



# Hard at Work:

## Breastfeeding Changes Between 1992 & 2007

By Bidisha Mandal & Seungchul Lee

**M**others who return to work are less likely to breastfeed and will breastfeed for fewer weeks than mothers who do not return to work outside the home. Two national studies give us an opportunity to compare changes in breastfeeding behaviors between 1992 and 2007, and to present latest statistics from the northwest region on mother's choice of feeding practices as she combines employment with breastfeeding.

Two studies were conducted by the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention (CDC) in 1992-1993 and 2005-2007. They allow a comparison of breastfeeding practices over time. Results from the Infant Feeding Practices Study (IFPS) surveys I and II highlight the effects of new products, policies, and education. For example, state and federal laws have reduced the barriers that working women face in choosing to breastfeed and policies and recommendations about infant feeding have changed over the years, as have infant formulas.

In 1997, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommended that mothers breastfeed for 12 months, rather than the previously recommended 6 months, reflecting new research that associated breastfeeding with a reduced risk of many adverse health outcomes in both mothers (such as lower risk of premenopausal breast cancer) and infants (such as lower risk of diarrhea).

While it has been a national goal of the US Department of Health and Human Services to increase the proportion of mothers who breastfeed their babies to 75 percent by this year, more US mothers work and face difficulties in combining paid work with breastfeeding. States show considerable variations in breastfeeding laws. For instance, only 28 states and the District of Columbia exempt breastfeeding from public indecency laws, while only 24 states and the District of Columbia have laws related to breastfeeding in the workplace. So far, according to the National Conference of State

Legislatures, only five states have implemented or encouraged the development of breastfeeding awareness education campaigns or health programs.

### Overall Trends

In both studies, mothers who thought they were not producing enough milk were the ones who stopped breastfeeding before their infants were 6 months. We found that, in the 2007 study, about 10 percent more mothers reported that they had trouble getting milk flow to start and about 14 percent more mothers reported that they thought milk production was not enough than in the earlier study. The more recent study also found that concern about leaving their infants and concern about having someone else feed them were less frequently cited as reasons to stop breastfeeding. (See the table online for detail).

### Breastfeeding and Employment in the Northwest

The 2007 study included 179 mothers from the Northwestern states of Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming. (Alaska was not part of the IFPS). Of these 179 mothers, only 46 (26 percent) concurrently breastfed and worked, compared with 32 percent in other states. However, working mothers in the Northwest states were more likely to breastfeed for longer duration after returning to work. This favorable outcome could possibly be related to supportive workplaces as reported by 45 to 63 percent of mothers from the Northwest, or to the

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*Above, Angela Garza and her baby, courtesy Texas Department of State Health Services WIC program. Opposite page, baby Rebekah Blackmer, photo courtesy Hsiao-Ying Lo.*

fact that mothers from the Northwest reported a smaller contribution to the total household income. A lower contribution could indicate less time spent outside the home and more time with the infant. Among work accommodations and breastfeeding strategies used in the first month after return to work, a higher percentage of mothers in this region pumped and saved milk for their infants.

## Conclusion

In 2007, 86.5 percent of mothers reported initiating breastfeeding, an increase of 10.5 percent from the 1992 study. The average duration of breastfeeding was 31.6 weeks, 7.5 weeks longer than observed in the first study. One limitation of the IFPS surveys is that their samples are not nationally representative of new mothers. The increase in breastfeeding between the two studies may indicate a greater availability of portable breast pumps, changes in breastfeeding laws, and greater support in some workplaces. Yet, the US remains below its Healthy People 2010 goal of 50 percent of women breastfeeding at 6 months and 25 percent of women breastfeeding at 1 year. Today, only 43 percent and 21 percent, respectively, do so. ■

## Work accommodations for breastfeeding

	Northwest states %	Other states %
Accommodations in the first month after return to work		
Brings infant to work, breastfeeds during work day	40.9	38.8
Goes to infant to breastfeed during work day	4.5	7.9
Infant brought to mother to breastfeed during work day	4.5	2.5
Pumps milk and saves for infant	53.8	36.4
Neither pumps nor breastfeeds during the work day	18.2	10.5
Work characteristics		
Workplace is very supportive of breastfeeding: prenatal	45.4	33.8
Workplace is very supportive of breastfeeding: postnatal	63.2	51.9
Outcome		
Weeks of breastfeeding after return to paid work	31.3	26.1

Comparison of 46 women from the Northwest and 782 women from other states for 2005-2007.  
This chart is simplified from a table that is online at [www.nwpublichealth.org](http://www.nwpublichealth.org).

Despite progress, we  
are below the Healthy  
People 2010 goal.