother's birthplace		
Mainland China (North)	20 (42.6)	143 (52.4)
Mainland China (South)	19 (40.4)	91 (33.3)
Hong Kong & Macau	8 (17.0)	39 (14.3)
Duration in Ireland(years)*		
<=5	29 (61.7)	69 (25.1)
>5-10	17 (36.2)	163 (59.3)
>10	1 (2.1)	43 (15.6)
Child's order*		
1	45 (95.7)	171 (62.2)
2/3/4	2 (4.3)	104 (37.8)
*P<0.05 Significance of relationships was calculated by Pearson		

\*P<0.05. Significance of relationships was calculated by Pearson Chi-square statistics.

Figure 2. Breastfeeding rates from 0 to 6 months



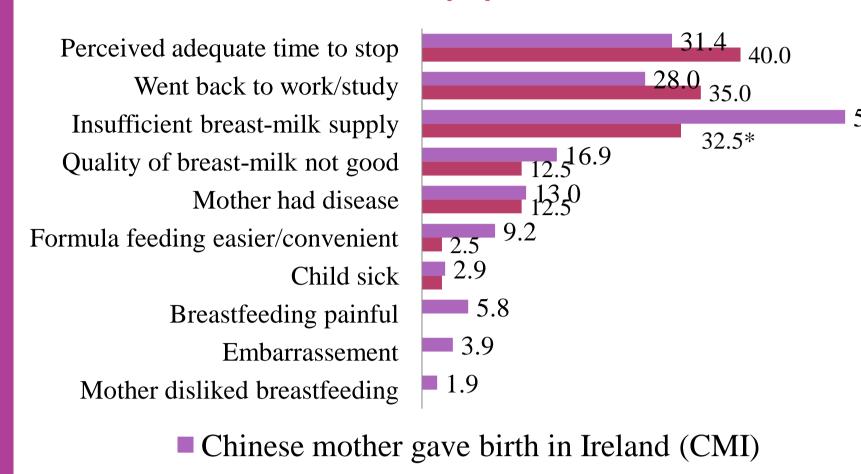
\*P<0.05; \*\*P<0.001; ns: no significant difference. Significance of relationships was calculated by Pearson Chi-square statistics.

High breastfeeding initiation rates were found in both groups-

CMC: 87.2%; CMI: 75.6% (P>0.05).

Remarkable reductions in breastfeeding rates at 3 months (49.1%) and 6 months (28.4%) were found among CMI but not CMC (P<0.05).

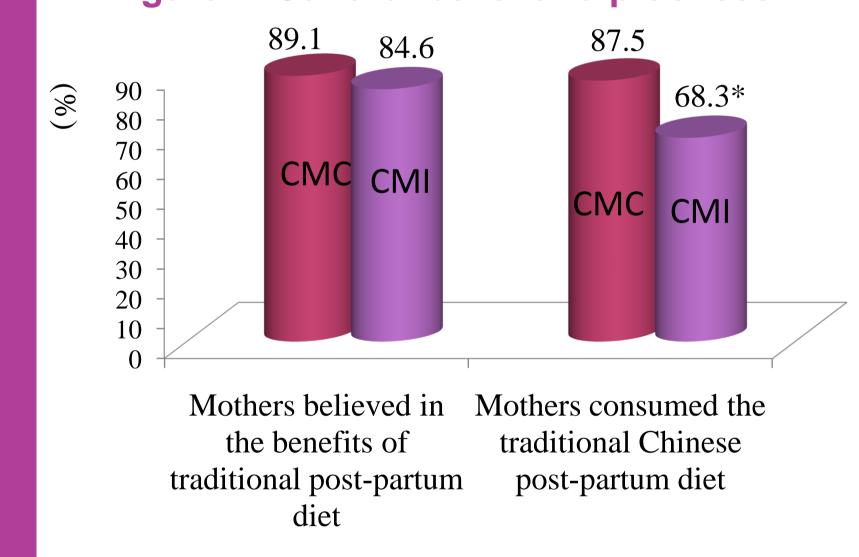
Figure 3. Reasons for breastfeeding discontinuation (%)



- Chinese mother gave birth in China (CMC)
- \*P<0.05. Significance of relationships was calculated by Pearson Chi-square statistics.

Significantly higher proportion of CMI (53.1%) than CMC (32.5%) perceived insufficient breast-milk production as the main reason for stopping breastfeeding (P<0.05).

Figure 4. Cultural belief and practices



\*P<0.05. Significance of relationships was calculated by Pearson Chi-square statistics.

The positive effect of the traditional diet to breast-milk production was highly agreed by both CMC and CMI.

But for those who breastfed, higher percentage of CMC (87.5%) consumed special Chinese diet than CMI (68.3%) (P<0.05).

#### Conclusion

- Decline in breastfeeding duration was found among Chinese mothers in Ireland. This finding was consistent with previous Chinese study in Australia<sup>[3]</sup>.
- Cultural factors as well as changes caused by migration contributed to the decline in breastfeeding duration.
- Language specific breastfeeding support and education among Chinese mothers in Ireland is needed, in particular to prolong breastfeeding for at least 6 months.
- Future direction: qualitative research (focus group discussion & inter-person interview) to further explore the reasons for shorter breastfeeding duration, and to develop strategies to optimize breastfeeding practices among the Chinese mothers in Ireland.

# References

- [1] World Health Organization (WHO) (2001) Global strategy for infant and young child feeding. The optimal duration of exclusive breastfeeding (A54/INF.DOV./4.)
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- of Technology, Republic of Ireland.
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