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'Breastfeeding Gap' Exists Among Mexican-Origin Women Living in Texas

AUSTIN, Texas — Mexican women born and educated in Mexico who now live in Texas breastfeed longer than those born and educated in the United States. That's the finding from new research from the [Texas Policy Evaluation Project](#) (TxPEP) at The University of Texas at Austin, which points to a "breastfeeding gap" among some Mexican-origin women living in Texas.

The study, published in *Pediatrics*, compared 1,235 women of Mexican origin living in Texas who were: 1) both born and educated in Mexico, 2) born in Mexico and but finished their last year of education in the United States, and 3) both born and educated in the United States.

Of the women who started breastfeeding, there was no difference among the groups in how long the women intended to breastfeed: 85% intended to breastfeed for at least 6 months and 41% intended to breastfeed for a year or longer. Differences came in the actual duration of breastfeeding: Over half of women born and educated in Mexico breastfed for at least 6 months, compared with 38% of women born in Mexico and educated in the U.S. and just 23% of women who were born and educated in the U.S.

In line with previous research, this study also showed that for all women, early formula use, returning to work and smoking were all risk factors for discontinuing breastfeeding earlier than intended.

"There is plenty that can be done to help all women meet their breastfeeding goals — discussing breastfeeding plans at prenatal visits, providing support at pediatric appointments, postponing early formula supplementation, and more," said Michelle Eilers, a doctoral student in sociology and graduate research associate at the Texas Policy Evaluation Project at UT Austin. "Our study shows a breastfeeding gap that can help physicians, nurses and lactation consultants be aware that additional support may be needed for Mexican American women who were born in the United States so that they can meet their breastfeeding goals."

Breastfeeding confers health benefits for mothers and their newborns. The American Academy of Pediatrics [recommends](#) that all mothers breastfeed one year or longer and exclusively breastfeed for about six months after delivery.

“We all want to see healthy mothers and healthy babies, and breastfeeding is one of the most cost-effective ways to promote health and child development in early life,” said study co-author Rafael Pérez-Escamilla, a professor of public health and the director of the Office of Public Health Practice at the Yale School of Public Health. “The more we can tailor breastfeeding protection, promotion and support programs to the needs of immigrant populations with different acculturation trajectories, the more effective interventions at maternity facilities, the WIC program and worksites will be.”

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About the Texas Policy Evaluation Project

The [Texas Policy Evaluation Project](#), or TxPEP, is a comprehensive effort to document and analyze the impact of the measures affecting reproductive health passed by the Texas Legislature. The project team includes researchers at The University of Texas at Austin Population Research Center, the University of California San Francisco, and Ibis Reproductive Health. The project is supported by grants from the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation. Infrastructure support for the Population Research Center is provided by a grant from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Funders of the Texas Policy Evaluation Project have no role in the design and conduct of the research, interpretation of the data, approval of the final manuscript or decision to publish.