

An Online Questionnaire Investigating UK Mothers' Experiences of Bottle Refusal by Their Breastfed Baby

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Abstract : A review of global online forums and social media reveals large numbers of mothers experiencing bottle refusal by their breastfed baby. It is difficult to determine precise numbers due to a lack of data, however, established virtual communities illustrate thousands of posts in relation to the issue. Mothers report various negative consequences of bottle refusal including delaying their return to work, time and financial outlay spent on methods to overcome it and experiencing stress, anxiety, and resentment of breastfeeding. A search of the literature revealed no studies being identified, and due to a lack of epidemiological data, a study investigating mother's experiences of bottle refusal by their breastfed baby was undertaken. The aim of the study was to investigate UK mothers' experiences of bottle refusal by their breastfed baby. Data were collected using an online questionnaire collecting quantitative and qualitative data. 841 UK mothers who had experienced or were experiencing bottle refusal by their breastfed baby completed the questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and non-parametric testing. The results showed 61% (516/840) of mothers reported their breastfed baby was still refusing/had never accepted a bottle, with 39% (324/840) reporting their baby had eventually accepted. The most frequently reported reason to introduce a bottle was so partner/family could feed the baby 59% (499/839). 75% (634/841) of mothers intended their baby to feed on a bottle 'occasionally'. Babies who accepted a bottle were more likely to be older at 1st attempt to introduce one than those babies who refused (Mdn = 12 weeks v 8 weeks, $n = 286$) ($p = <0.001$). Length of time taken to acceptance was 9 weeks (Mdn = 9, IQR = 18, $R = 103.9$, $n = 306$) with the older the baby was at 1st attempt to introduce a bottle being associated with a shorter length of time to acceptance ($p = < 0.002$). 60% (500/841) of mothers stated that none of the methods they used had worked. 26% (222/841) of mothers reported bottle refusal had had a negative impact upon their overall breastfeeding experience. 47% (303/604) reported they would have tried to introduce a bottle earlier to prevent refusal. This study provides a unique insight into the scenario of bottle refusal by breastfed babies. It highlights that bottle refusal by breastfed babies is a significant issue, which requires recognition from those communicating breastfeeding information to mothers.

Keywords : bottle feeding, bottle refusal, breastfeeding, infant feeding

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