

Research gaps: thoughts on possible areas needing study

Breast care for non-breastfeeding mothers including hand expression

Maslow's hierarchy of needs and learning how to breastfeed (need to address comfort, security, sense of belonging before learning skills and self-efficacy)

First feed for non-breastfeeding babies – when/what/quantity, risks- evidence based practice (funding equity, AIDS?)

Quantity and frequency of feeds for non-breastfeeding babies in the first 6 weeks. Do non-Bf babies use same feeding signals as breastfeeding babies? Risk of over-riding the natural satiety-stat if encouraged to take just a bit more feed. Leading to needing higher amounts of feed, earlier solids, and later obesity. (funding ? obesity)

Teaching skill of breastfeeding (pos&att, hand expression, etc) antenatally – do mothers feel more competent quicker than if they learn post-natally?

Grandmother's views and actions regarding infant feeding. (funding? ICA, Women's Institute or other older women group)

6 month exclus bf – do mothers, fathers, families, health workers, etc think it can be done? (Govt policy)

Risks of not breastfeeding – do parents, families, health workers, etc accept that there are “risks” from not breastfeeding or only “benefits” from breastfeeding? (Food Safety, Rights of Child) [US campaign - not bf is a risk]

Formula feeding an informed choice? Do women (antenatal, early post natal) discuss with health worker what are the differences between formulas (whey, casein, soya, follow-on etc), water to use, teats, bottles, sterilising etc. Is formula feeding seen as simple, nothing to learn or to discuss?
Is AFASS relevant in Ireland?

Frequency of problems with formula feeding in the first few weeks – vomiting, colic, constipation, errors in prep, etc. What problems are considered ‘normal’?

Mothers who only use expressed milk long term. Why, how common, experiences. Is ‘expressing only’ offered as an option to pregnant women/new mothers? (Maybe pump company funder if acceptable) Web site / book www.exclusivelypumping.com

When babies don't thrive – how often is skilled assistance with feeding provided as part of the diagnosis and treatment? See MIDIRS 15:2, 2005: BF babies likely to be hungry, formula fed likely to be ill when readmitted.

Support for mothering as distinct from support for breastfeeding. If mothering is valued and supported does Bf go better?

Skin to skin contact immediately after birth – why does the contact end? (Nils Bergman says should continue for 20 out of 24 hours for first few weeks and BFHI)

global criteria is now at least 60 minutes) What are barriers – need to dress baby before warding, mother's tea & toast, mother shower, father/granny needs to hold ...

Weighing baby at birth – why/when? Interferes with early skin to skin. Can midwives estimate birth weight close enough to determine need for extra attention? Will parents wait an hour or two to find out weight? Why is weight considered so important by family – or is it?

RCT – one group get lots of motivation type input, other group gets practical skills. Who is Bf at 6 weeks?

Fathers & breastfeeding – do they feel left out of bonding with baby or displaced in women's attention? Does training fathers to a role help? (i.e. sing, massage, play with baby specifically taught) See 2006 Piscane article. UL study on songs for babies?

Research methodologies and bf – what methods have been used to investigate what? Choosing a method to suit and what does suit. If the same question is researched by different methods is the result different? (JHL)

General population view of the value of children to the community and support for best care for infants. (Ellen McIntyre has done research on community views on breastfeeding).

Bf and maternal hospitalisation (not related to birth). What hospital support is available for the mother with broken leg, gall bladder surgery, etc? If mother comes to A&E does she get asked if bf before given drugs etc, any support for bf?

Top-ups in the first few days – restricting amounts – is giving 5-10 mls enough?

Where does the baby fit in? Babies have rights – are those rights respected?

Terminology – do babies breastfeed or are they breastfed? Does our terminology imply an active or passive role for the baby? (see Mulford, C, Swimming Upstream-breastfeeding in a bottle feeding culture, JOGNN about 10 years ago)

Breastfeeding mothers at secondary school – a number of programmes in the US for young mothers, any in this part of the world?

BFHI: evaluation of the programme (as distinct from the practices). Most of the Steps have some evidence base, though do all have? Does it help if a hospital is part of the initiative/network as distinct from implementing the practices on their own?

Is it ethical to promote breastfeeding if support is not available to mothers?

Attitudes to women's bodies and own body image of those who assist breastfeeding. One aspect in particular is if midwives and others teaching about breastfeeding, touch their own (clothed) breasts during discussions. Also use of model breasts when discussing breastfeeding. Is model use more common among health workers who are uncomfortable with their own body? (Bernie Webster, Derry research years ago)

Mothers who stop breastfeeding before hospital discharge – why? What would help them to continue? Would more staff time/better skilled staff help?

