

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Breastfeeding and First-times Mums

Associate Professor Virginia Schmied from the Family and Community Health Research Group and School of Nursing and Midwifery is researching what factors influence breastfeeding and other parenting decisions of first-time mothers. This research is funded by the Australian Research Council Linkage program in partnership with The Kids of Macarthur Health Foundation.

'Whether or not mothers breastfeed their newborns often comes down to cultural and social factors' says Associate Professor Schmied. 'Australia has an extremely high rate of initial breastfeeding, however, there is a drastic decline in mothers who continue to breastfeed after 6 months. Many different factors contribute to women making the initial choice and this decline. The women most likely to initiate breastfeeding and continue for longer than six months are older women who have a high-socio economic status, private health-insurance and a higher level of education. In contrast, this research will focus on new mothers in the Macarthur area (rated comparatively low on an index of socio-economic disadvantage) to understand infant feeding decisions within their cultural and social contexts.'

The sample for this research will include 30 first-time mothers, 30 first-time fathers, 30 grandparents and 10 to 20 close relatives of each new mother. Data will be collected both pre-birth and 3 to 4 months after birth. First a "Family Group Conversation" will be held with all involved family members to discuss any expectations and aspirations of the new family. All the mothers will then be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview. During this interview researchers will discuss with the mothers their attitudes towards parenting practices and parenting challenges (specifically breastfeeding). Separate focus groups will also be held with the new fathers and grandmothers in order to identify the unique



influences each of these groups have on the parenting practices. After the interviews are complete, researchers will have a better understanding of who influences infant feeding decisions and how they do.

This research aims to develop strategies and resources and information that will effectively support and promote parenting practices that allow women to breastfeed for longer. The benefits of breastfeeding for mother and child are numerous, including a reduced rate of lower respiratory illness, ear infections and gastrointestinal illness.

Project Title: A study of contemporary family, social and cultural influences on first-time mothers' decisions about infant feeding and early parenting practices

Funding has been set at: \$78,420

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