



To investigate the effects of lactation support on the initiation and establishment of breastfeeding for first time mothers in an Irish maternity hospital setting.

By

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Abstract

This thesis focuses upon the practice of maternal breastfeeding, a practice widely regarded as having multiple public health benefits. Mothers' experiences of maternity hospital practices with regard to breastfeeding highlight many issues in relation to the 'Ten steps to successful breastfeeding'. A review of the relevant literature revealed three domains of interest with regard to their experiences, namely awareness by maternity health care providers of factors affecting maternal intention to breastfeed, maternity hospital practices, and maternal experiences of maternity hospital practices. Further investigation was warranted to determine were mothers' expectations in relation to hospital practices being met in an Irish maternity hospital setting. The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of lactation support on the initiation and establishment of breastfeeding for first time mothers in an Irish maternity hospital setting. The objectives of the study were to explore the experiences of mothers in relation to infant feeding and to gain an insight into the effect lactation support had on their initiation and establishment of breastfeeding in relation to hospital practices.

The aims and objectives of the study were met by using a descriptive qualitative design and the study also considered quantitative data in terms of respondent demographics and hospital breastfeeding metrics. The study population was defined as in-hospital first time mothers on day two of delivering their baby. A purposive sample of 16 mothers was identified comprising approximately 60% of mothers who had initiated breastfeeding (this share accords with the aforementioned hospital breastfeeding metrics). Each mother was interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire; interview data was then analysed using qualitative research data analysis techniques. This analysis revealed seven themes which in turn aggregated to three overarching areas: respondent profile and the decision to breastfeed, respondent's views on breastfeeding & the influence of other people, supporting and encouraging the breastfeeding mother. Issues not widely recognised in the literature were also identified during the research, specifically mothers' feelings about supplementation and mothers' positive perceptions of rooming-out. The thesis concludes with recommendations for practice, recommendations for research, and recommendations for education.

