

Perceived social and workplace support among breastfeeding mothers in Cyprus

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Background

The BrEaSt start in life study documented low prevalence of breastfeeding in Cyprus. Social and workplace support are significant modifiable determinants of breastfeeding.

Methods

Structural and four dimensions of functional social support were assessed with the Perceived Infant Care Social Support Scale among 376 mothers at the fourth month after birth. Workplace support was measured with the Workplace Breastfeeding Support Scale.

Results

Overall social support was moderate ($M=3.10$) on a four-point scale, with lower levels of instrumental support ($M=2.81$). For all dimensions, a social gradient was apparent in favor of mothers of higher socioeconomic position, even though differences were statistically significant only with regards to instrumental and emotional support. There were no differences in terms of breastfeeding status, with the exception of instrumental support. Interestingly, an inverse pattern was observed with lower levels reported among mothers exclusively breastfeeding ($M=2.57$, $SD=0.75$) compared to breastfeeding but not exclusively ($M=2.77$, $SD=0.73$) and not breastfeeding (2.88 , $SD=0.78$; p -value=0.033). The partner was the main source of instrumental, emotional and appraisal support (70-85%), followed by maternal grandmothers (60-70%) with less than a third naming any other person. In terms of informational support, pediatricians ranked first (73%) closely followed by grandmothers (69%), with less than a quarter listing the partner, other health professionals, other family members or friends. While peer and environmental support in the workplace were moderate, workplaces were not rated as breastfeeding friendly in terms of facilities ($M=2.74$) and technical support ($M=2.72$) on a 7-point scale.

Conclusions

Lower levels of perceived support among the minority of mothers who exclusively breastfeed at the 4th month may represent a mismatch between their expectations and received support in the context of a generally weak breastfeeding culture.

Key messages:

- There was lower levels of perceived social support among breastfeeding mothers.
- Workplaces were not rated as breastfeeding friendly.