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BREAST-FEEDING: PERSONAL AND SOCIAL INFLUENCES

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the Degree of Master of Arts in Nursing Studies

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## ABSTRACT

Based on a purposive non-random sample of 20 primiparous and 11 multiparous women who had their delivery at a general hospital, a descriptive study was conducted to explore personal and socio-cultural factors which influence women's choice of an infant-feeding method, and those factors that influence the continuation or cessation of breast-feeding. The women from both groups were interviewed four times with a similarly structured questionnaire - 3-5 days postnatally at the hospital and three times at home until the baby was 12 weeks of age. The first interview covered a retrospective review of the decision about the method of feeding and the present experience of breast-feeding whilst the questions asked at home related to the experience of breast-feeding including reasons for change of feeding method. The last interview concerned feeding experience and the women's perception of the major advantage and disadvantage of the feeding method that they were actually using.

The result showed that all women elected to breast-feed their babies and almost all of them made such a decision prior to pregnancy or at an early stage of pregnancy.

It was found that several aspects of personal characteristics influenced women's choice of infant-feeding. The personal value system, knowledge and experience affect women's decisions to breast-feed whilst coping ability and physical problems affect the continuation or discontinuation of breast-feeding. An analysis of the demographic background failed to indicate any influence on breast-feeding. Within the Socio-cultural context, cultural practice, advice and help at hospital, and a source of help and encouragement at home, significantly affect choice and continuation of breast-feeding. Encouragement and help with household tasks from partner and family in particular appeared to be an important influence on the continuation of breast-feeding.

Implications for nursing practice and other factors relevant to the Thai situation are derived from the results. These have been discussed and suggestion for change have been made.