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 post-partum practices
- Acculturation

Chinese immigrant mothers studies reported:

- Lower breastfeeding initiation rate [2]
- Decline in breastfeeding duration [3]

Breastfeeding in Ireland [4]:

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

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

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-administered survey (written in Chinese)

Data Collection: Mailed questionnaires

Data analysis (SPSS version 15):
- Frequency
- Chi-square

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maternal age (years)*</th>
<th>CMC (n=47)</th>
<th>CMI (n=27)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>27 (60.0)</td>
<td>81 (30.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>10 (22.2)</td>
<td>111 (41.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;30</td>
<td>8 (17.8)</td>
<td>77 (28.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>43 (91.5)</td>
<td>232 (84.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single/Divorced/Enrol</td>
<td>4 (8.5)</td>
<td>45 (15.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary/Secondary</td>
<td>23 (48.9)</td>
<td>133 (48.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>24 (51.1)</td>
<td>142 (51.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother's workplace</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainland China (North)</td>
<td>20 (42.6)</td>
<td>143 (52.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainland China (South)</td>
<td>19 (40.4)</td>
<td>91 (33.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong &amp; Macau</td>
<td>8 (17.0)</td>
<td>39 (14.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration in Ireland(years)*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>29 (61.7)</td>
<td>69 (25.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥5-10</td>
<td>17 (36.2)</td>
<td>163 (59.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>1 (2.1)</td>
<td>15 (5.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child's order*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>47 (95.7)</td>
<td>171 (62.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3/4</td>
<td>2 (4.3)</td>
<td>104 (37.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Results

Figure 1. Study Procedure

Figure 2. Breastfeeding rates from 0 to 6 months

![Graph showing breastfeeding rates from 0 to 6 months.](image)

*P<0.05. **P<0.001; n= 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 (%)

![Graph showing reasons for breastfeeding discontinuation.](image)

Figure 4. Cultural beliefs and practices

![Graph showing cultural beliefs and practices.](image)

*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 [6].
- 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


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