

Title: Challenges in immigrant mothers' infant feeding practices. A qualitative study of Iraqi and Somali mothers living in Norway

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Background: There is limited information about infant feeding practices among immigrant mothers living in Norway. The main objectives of the InnBaKost qualitative substudy were to generate knowledge about infant feeding practices of, potential challenges to and influential information sources for Somali and Iraqi women living in Norway.

Methods: Thirty mothers from Iraq (n=15) and Somalia (n=15) participated in the in-depth interviews at infant age six months and a follow-up interview was conducted at infant age one year. The mother-pairs were purposively selected using a multi-recruitment strategy.

Results: Most of the mothers were partially breastfeeding when infants were six months old. One third had never breastfed exclusively, and most of them had stopped exclusive breastfeeding before the infant was three months old. At infant age one year, ten of the Iraqis but only two of the Somali mothers were still breastfeeding. According to most of the mothers, they had received limited support and information from the health clinics to help overcome breastfeeding problems. The lack of knowledge about how to overcome such problems may have induced them to either combine breastfeeding with other foods early, or to stop breastfeeding completely. The mothers also found it challenging to breastfeed in public, and had therefore introduced formula early. The mothers received conflicting advice from their close social network and the health clinic regarding the introduction of water, formula and weaning food. In most cases they trusted the health clinic more than the network. The Somali mothers mentioned that the notion of a chubby child being a healthy child as reason for providing early formula feeding and practise mixed feeding.

Conclusion: Appropriate infant feeding support and knowledge of the cultural infant feeding traditions in the mothers' home country are pivotal and need to be embedded in the health-promotion strategies and advice provided at the health clinic.

Significance for further research: The health workers must be aware of that mothers are under influence from their close social networks.

Key reference:

Steinman, L., Doescher, M., Keppel, G. A., Pak-Gorstein, S., Graham, E., Haq, A., Spicer, P. (2010). Understanding infant feeding beliefs, practices and preferred nutrition education and health provider approaches: an exploratory study with Somali mothers in the USA. *Matern Child Nutr*, 6(1), 67-88.