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## Trends in breastfeeding rates in Portugal: results from five National Health Interview Surveys

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### Abstract

#### Background

The World Health Organization advice breast milk as the perfect food for the newborn starting immediately after birth and exclusively up to at least 6 months of age. However, there are considerable differences in breastfeeding rates between countries related to their policies on breastfeeding promotion and duration of maternity leave. This study aims to describe changes in breastfeeding rates over time in Portugal as a way to inform social policies and public health initiatives on breastfeeding.

#### Methods

To examine the breastfeeding rates evolution we used data from five National Health Surveys. Breastfeeding was assessed based on information provided by the mothers of children born between 1982 and 2014. Birth cohorts were grouped in block of 3-year period. We estimated 3 and 6-months exclusive breastfeeding rates and 95% confidence intervals. Trends in breastfeeding rates for each outcome were assessed by linear regression weighting each cohort-specific estimate by the inverse of variance in the logit scale.

## Results

We analyzed data on 9172 children; sample size by birth cohort ranged from 213 in 2012/14 to 1651 in 1994/96. Proportion of infants ever breastfed during the study period varied between 71.7% and 86.7%. The 3 months exclusive breastfeeding rate increased by 9.5% (CI95%:7.8-11.3%) per 3-year period, from 41.3% (CI95%:38.7-43.9%) in 1982/84 to 62.4% (CI95%:55.7-68.7%) in 2012/14. The 6 months exclusive breastfeeding rate raised up from 23.5% (CI 95%:21.2-25.7%) in 1982/84 to 31.9% (CI95%:26.0-38.5%) in 2012/14, corresponding to 5.6% increase per 3-year period.

## Conclusions

This study shows a positive evolution in breastfeeding practices, with an increased in the prevalence of women who reported exclusively breastfeeding until the 3rd and 6th month after birth. Our results may be explained by changes in maternity leave duration. Furthermore, the results emphasize the need for further investment in breastfeeding support services and professionals' training.

## Key messages

- Positive evolution in breastfeeding practices in Portugal.
- Maternity leave duration could have a positive role.

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