Nutrition during labour and affect on maternal well-being in first 48 hours after birth. If woman has little or no energy/fluid intake during a time of high energy expenditure (labour) does this leave her tired, stressed and unable to cope with the early days of caring for baby and breastfeeding? Do women who have food cope better? (Or is lack of food intake a marker for medicalisation of birth and problems arising from that?)

Skin to skin contact after a c-sec. How can the BFHI criteria be met (old criteria within 30 minutes for at least 30 minutes, new criteria – immediately for at least 60 minutes). What are the barriers and how to overcome?

Is the BFI UK audit tool suitable for use outside the UK? Would a specific BFHI Ireland audit tool improve practice?

If a breastfeeding policy is mandatory in a hospital why isn't an incident report filled in and discussed when the policy isn't followed? What makes an 'incident' reportable?

Teaching post natal mothers about formula feeding (those not breastfeeding) – what to teach, when, how.

Bf in paediatric hospital – is breast milk valued? staff knowledge and skills, practical supports, baby's and mother's needs, would BFHI paediatric project help?

Breast milk versus breastfeeding. Does expressed milk (solely) have different immunological properties to at-breast feeding?

Breastfeeding and infant appetite. If baby-led feeding at the breast allows baby to control intake, plus fat/lactose balance, what effect if expressed milk fed by bottle/cup where caregiver controls and fat is constant throughout feed?

Is 6 months exclusive bf seen as achievable by mothers, families, health workers of various types?

Role of 'granny' (mother's mother) in infant feeding decisions. Do we need to target them?

Bandura – Social Learning Theory – Do Irish mothers believe bf matters/is worth doing, *and* do they believe that they will be able to do it? (self-efficacy)

Support services exist – why don't mothers use them? (Mary McGrath, RCSI Masters)

Importance/benefits of breastfeeding to mothers – do parents and health workers believe there are any?

Lactation breaks – do low-income/unskilled women (in particular) know about them, do they use them, does it affect their decision to bf/wean, is there a need for the legislation if maternity leave is now longer, who isn't entitled to/doesn't take

maternity leave and would be back at work before 26 weeks? (some jobs, contract workers, new employees, house officers and others in training)

Obese mothers and breastfeeding – are low initiation and duration rates due to attitudes to health practices, body image, mechanical/positioning difficulties, or physiological/biochemical?

Maternal diet and milk composition – particularly lipid profile.

Low-income mothers – would providing food aid or financial aid support bf?

True cost of formula feeding. Ask families to keep record for 6 months of formula, equipment, illness, etc.

Maternal nutrition status and sore nipples / sore breasts.

Health promotion models applied to breastfeeding.

Research gaps highlighted by Cochrane reviews related to breastfeeding – Milk expression, others

Is a Code of Marketing to cover pumps and other bf equipment needed similar to International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk substitutes.

Environmental Health officers knowledge and practice related to legislation on marketing of breast milk substitutes and cereal based foods.

“Guilt” – normal for mothers? Can health information and promotion “make a mother feel guilty”? Do health workers and family encourage maternal guilt rather than recognise maternal anger at lack of support (Minchin)?

Home helps for new mothers – outcome?

Baby-led feeding of solids – nutrient intake, growth. (Gill Rapley)

Galactosemia screening policies – does it mitigate against breastfeeding by Travellers? (Did Traveller bf rates fall as a direct consequence of intro of policy?) Is it equitable, ethical, to restrict a high-risk population group from participating in a known beneficial health behaviour?

Would a scheduled feeding check at 7 days help bf rates?

Parent snacking behaviour and introduction of snack foods to infants.

Does access to a lactation consultant improve duration of breastfeeding?

Cardiac babies – breastfeeding/breast milk. Outcomes re infection, development, speech, progression to solid foods etc
Similarly Down’s syndrome and other conditions

Irish Aid, development workers and formula support. Actual supplies of formula particularly in HIV programmes (though not recommended by WHO) as well as barriers in development programmes, i.e. mothers not allowed to bring babies to income-generation activities.

Irish formula to China. Target of export companies (govt supported) to reduce breastfeeding rates in china so as to increase sales of Irish manufactured formula. Ethical to use taxpayers money to support this?

Infant feeding in emergencies – Irish emergencies, floods, no electricity, etc. Is bf encouraged?

Images of babies/families – is baby linked to bottle? Need for image bank of breastfeeding supportive images.

Bibliography of breastfeeding related research carried out in Ireland is due to appear in April on www.breastfeeding.ie Commissioned by the HSE, Population Health.