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National Survey Shows Mothers Want Support for their Infant Feeding Choices

Ninety-eight percent of mothers say, "It should be my decision how I choose to feed my baby."

WASHINGTON (January 24, 2013) – In 2009, a national survey of mothers with babies under 12 months revealed that new mothers wanted the right to make the decision about whether to breastfeed. Mothers had no doubts or misperceptions about the benefits of breastfeeding, according to the survey, but needed to balance those benefits against competing demands of work, other family obligations and physical ability to produce enough milk to feed their child.

In a reprisal of that survey, the bipartisan team of Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research (GQRR) and Public Opinion Strategies (POS) surveyed more than 1,000 mothers with children under 12 months about their infant feeding experiences and opinions. Mothers continue to strongly disagree with hospital and government policies banning hospital discharge bags, educational materials on infant formula and formula samples. In fact, the survey shows that mothers want and use the formula samples they receive.

“With the majority of babies receiving infant formula at some point during their first year, it’s important that moms have access to all infant feeding information so they can make fully informed decisions,” said Anna Greenberg, Senior Vice President at GQRR.

“This survey underscores the reality that when it comes to infant feeding, mothers want full information, flexibility and choices,” Greenberg continued. “Mothers know what is best for their baby, but they also know that infant feeding is complex, and they want the right to make their decision based on all available information and in an environment where mothers’ choices are supported.”

When asked what actions could help increase breastfeeding in the U.S., mothers said they would like to see more access to healthcare support after leaving the hospital, guaranteed paid maternity leave or longer maternity leave, and breastfeeding support in the workplace. “These are areas where healthcare providers, the government and employers could be doing more to support mothers to increase breastfeeding initiation and duration rates,” Greenberg added.

Mothers identified a number of other barriers that either prevented them from initiating or continuing breastfeeding, the most common of which include the inability to produce enough milk and problems associated with breastfeeding (e.g., sore or cracked nipples, engorged or leaking breasts, breasts infected or abscessed). “Many mothers want to breastfeed,” stated Nicole McCleskey, Partner at POS, “But oftentimes they realize that when it’s time to go back to work, continuing to exclusively breastfeed and maintain their milk supply can be difficult without adequate support.”

Main Findings from Survey

Mothers strongly oppose efforts to restrict access to infant formula information

Ninety-eight percent of mothers agree that, “Ultimately, it should be my decision how I choose to feed my baby,” and 97 percent agree that, “Hospitals should provide information about both infant formula and breastfeeding so mothers have all the information they need to make an informed choice.”

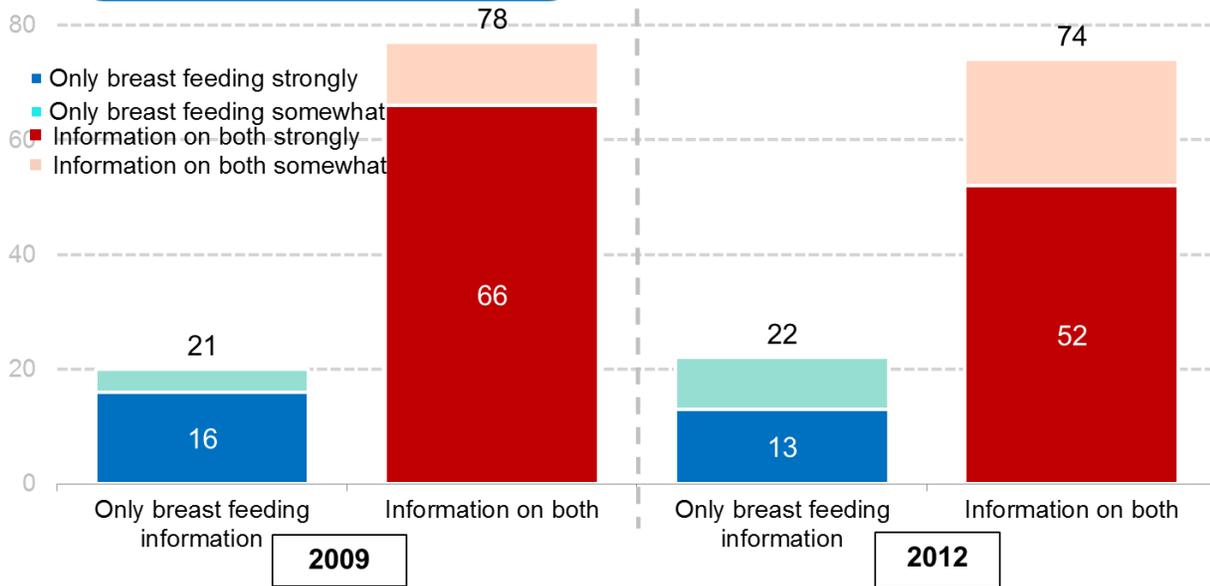
The level of consensus and intensity on these issues is not surprising, but it translates into strong opposition to efforts to restrict access to infant formula. A 72-percent majority disagree with the statement, “Hospitals should restrict access to infant formula for all new mothers, to encourage them to feed their babies breast milk,” and 82 percent oppose policies that ban hospitals from giving out discharge bags with infant formula samples. Seventy percent oppose policies to restrict the use of infant formula for all moms unless medically indicated.

