



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

News Release

Issued Friday 24 February 2014

Breastfeeding up most among disadvantaged mums, study shows

Policies supporting breastfeeding – introduced in Scotland during the last ten years – may have contributed to a greater uptake of the practice among disadvantaged families.

Mothers with fewer, or no, educational qualifications who gave birth in 2011 were far more likely to breastfeed for longer than similar mothers in 2005, research suggests.

The study showed that among women breastfeeding for six months or more, there was a 150 per cent higher chance of mothers breastfeeding for longer in 2011 compared with 2005.

There was no similar improvement for women in more socially advantaged circumstances over the study period, although these mothers already breastfeed for longer.

The findings by the University of Edinburgh draw on national surveys of more than 5000 mothers in 2005 and almost 6000 mothers in 2011. The study assessed breastfeeding habits of mothers in the first ten months of their babies' lives.

The proportion of mothers who breastfed their babies at least once increased by three per cent from 2005 to 2011.

Mothers who gave birth in 2011 were 25 per cent more likely to give up breastfeeding in the first month compared with mothers in 2005. This may be because a larger proportion of mothers actually breastfed in 2011 compared with 2005.

Researchers say the findings demonstrate the value of policies to tackle health-related issues among hard-to-reach populations.

Mothers in households where a language other than English was spoken were four times more likely to breastfeed their child compared with mothers where only English was spoken.

Dr Valeria Skafida, of the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships at the University of Edinburgh, said: "In the past decade, the Scottish Government has developed several public health policies to promote breastfeeding. Changes have occurred at policy level, in national legislation, in hospitals and in health care staff training."

The study, funded by the British Academy, appears in the *European Journal of Public Health*.

Ranked among the top universities in the world

Minister for Public Health Michael Matheson said: “I’m encouraged by these findings that show an increasing understanding among Scottish women about the importance of breastfeeding and the long-term benefits it can have on a child’s health.

It is particularly pleasing to see a rise in the number of mothers from disadvantaged backgrounds who have breastfed for longer. This is good news as there is considerable evidence to demonstrate that children who are breastfed lead healthier lives and are less likely to access NHS services in later life.”

For further information please contact:

Joanne Morrison, Press & PR Office, Tel +44 131 651 4266. Email
joanne.morrison@ed.ac.uk