

**The effectiveness of midwives and nurses support on the rate and length of breastfeeding
Systematic review.**

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Abstract

Background: The World Health Organizations (WHO) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for all infants from birth to at least six months and longer with other food. Despite many studies demonstrating the benefits and superiority of breastmilk over other kinds of infant nutrition, breastfeeding rates in Europe are far below international recommendations. In Iceland over 90% of mothers initiate breastfeeding early after birth, yet breastfeeding rates fall rapidly during the first months. In 2018 only 18% of infants are exclusively breastfeeding at six months in Iceland.

Aim: The aim of this project was to highlight the importance of health professionals supporting the needs of breastfeeding women, review the supporting needs of breastfeeding women and to determine if and how and the support affects the rate and length of breastfeeding.

Design: Systematic review was conducted searching electronic databases PubMed, CINAHL, Scopus and Web of science. Inclusion criteria was quantitative research from 2014-2019, support from healthcare professional and the outcome measurement was the rate and length of breastfeeding. 25 research data points fulfilled the inclusion criteria and the quality assessment.

Results: The data indicated that support from healthcare professionals affects both the rates and length of breastfeeding. Studies do not demonstrate what form of support is the most effective. The most successful breastfeeding support is continuous that starts in the pregnancy and continues after birth and lasts as long as the women breastfeeds. Furthermore it is important that the support is provided by midwives or nurses with extensive knowledge and experience of breastfeeding.

Conclusions: As breastfeeding rate in Iceland is below international recommendations and health professionals' education regarding breastfeeding is unorganized or invisible. Breastfeeding women need to have access to continuous support from healthcare professionals who have specific knowledge and training in breastfeeding.

Keywords: Breastfeeding, support, professional support, outcome, exclusive breastfeeding.