

Prevalence and Determinants of Breastfeeding in Portugal

Introduction: The determinants associated with breastfeeding (BF) initiation and duration differs among populations, and their understanding is crucial for the design of effective interventions.

Objectives: To assess BF initiation and prevalence, exclusive or not, from birth to 3 and 6 months (M), and to determine the associated factors.

Methods: A cohort study collected data using telephone interviews at 3 and 6M postpartum. To identify the factors associated with BF, bivariate and multiple logistic regressions were performed.

Results: Ninety six per cent of the mothers initiated breastfeeding (n=494); 56.7% breastfed at 3M (33.2% exclusively) and 42.1% at 6M (0.9% exclusively). Protectors of exclusive BF at 3M were: higher maternal age [OR=1.02]; higher maternal educational level [OR=1.19]; utilization of BF supportive spaces at the health centers [OR=1.73]; higher BF self-efficacy score [OR=1.14]; awareness of a higher number of BF advantages for herself [OR=1.86]. Protectors of 'any' BF at 6M included older mothers [OR= 1.07]; delivered at public hospitals [OR= 6.07]; used BF supportive spaces at the health centers [OR= 6.01] and had a higher BF self-efficacy [OR=1.19].

Conclusions. Despite a high rate of initiation of breastfeeding, only 33.2% of the mothers breastfed exclusively at 3M, a percentage below the 50% target set by the National Health Plan. Comparing our data with the National Health Interview Survey 1995/1996 we observed that BF initiation rate has increased from 81.4% to 95.8% and, at 6M, from 34.1% to 42.1%. Health care services can crucially impact BF success.