BREASTFEEDING AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION:
A NEW ZEALAND CASE STUDY

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Some Recent Papers


GDP per capita ($US purchasing power parity)

- Japan
- Australia
- Singapore
- New Zealand
- China
- Indonesia
- Bangladesh

$0 $5,000 $10,000 $15,000 $20,000 $25,000 $30,000
Some Features of NZ Life

- High level of female representation in public and political spheres
- High infant mortality rate (one of the highest SIDS rates in OECD)
Changes in family types

Along with the United States, the highest rate of sole parenthood in OECD

Trend towards older mothers

Declining fertility rates (although higher among Maori families)
- Disparity in illness incidence and mortality rates among different groups (ethnicity, SES)

- Disparity in breastfeeding rates (geographical, ethnicity related)

- Increase in women’s labour market participation
Breastfeeding Rates (2001)

- 5-6 weeks, 65% fully breastfeeding
- 3 months, 50% fully breastfeeding
- 4-6 months, 13% Maori, 17% Pacific & 21% European fully breastfeeding

Ministry of Health, 2002
% of women economically active in the age group 30-34

- China
- Thailand
- Bangladesh
- Singapore
- New Zealand
- Indonesia
- Japan
- Malaysia
- Philippines
- India
- Pakistan
Mothers' Labour Market Participation

Employment rates for mothers with a child under one year of age by family type, 1986 to 2001

- Partnered mother in paid work
- Sole mother in paid work
- Total mothers in paid work

Graph showing trends from 1986 to 2001.
Reasons for Worldwide Changes in Women’s Economic Activity

- More households in all regions rely on two incomes
- Growth in women-headed households
- Decline in fertility in many countries = more time for paid work
- Growth in male unemployment and part-time employment in many countries

- Globalisation and structural adjustment programmes

- Worldwide, women are gaining higher levels of education, with more wanting to work
Maternity Leave and Breastfeeding: What does the Research Show?

- Duration of maternity leave is positively associated with breastfeeding duration
- Resumption of employment within 12 months is “associated with a shorter duration of breast-feeding”

Visness & Kennedy, 1997.
While “competition clearly exists between work and breast-feeding for many women”, breastfeeding is usually sacrificed.

*Roe et al, 1999.*
Employed mothers often terminate breastfeeding within a month of resuming work.

To achieve recommended six months of breastfeeding requires maternity leaves of “at least six months”.

*Lindberg, 1996.*
Resumption of employment generally had negative affects on breastfeeding rates and duration

Women working outside home or in shift work tended to give up breastfeeding within one month of resuming employment

History of NZ Maternity Leave

- 1948, Maternity leave (unpaid) introduced in public sector
- 1980, Legislation extended 26 weeks of maternity leave (unpaid) to employees in the private sector
- 1987, Parental leave legislation enacted (unpaid, 52 weeks)
1990s Labour Trends

- 1991, legislation entrenched move from collective to individual bargaining
- Decline in union membership
- Casualisation & feminisation of workforce
- Introduction & promotion of “family-friendly” workplace
Paid Parental Leave

- 1994, “12 Weeks Paid Parental Leave Campaign” commenced
- 1998, PPL Bill introduced to Parliament (12 weeks, employer funded)
- 2000, International Labour Organization adopts Maternity Protection Convention 183
- 2000, “14 Weeks Paid Parental Leave Campaign” commenced
International Legislative Background

- 1983, NZ adopted the *International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes*

- 1989, *Innocenti Declaration*, intersectoral national breastfeeding committee being established
1984, NZ ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)


NZ Government has not ratified the International Labour Organization’s Maternity Protection Convention
Paid Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act (2002)

- 12 weeks, taxpayer-funded, paid parental leave law came into effect on July 1, 2002.
However,

- Restrictive eligibility criteria
- Women who have worked <10 hrs per week (on average) and/or <12 months with same employer ineligible
- Self-employed mothers ineligible
- Length of leave (insufficient for recommended period of six months exclusive breastfeeding)

- No breastfeeding breaks

- Low payment levels

- Legalises “double dipping” for employees in “good jobs”
What is Happening Now?

- Gov. reviewing PPL scheme, including need for nursing breaks and possible ratification of Maternity Protection Convention
- Trade Unions, introduction of breastfeeding provisions into some collective bargaining agreements
- Employers, greater awareness of “breastfeeding-friendly” workplace
Multiple Strategies Required

- Women’s Groups
- Trade Unions
- Government
- Employers
- Community Groups
- Breastfeeding Advocates
Strategies for Moving Breastfeeding onto Labour Policy Agenda

- Shifting the focus from children to women’s health (e.g. breast & ovarian cancer, osteoporosis)

- Highlighting discrimination concerns regarding lack of job protection to breastfeed
Class argument. (Women in insecure work generally have fewer opportunities to combine breastfeeding and work)

Evidence based, policy-oriented research, cost benefit analysis (no appeals to sanctity of motherhood etc)
Main Issues Now

- Informal sector workers
- Who funds leave? (not employers)
- Legislated breastfeeding breaks
- Length of leave
# Mothers’ Employment, Breastfeeding Rates and Maternity Leave

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Return to work at 6 months</th>
<th>Work 18 months</th>
<th>Breastfeeding rates -6 months</th>
<th>Statutory paid parental leave</th>
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THE END

THANK YOU