



media release

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Call for action on static breastfeeding rates

New laws to protect the rights of breastfeeding women who return to work may be needed if Australia is to meet national breastfeeding targets.

This is one of the recommendations in a study of breastfeeding trends by University of Melbourne researchers published in the latest issue of the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*. (Vol 29 No 2, 2005) It found that breastfeeding rates have remained unchanged since 1995, even though there is a national and international push for babies to be fully breastfed until they are at least six months old.

An analysis of the 2001 Australian National Health Survey data by Ms Susan Donath from the Department of Paediatrics and Dr Lisa Amir, Key Centre for Women's Health in Society at the University, found that many mothers give up breastfeeding before their babies are 6 months old. Only 18.4% of babies were fully breastfed at 25 weeks and 63% of infants are having formula at 26 wks.

"Fewer than 50% of infants are receiving breast milk at 6 months, which is considerably lower than the 80% figure recommended by the latest Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents," say the researchers.

At discharge from hospital, 83% of babies are breastfed, but this drops to 49% at 25 weeks (four months). After four months of age, most babies are receiving solid foods. Mothers give up because they believe they don't have enough milk for the babies, a view that is "rooted in a lack of information or lack of confidence about lactation".

The researchers suggest that "imaginative legislation protecting the breastfeeding rights of working women and establishing means for its enforcement" may be needed to improve rates.

UNICEF and the World Health Organization are urging governments to set up a nationally

co-ordinated breastfeeding committee, made up of government officials, health professionals and non-government organizations.

While conducting their study, the researchers identified some problems with the way information about breastfeeding is collected in Australia and they urge better monitoring of infant feeding trends. "Given that breastfeeding is a national priority issue, continued monitoring of breastfeeding rates is essential," they say.

Australia's breastfeeding rates compare well with the US and UK, but are below those of Norway where 80% of babies are fully breastfed at 6 months.

Reference:

Breastfeeding and the introduction of solids in Australian Infants: data from the 2001 National health survey. *Vol 29 No 2, 2005 171-175.*

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