

Infant feeding intentions of new mothers in five European countries

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Primiparous mothers with healthy singleton babies in England, Finland, Germany, Hungary and Spain were asked about their milk feeding and weaning intentions in 2005. Following informed consent, questionnaires were completed by mothers shortly after the birth of their baby, and included items asking about their socio-demographic characteristics, sources of information on infant feeding, and beliefs about the effect of early nutrition on the immediate and future health of the child. Mothers were recruited through the maternity services in the locality of the researchers.

A total of 2071 mothers completed questionnaires (England, 438; Finland, 426; Germany, 414; Hungary, 389; Spain, 404). The mean age of mothers was 30.0 (SD 0.02) years, ranging from 28.1 (SD 4.03) in Hungary to 32.1 (SD 4.95) in Germany (ANOVA; $P < 0.001$). The percentage of mothers who had undertaken further or higher education (post 18 years) varied between countries (England, 89.9; Finland, 59.6; Germany, 75.6; Hungary, 48.8; Spain, 26.3; χ^2 , $P < 0.001$). Significant differences also existed between countries in mothers' stated intentions in relation to milk feeding (Table 1) and weaning time (Table 2).

Table 1. Stated milk feeding intentions of new mothers from five European countries

	England		Finland		Germany		Hungary		Spain		All	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Breast-feed	297	68.0	297	69.7	378	97.2	369	89.1	354	87.6	1695	81.9
Breast- and bottle feed	108	24.7	125	29.3	9	2.3	26	6.3	33	8.2	301	14.5
Bottle (formula) feed	30	6.9	0	0	0	0	18	4.3	15	3.7	63	3.0
Don't know	2	0.5	4	0.9	2	0.5	1	0.2	2	0.5	11	0.5
Total	437	100	426	100	389	100	414	100	404	100	2070	100

χ^2 250.15, df 12, $P < 0.001$.

Table 2. Stated weaning intentions of new mothers from five European countries

	England		Finland		Germany		Hungary		Spain		All	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Before 4 months	14	3.5	13	3.2	10	2.6	10	2.6	18	8.1	65	3.6
4–5.99 months	104	25.7	185	45.5	46	12.4	51	13.2	84	37.7	470	26.2
6 months or later	287	70.9	209	51.4	316	84.9	325	84.2	121	54.3	1258	70.2
Total	405	100	407	100	372	100	386	100	223	100	1793	100

χ^2 163.12, df 4, $P < 0.001$.

Health factors, rather than convenience or cost, were cited as a reason for intending to exclusively breast-feed most frequently in England (about one-third of stated reasons) and least often in Spain (approximately one-eighth). Personal sources of information (friends and family) were more important influences on infant feeding decisions than medical sources (doctors, nurses, midwives) in England and Germany, but healthcare professionals were more important to mothers in Finland, Hungary and Spain.

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