

Breastfeeding Practices and Opinions of Latina Mothers in an Urban Pediatric Office: A Focus Group Study

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore beliefs about breastfeeding among Latina mothers. The focus groups were part of a sequential mixed methods study.

Methods: Two focus groups were conducted. Participants were Spanish-speaking mothers with infants younger than 12 months. Focus groups were conducted in Spanish and audiorecorded. The researchers performed open coding of the data, compared and converged codes, and identified common themes and relationships among the themes.

Results: Mothers described concerns about adequacy of breastfeeding for their infants' needs, the continued goodness of breast milk, and weaning. They expressed lack of

knowledge about using breast pumps and other assists that could help them breastfeed.

Discussion: Culturally tailored breastfeeding education and support have not been adequately implemented in this urban clinic and likely in other similar settings. More targeted attention to this population could improve exclusive breastfeeding of infants and ultimately result in better child health. *J Pediatr Health Care.* (2017) ■■■, ■■■-■■■.

KEY WORDS

Breastfeeding, focus groups, newborn feeding, nursing, qualitative research

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INTRODUCTION

Both the [World Health Organization \(2016\)](#) and the [American Academy of Pediatrics \[AAP\] \(2012\)](#) recommend exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of an infant's life. Evidence has shown a positive dose-response effect between the amount of breast milk a child receives and the extent of subsequent health benefits, including reduction of risk for childhood cancer, infections, obesity, and atopic disease ([Bartick & Reinhold, 2010](#)). Supplementation of breast milk with formula reduces the dosage of breast milk and is strongly associated with decreased durations of overall breastfeeding ([Holmes, Auinger, & Howard, 2011](#)). The benefits of exclusive breastfeeding extend beyond infant-mother dyads: a recent health care cost analysis estimated that the United States would save \$13 billion per year in excess costs if 90% of infants were exclusively breastfed during the first 6 months of life ([Bartick & Reinhold, 2010](#)). Although rates of breastfeeding overall have improved in the United States over the

past decade, rates of exclusive breastfeeding remain far below the goals of Healthy People 2020, with only 22.3% of infants being exclusively breastfed at 6 months of age in the latest [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(2016\)](#) report. Latina mothers in particular are more likely to introduce formula along with breast milk in the first days of life, a practice known as *las dos cosas*, or in English, *the two things* ([Bartick & Reyes, 2012](#); [Flores, Anchondo, Huang, Villanos, & Finch, 2016](#)).

Between 2000 and 2010, Latinos accounted for more than half of the U.S. population growth ([Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011](#)), and Hispanic women currently have the highest birth rate of any ethnic group in the United States ([Sutton, Hamilton, & Matthews, 2011](#)). As such, a thorough understanding of breastfeeding practice among Latina women is essential to improving exclusive breastfeeding rates and overall breastfeeding duration in the U.S. population. Latina mothers, particularly immigrants, face unique barriers to breastfeeding exclusivity, including social isolation, the economic need to return to work, and workplace settings that do not facilitate pumping ([Waldrop, 2013](#); [Wambach, Domain, Page-Goertz, Wurtz, & Hoffman, 2016](#)). Their decisions regarding breastfeeding are influenced by the culture of their country of origin, their process of acculturation, and their interaction with predominantly English-speaking health care workers ([Wambach et al., 2016](#)).

In the past decade, literature addressing breastfeeding in the Latino population has expanded, with some studies explicitly discussing *las dos cosas* ([Bartick & Reyes, 2012](#); [Flores et al., 2016](#); [Hohl, Thompson, Escareño, & Duggan, 2016](#); [Waldrop, 2013](#); [Wambach et al., 2016](#)). Most current literature, however, is focused on the correlations between characteristics of Latina mothers, such as their levels of acculturation, and their breastfeeding behaviors. A few qualitative studies have explored Latina mothers' beliefs regarding breastfeeding ([Hohl et al., 2016](#); [Waldrop, 2013](#); [Wambach et al., 2016](#)), and even fewer have directly asked mothers why they implement *las dos cosas* ([Flores et al., 2016](#)). The theory of planned behavior acknowledges that an individual's beliefs about a health behavior and his/her perceptions of others' attitudes toward that behavior greatly influence his/her actions ([National Cancer Institute, 2005](#)). Given the size and diversity of the Latino population in the United States, more data on Latina mothers' beliefs about breastfeeding are needed. The following qualitative analysis of focus group findings contributes to these data.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design and Setting

This study is part of a sequential mixed methods study that explored breastfeeding rates in the first 6 months of life among infants of Latina mothers seen at an urban health center, associated factors related to breastfeeding

in this group, and the views and opinions of infants' mothers related to method of infant feeding. The first part of the study involved a chart review to determine the rate and associated factors related to breastfeeding in this specific clinic population ([Sloand et al., 2016](#)). Subsequently, focus groups were conducted to further explore breastfeeding in this population, including the decision-making process of Latina mothers regarding infant feeding choices and the influences, barriers, and cultural beliefs that affected their decisions. We were especially interested in Latina mothers' decisions related to *las dos cosas*. The qualitative portion of the study consisted of two focus groups of Spanish-speaking mothers of infants born in 2014, recruited from an urban pediatric outpatient clinic in the Northeastern United States.

We report here on the qualitative part of the study regarding women's beliefs and ideas about breastfeeding based on two focus groups conducted in Baltimore in September and October 2015.

Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the institutional review board affiliated with the university and by the research review committee of the pediatric clinic. Participants completed an informed consent form.

Participants

A purposive sample of 17 mothers participated in the study. There were 5 women who participated in one focus group and 12 who participated in another focus group held at a different time. Participants were mothers of young children who were informed of the study by the clinic social worker or the study research assistant and voluntarily decided to participate in the study. Inclusion criteria were as follows: adult (> 18 years old), having a child born in 2014, having a child who has been a patient at the clinic for at least 6 months, and mother identifies self as Latina. The exclusion criterion was maternal age younger than 18 years. A complete description of participant characteristics and demographics is found in the [Table](#).

Procedure and Data Collection

The purpose of the qualitative portion of the study was to learn about the beliefs and ideas regarding breastfeeding among Latina mothers. We developed a semistructured interview guide based on a comprehensive literature review and on our findings from the chart review portion of the study. Interview guide questions sought to gain additional insight from the participants regarding feeding methods for their infants. Examples of interview questions are given in the [Box 1](#).

The clinic social worker conducted the focus group interviews. She is a native Spanish speaker who is well known and trusted by families that attend the clinic. Focus groups were conducted in the clinic waiting room

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