

Research question: How does contact affect breastfeeding within the first 24 hours after birth?

Why my research has changed.

With the onset of Covid-19 many scholars, including myself, have had to adapt their research to fit the current circumstances. My original research question was “how does being a new mum affect sleep in women who have breastfed babies and women who have formula fed babies in the first 6 month postpartum?”. My new research question, whilst different, stays within the same realm and department at the Infancy and Sleep Centre in Durham. Due to limited time and data, I spent my first two weeks of research learning to code data with master’s student Francesca Tugwell. For the last four weeks I have been using my newfound skills to help PhD student Alice Keegan explore how parent-infant caregiving can be improved within the first 24 hours after birth. Using data she collected in 2019 we have been able to code and analyse the data, despite the current circumstances.

Key objectives

The key objectives of the research are to investigate and discover how hospital postnatal care can be improved in the UK, primarily focusing on breastfeeding. Breastfeeding is shown by the WHO to have many benefits for babies and mothers. Therefore, a hospital's practices should encourage breastfeeding, not only in the first 24 hours post birth but also after.

Many hospitals in the UK use standalone cots immediately after birth during the post-birth stay, where the baby is placed in its own cot next to or away from the bed and mum. This study will compare the effects of standalone cots and in-bed cots (small plastic tubs that can sit in the bed, so baby lies next to mum when she is on the bed) on how often new mums breastfeed. Using video recordings of first-time mothers to code how often breastfeeding occurs in the first 24 hours post birth, we will be able to analyse if the baby being closer to mum (in-bed cots) causes mum to recognise more early signs that baby wants to feed and increase skin to skin contact between mum and baby. Both these factors are important for encouraging breastfeeding initiation. The study will also ask mums if they are still breastfeeding 6-8 weeks post birth, as recommended by the WHO. Furthermore, it will also consider other factors such as the ethnicity and education level of the mums in the study, as these factors have can influence breastfeeding.

The information gained from the study will provide guidance for new parents and hospitals on how best to encourage breastfeeding in new mums. My particular study looks only at length of breastfeeding for a study of 23 women, if this research piques your interest Alice Keegan’s PhD (not yet published) will provide more information on other factors such as contact, risk to baby etc. for both the in bed and standalone cots, comparing the two.

Summary

The research aims to see whether in-bed cots encourage breastfeeding more than standalone cots in the first 24 hours in hospital post birth. The study will be used to provide guidance for new parents and hospitals on what is best for encouraging breastfeeding and to help implement new policies and guidelines.