

Two Years Later: Postpartum Return to Work

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Learning Objectives

The learner will be able to:

1. Describe qualitative data and themes for maternal perspectives about return to postpartum work
2. Identify and discuss future (clinical, educational and research) strategies to meet the needs of employed mothers.

There are no conflicts of interest for the authors or FNU.
No commercial support was provided to the authors.



Background

- More women of childbearing age are in the workplace today.
- Postpartum return to employment is often challenging, especially for breastfeeding and first time mothers.
- Breast feeding is an excellent and preferred way to nourish infants even after women return to the workplace.



Background, cont'd

- Most mothers in the US return to the workplace approximately 6-12 weeks after giving birth.
- Return to employment is often the cause for weaning despite the fact that there are numerous known benefits to exclusively breastfeeding.
- Among breastfeeding women, those who work full-time outside the home have lower rates of breastfeeding beyond six months than women who stay home.



Purpose

Current descriptive study:

- 2 year follow-up of 38 participants from a larger mixed methods study
 - 225 employed women
 - aged 21-48 who were breastfeeding
 - returned to postpartum work at an average of 9 weeks after giving birth.



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Methods

- Recruitment for larger study: email listserve, internet social media, day care centers, obstetrical practices
 - Well educated, economically advantaged, mostly professionals.
 - identified more facilitators than barriers to breastfeeding in the workplace.



Methods, cont'd

- 38 Women responded via Survey Monkey
 - Demographics
 - Employment details
 - Current employment status
 - Open-ended questions about combining roles: motherhood and employment



Results

Demographics (N= 38)

- Age 23-50 years old (mean = 33.8 years)
- Current number of children: infant-10 years old
 - 20 (52.6%) = one child
 - 15 (39.4%) = two children
 - 3 (8%) = three children



Demographics, cont'd

Married or partnered:

- Yes: 36 (91.4%)
- No: 2 (8.6%)

Currently employed:

- Yes: 36 (91.4%)
- No: 2 (8.6%)



Employment details

Why stopped working:

- Extended (unpaid) maternity leave
- Job searching
- Attending school



After return to work 2 years ago, did you re-adjust your work schedule?

- Yes: 16 (42.1%)
- No: 22 (57.9%)

If yes, why? Themes/frequencies (%):

- Ft to PT: 11 (53%)
- New job: 4 (19%)
- Parenting/role issues: 3 (14%)
- Economics: 3 (14%)



Current employment status

- Full-time: 28 (75.7%)
- Part-time: 9 (24.3%)

Type of work:

- Professional: 31 (82%)
- Non-professional: 7 (18%)



Effects of work on maternal role (n =31)

<u>Themes:</u>	<u>Frequency (%)</u>
Time demands	12 (39%)
Positive role effects	11 (35%)
Negative role effects	8 (26%)



Child Care Arrangements (n=38)

<u>Types:</u>	<u>Frequency (%)</u>
Day care/preschool	25 (66%)
Family/friend	9 (24%)
Home Nanny/babysitter	4 (10%)



Most helpful to you as a working mom? (n= 37)

<u>Themes:</u>	<u>Frequency (%)</u>
Work support/flexibility	19 (48%)
Partner/family/peer support	17 (42%)
Reliable/quality day care	5 (10%)



Most challenging to you as a working mom? (n=38)

<u>Themes:</u>	<u>Frequency (%)</u>
Role conflict	20 (46%)
Stress/lack of support	12 (27%)
Workplace issues	8 (18%)
Breastfeeding/pumping	4 (9%)



What do you wish you had known before return to work after having a new baby? (n= 33)

<u>Themes:</u>	<u>Frequency (%)</u>
Stress	13 (33%)
Work/life balance	12 (31%)
Prep for BF/pumping	10 (26%)
Planned ahead	4 (10%)



Advice for other moms returning to the workplace (n= 36)

<u>Themes:</u>	<u>Frequency (%)</u>
Time	19 (38%)
BF advocacy	13 (26%)
Support	10 (20%)
Role balance	8 (16%)



Workplace policies needed (n=35)

<u>Themes:</u>	<u>Frequency (%)</u>
Workplace flex/maternity leave	37 (62%)
BF support policies	17 (28%)
Child care assistance	6 (10%)



Additional thoughts about maternal employment

- Prenatal preparation is essential
- Spousal/partner social support is needed
- More paid time off is needed
- Need a role balance between work and parenthood



Conclusions

- Effective strategies are needed to prepare employed women to continue breastfeeding after their return to work to increase breastfeeding duration and self-efficacy:
 - enhanced perinatal support
 - advanced planning for return to postpartum employment



Implications

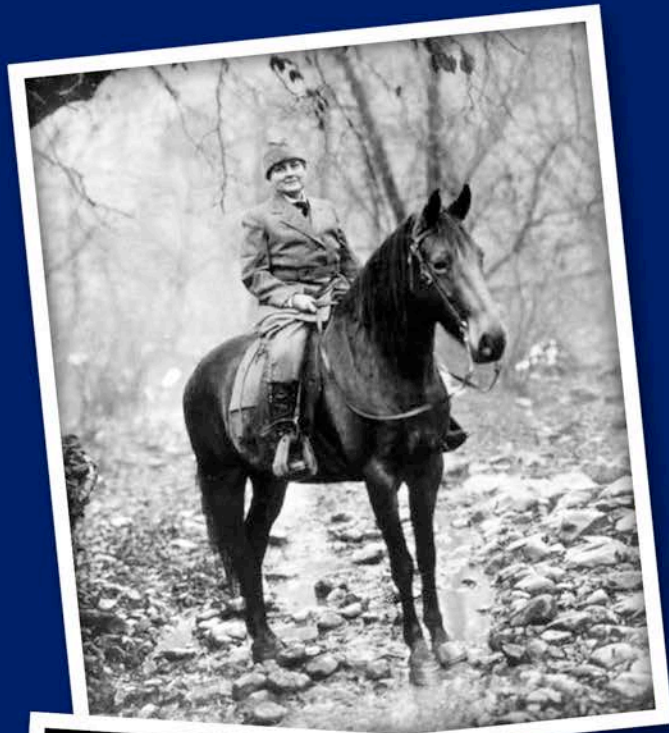
- Breastfeeding-friendly workplaces:
 - establish dedicated breastfeeding rooms
 - maintain a comfortable and clean environment
 - work flexibility
 - encouragement and support for working mothers.
- Health care providers:
 - education about potential barriers
 - exploration of problem-solving strategies



Implications, cont'd

- Lack of paid maternity leave:
 - must use vacation time and sick leave for maternity leave
 - have to return to work within weeks after giving birth
- Future studies:
 - specific needs of employed mothers with infants
 - develop and test interventions, including the use of social media
 - support groups designed to help employed women manage parenting and employment issues.





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