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### Abstract

#### Objective

Breast-feeding is associated with positive maternal and infant health and development outcomes. To assist identifying women less likely to meet infant nutritional guidelines, we investigated the role of socio-economic position and parity on initiation of and sustaining breast-feeding for at least 6 months.

#### Design

Prospective cohort study.

#### Setting

Australia.

#### Subjects

Parous women from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (born 1973–78), with self-reported reproductive and breast-feeding history (*N* 4777).

#### Results

While 89 % of women (83 % of infants) had ever breast-fed, only 60 % of infants were breast-fed for at least 6 months. Multiparous women were more likely to breast-feed their first child (~90 % *v.* ~71 % of primiparous women), and women who breast-fed their first child were more likely to breast-feed subsequent children. Women with a low education (adjusted OR (95 % CI): 2.09 (1.67, 2.62)) or a very low-educated parent (1.47 (1.16, 1.88)) had increased odds of not initiating breast-feeding with their first or subsequent children. While fewer women initiated breast-feeding with their youngest child, this was most pronounced among high-educated women. While ~60 % of women breast-fed their first, second and third child for at least 6 months, low-educated women (first child, adjusted OR (95 % CI): 2.19 (1.79, 2.68)) and women with a very low (1.82 (1.49, 2.22)) or low-educated parent (1.69 (1.33, 2.14)) had increased odds of not breast-feeding for at least 6 months.

#### Conclusions

A greater understanding of barriers to initiating and sustaining breast-feeding, some of which are socio-economic-specific, may assist in reducing inequalities in infant breast-feeding.

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