

LETTER TO EDITOR

CORRELATES OF BREASTFEEDING IN UNDER THREE YEAR OLD CHILDREN - UNITED STATES

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An infant during the first 4 – 6 months of life should optimally be exclusively breastfed, according to the World Health Organization recommendation of 1979¹. We describe gender, race, age of children and their mother's educational status associated with under-three year old children's being breastfed for any length of time in the United States of America. Using data from the National Survey of Early Childhood Health², 2000 (NSECH), we identified all the children who have been breastfed for any length of time.

A multistage national random-digit-dialed sample of households was used to obtain representative sample of children under 36 months. A design-based analysis with STATA 8 was done using Logistic Regression, Odds Ratios (OR) were computed for the association of being breastfed for any length of time, with various variables. The overall prevalence of being breastfed for any length of time was 32.8% and 95% Confidence interval (CI) was 29.9% – 35.7% (n = 2068). In females prevalence was 31.6% (95% CI 27.3% - 35.8%), while in males was 34% (95% CI 30% - 37.9%).

No statistically significant association was observed between children's age or gender and being breastfed for any length of time. Educational

attainment of mothers was assessed in terms of less than high school, high school, or more than high school.

Compared to mothers with less than high school education, children of mothers with high school education were less likely to have been breastfed for any length of time (OR 0.67, 95% CI 0.47 – 0.98), as well as children of mothers with more than high school education (OR 0.27, 95% CI 0.19 – 0.40). Race of the child was significantly associated with being breastfed for any length of time. Compared to White children, African-American children more likely to have been breastfed for any length of time (OR 2.09, 95% CI 1.56 – 2.8); while children of all other races were less likely to have been breastfed for any length of time (OR 0.50, OR 0.34 – 0.74). We conclude that White children whose mothers have more education are less likely to have been breastfed for any length of time.

REFERENCES

1. World Health Organization. Joint WHO/UNICEF Meeting on Infant and Young Child Feeding. Statement and Recommendations. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization, 1979.
2. National Center for Health Statistics. National Survey of early Childhood Health. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/about/major/slats/nsech.htm> (assessed January 14, 2005)

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