Figure 1: Mothers Want an Informed Choice on Feeding

Now let me read you two statements on ways to encourage mothers to breastfeed. After I have read both statements please tell me which one you agree with the most.

Statement A: Some people say we should give new mothers only information on breastfeeding and not include information on formula, in order to encourage them to breastfeed.

*Statement B: Some people say new mothers should not have the information they receive restricted so they can make an informed choice.**



* In 2009 statement B read "Some people say new mothers should receive information on breast feeding and other feeding options for their baby so they can make an informed choice and mothers should not have the information they receive restricted"

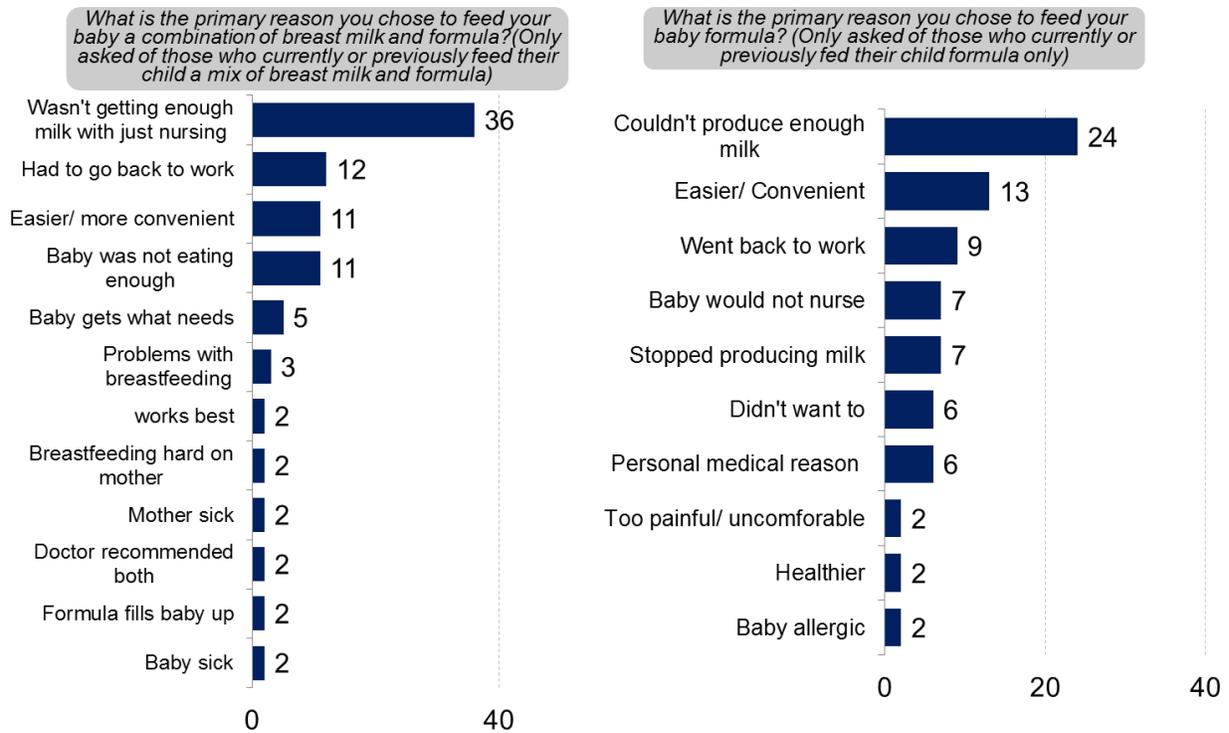
These results are consistent with the survey by GQR and POS three years ago, which also showed opposition to efforts to interfere with mothers' autonomy.

