

**WIC INFANT AND TODDLER FEEDING PRACTICES STUDY 2: INTENTION TO BREASTFEED
(SUMMARY)**

Background

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) was established to safeguard the health of low-income pregnant women and infants who are at nutritional risk. WIC serves 53 percent of all infants in the United States. The WIC Infant and Toddler Feeding Practices Study 2 (WIC ITFPS-2)/“Feeding My Baby” Study is designed to describe the feeding practices used by caregivers and measure the nutrition outcomes of children who participate in WIC. The study uses a longitudinal design; caregivers respond to surveys periodically from a prenatal interview through the infant’s third birthday. The study expands upon the USDA’s WIC Infant Feeding Practices Study (WIC IFPS-1)¹ and complements the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s Infant Feeding Practices Study II (FDA IFPS-II).² This study will provide a series of reports. The current report presents results from the prenatal survey.

Methods

Data was collected from a nationally representative sample of infants enrolled in WIC prenatally or prior to 3 months of age during the fall of 2013. Each telephone survey seeks information on feeding practices, and starting with the 1-month interview, uses a 24-hour dietary recall focused on the infant’s consumption.

There are 2,649 women in the prenatal analysis sample. Nearly half (44 percent) of respondents had no prior WIC experience at the time of the interview. The interview sought information on: participants’ attitudes toward breastfeeding and their infant feeding intentions; the participants’ perceptions of WIC services; whom participants turn to for advice; and the participants’ knowledge

of WIC benefits, including specifics about the food packages.

Findings

WIC women’s acceptance of breastfeeding increased greatly between 1995 and 2013 (Table 1). Notably, since the WIC IFPS-1 study was completed, the percentage of WIC women agreeing that breastfed babies are healthier and that breastfeeding helps women lose weight has increased by 30 percent and 42 percent, respectively. In addition, at least 80 percent of WIC prenatal mothers believe that breastfeeding helps the baby be healthy, helps protect the baby from diseases, and brings the mother and baby closer together. Seventy-five percent agree that breastfeeding helps a woman lose weight, and 71 percent agree that breast milk gives a baby all he or she needs to eat.

Table 1. Percentages of WIC mothers agreeing^a with benefits of breastfeeding^b

WIC Mothers’ Perceptions of the Benefits of Breastfeeding	2013 (ITFPS-2) (%)	1995 (IFPS-1) (%)
Breastfed babies are healthier than formula-fed babies.	80	61
Breastfeeding helps protect the baby from diseases.	81	77
Breastfeeding is easier than formula feeding.	55	50
Breastfeeding brings a mother closer to her baby.	88	81
Breast milk alone gives a new baby all he/she needs to eat.	71	71
Breastfeeding reduces the risk of a child becoming overweight.	50	Not asked
Breastfeeding helps women lose weight.	75	53

^aResponse options include strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Responses indicating strongly agree and agree are combined and reported above.

^bBecause WIC IFPS-1 provided limited descriptive statistics, we do not have all the information needed to statistically test whether the proportions from the two studies are different.

¹ Baydar, N., McCann, M., Williams, R., et. al (1997). Final Report: WIC Infant Feeding Practices Study.

² Fein, S., Labiner-Wolfe, J., Shealy, K., et. al (2008). Infant Feeding Practices Study II: Study Methods. *Pediatrics*, 122; S28.

Overall, WIC women’s negative views on breastfeeding decreased between 1995 and 2013 (Table 2). The percent of mothers reporting that breastfeeding ties you down and breastfeeding takes too much time has decreased by over half since WIC IFPS-1. However, the percentages of WIC women reporting that breastfeeding is painful, and breastfeeding means no one else can feed your baby, have slightly increased.

Table 2. Percentages of WIC mothers agreeing^a with barriers to breastfeeding^b

Barriers to Breastfeeding Identified by WIC Mothers	2013 (ITFPS-2) (%)	1995 (IFPS-1) (%)
Breastfeeding ties you down.	17	41
Breastfeeding takes too much time.	15	34
Breast milk leaking onto your clothes is something that I worry about.	27	46
Breastfeeding in public is not something that I want to do.	37	61
Breastfeeding is painful.	44	39
Breastfeeding means no one else can feed your baby.	51	48
With bottle feeding, the mother knows that the baby is getting enough to eat.	67	76

^aResponse options include strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Responses indicating strongly agree and agree are combined and reported above.

^bBecause WIC IFPS-1 provided limited descriptive statistics, we do not have all the information needed to statistically test whether the proportions from the two studies are different.

WIC-participating women’s beliefs regarding breastfeeding have shown a more positive shift over the past 20 years than women nationwide.

This report compares changes in breastfeeding beliefs among WIC women and women nationwide found in IFPS-1 and ITFPS-2 to those found in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Health Styles surveys.³ The CDC Health Styles survey is conducted yearly with a nationally representative sample of women. Though the questions in the two surveys are not exactly the same, the comparison illustrates some important differences in views between WIC respondents and the population as a whole. The percentage of WIC-participating women agreeing that breastfeeding is healthier for babies than formula feeding increased from 61 percent to 80 percent

between IFPS-1 and the current study, a 19-percentage-point increase. In the same time period, CDC data show only a 9-percentage-point increase in agreement with that view among U.S. women overall. In addition, the percentage of WIC-participating women feeling uncomfortable with breastfeeding in public decreased between the studies from 61 percent to 37 percent, a 24-percentage-point decrease. In contrast, CDC data show an estimated 14-percentage-point decrease over time for women nationally in their acceptance of public breastfeeding. Although the studies cannot be compared directly, they do suggest that WIC-participating women’s breastfeeding acceptance has increased more substantially than that of women nationwide.

WIC staff are a very important resource of breastfeeding information for WIC-participating women. WIC staff are the second most common group that women spoke to about breastfeeding, with 68 percent of women reporting they spoke with WIC staff. Seventy-eight percent of women conferred with their husband or boyfriend about this decision. Smaller percentages of women spoke to mothers (62 percent), doctors (51 percent), friends (40 percent), and other relatives (39 percent) about breastfeeding.

The majority, 72 percent, of prenatal women receive breastfeeding information from WIC. After the prenatal visit to WIC, the majority of women are aware of the exclusive breastfeeding package, and about half know about how the quantity of formula varies with breastfeeding and the baby’s age. Seventy-two percent of prenatal women say they received information on breastfeeding, whereas 92 percent report they received information on diet.

For More Information

May, L., Borger, C., McNutt, S., et. al (2015). WIC Infant and Toddler Feeding Practices Study 2: Intention to Breastfeed. Prepared by Westat, Contract No. AG-3198-K-11-0073. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support, Project Officer: Allison Magness. Available online at: www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Health Styles surveys. Available online: www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/data/healthstyles_survey.htm.