

# DURATION OF PARENTAL LEAVE AND BREASTFEEDING: ARE THEY RELATED?

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## Introduction

Although the duration of breastfeeding (BF) has increased in Quebec over the last decades, it remains below current recommendations.

Among women who successfully go through the first weeks of BF, the timing of the return to work appears to be a factor in its continuation.

Few studies have examined this association beyond the first few months of postpartum.

### Aim

To compare the duration of BF and its continuation after returning to work among women who benefited from the maternity/parental leave granted by the federal Employment Insurance program before and after its extension from six months to one year (December 31, 2000).



## Results

### Sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents (n = 170)

Individual and family characteristics	Characteristics related to employment	Work category
29,8 years (mean age; ± 3,8 years)	Working region	professionals <sup>(3)</sup> / managers 22 %
53 % university degree	Montreal-centre 63 %	nurses 49 %
98 % living with a partner	Montréal 26 %	technicians 17 %
63 % family income ≥ 60,000 \$/year <sup>(1)</sup>	Laval 11 %	others 13 %
Characteristics related to maternity	Type of establishment	Work status
54 % multiparas	CLSC <sup>(4)</sup> 19 %	regular, full time 46 %
97 % BF experience <sup>(2)</sup>	hospital centre 64 %	regular, part time 35 %
	others 17 %	occasional 19 %
	35 % possibility of working during night shift	
	34 % possibility of working on call <sup>(5)</sup>	
	15 % working at several establishments	
	95 % part of a union <sup>(5)</sup>	

Notes: <sup>(1)</sup> Gross income; n = 168 <sup>(2)</sup> n = 92 multiparas <sup>(3)</sup> Include residents in medicine (n = 2) <sup>(4)</sup> Community health services <sup>(5)</sup> n = 169

## Methods

The data stem from a broader exploratory study carried out to identify, using Triandis's theory of interpersonal behaviors, the factors associated with the intention of, and the continuation of, BF after returning to work.

### Population

Women employed in the network of health and social services in the province of Quebec.

Women were eligible if they requested maternity leave or preventive withdrawal between March 2000 and December 2001.

### Data collection

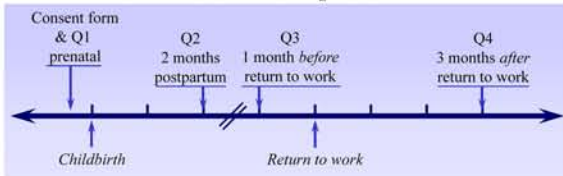
2 standardized questionnaires (self-administered)

- Sociodemographic variables & expected date of delivery (Q1)
- Psychosocial variables (Q2)

2 structured telephone interviews (Q3-Q4)

- Actual BF behavior & availability of specified facilitating conditions for BF in their environment (results not shown)

### Planned moment for each stage of data collection



### Respondents

334 women entered into the study

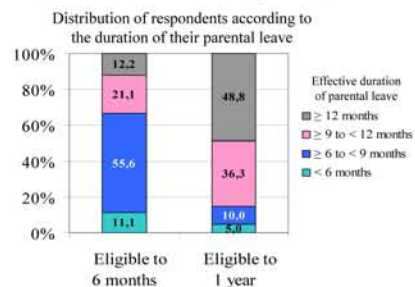
⇒ 170 women BF for at least two months and completed the study

- 80 (47 %) were eligible for the one year maternity/parental leave (henceforth "parental leave")

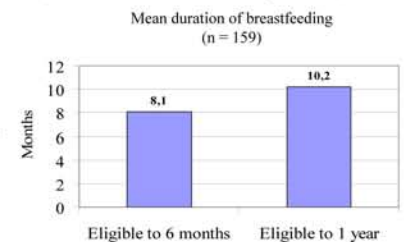
## Main observations

Compared to those who were eligible for the six months parental leave under the federal Employment Insurance program, the respondents eligible for the one year parental leave...

- Had a longer duration of leave (12.2 ± 0.5 vs 9.2 ± 0.4 months;  $p < 0.001$ )



- Had a longer duration of BF (10.2 ± 0.5 vs 8.1 ± 0.4 months;  $p = 0.002$ )



- But were **not more or less likely to continue BF after returning to work** (17.5 % vs 22.2 % continued BF after returning to work;  $p = 0.565$ )

None of the sociodemographic characteristics examined modified the results.

## Discussion

A longer parental leave seems favourable to BF.

- It gives women the possibility of remaining longer with their child and seems to support the continuation of BF, particularly before returning to work.
- Such a labour market policy can contribute to achieving the public health recommendations about BF.

The duration of parental leave was not associated with the continuation of BF after returning to work.

- Determinants of that behavior might be different from those of the duration of BF.

Further work is needed to

- assess the validity of our results in the context of the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (since January 1, 2006).
- explore ways to better support women who wish to continue BF after returning to work.

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