Positive Steps to Increase Breastfeeding

Certain steps can increase breastfeeding, starting by understanding how mothers make this decision and asking mothers themselves about some of the barriers to breastfeeding. Mothers largely agree that breastfeeding is the healthiest option for both their babies (81 percent) and for themselves (79 percent). A 69-percent majority breastfed their baby at some point during their child's first year.

However, mothers also recognize the need to balance these benefits against other family and work obligations. Moreover, many mothers face significant health issues during their first year after childbirth which inhibit or prevent breastfeeding. Work and health issues emerge as the two leading reasons why mothers turn to formula.

Figure 2: Reasons to Breast-Feed, Use Formula



These same two issues emerge when mothers rate a number of potential barriers to breastfeeding. The cost of a breast pump also emerges as major barrier.

■ **Figure 3:** Barriers to Breastfeeding

<i>Does the following represent a major barrier when it comes to breastfeeding, a minor barrier, not much of a barrier or no barrier at all?</i> ¹	Major Barrier
Not being able to produce enough milk	68
Employer does not support pumping at work	58
Returning to work or school	57
Baby not eating enough	55
No time to pump at work	55
Breast pump is too expensive	47
Lack of support or education at the hospital or birthing center	41
No access to support from health care professionals or others when there are problems	38
Lack of information about the benefits of breastfeeding	37
Requires mother to do most of the caregiving	31
Formula is easier and more convenient	29
Society frowns on public breastfeeding	29
Restrictions on a mother's diet	23
Partner or other family member is unable to feed the baby	22
Restricts freedom	19
Infant formula company marketing	15

Among mothers who participate in the federal Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, 28 percent said that help with non-food items like a breast pump would encourage them to breastfeed after returning to work. Non-WIC mothers cite longer maternity leave as the best way to continue breastfeeding. Both groups are more likely to identify help after they leave the hospital than help at the hospital as more effective in increasing breastfeeding.

¹ Mothers were asked whether or not these barriers represented a major, minor, not much of a barrier or no barrier at all when it comes to breastfeeding in general, not necessarily whether or not these barriers impacted their own ability to breastfeed.

■ **Figures 4 and 5:** Ways to Extend Breast-feeding

Which of the following actions by WIC, or the Women, Infants, & Children program, do you believe would be the most effective in increasing breastfeeding rates (Only asked of those who have participated in WIC)

Providing more support for non-food items like a breast pump, so women can continue to breastfeed when they go back to work	28
Providing more support from health care professionals, AFTER mothers leave the hospital, including home visits following birth	20
Providing more support AT the hospital from health care professionals, including a lactation consultant.	15
Providing more instruction and education on breastfeeding, including help from peer counselors	14
None of these	9
All	10
Don't know/Refused	4

Which of the following actions by the government do you believe would be the most effective in increasing breastfeeding rates? (Only asked of those who have not participated in WIC)

Guaranteeing paid maternity leave or longer maternity leave	29
Providing more support from health care professionals, AFTER mothers leave the hospital, including home visits following birth	15
Providing support for breastfeeding in the workplace, like break times and appropriate space	13
Providing more support at the hospital from health care professionals, including a lactation consultant.	10
Providing more instruction and education on breastfeeding	7
Protecting the right of women to breastfeed in public	3
Restricting access to infant formula, including access to samples and information given to mothers	2
None of these	7
All	11
Don't know/Refused	1

Conclusion

Mothers do not question or fail to understand the advantages of breastfeeding. But they understand that life requires them to balance these advantages against other obligations. Mothers insist that the way they feed their babies is a decision that involves many variables. They oppose restrictions on this decision, be it office policies that inhibit pumping in the workplace or hospital policies that restrict information on infant formula.