

## **Influence of 1991-1995 War on Breast-feeding in Croatia: Questionnaire Study**

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**Aim.** To investigate the influence of 1991-1995 war on the prevalence, duration, and practice of breast-feeding Croatian children up to 5 years of age.

**Method.** In 1996, interviews were conducted in households with children up to 2 years of age (757 children) and 2-5 years of age (1,180 children). Data for war-free areas, war-affected areas, and areas liberated after several years of occupation were analyzed separately.

**Results.** In 1996, 94.6% of mothers started breast-feeding, which lasted for an average of  $3.4 \pm 2.9$  months. The proportion of mothers who started breast-feeding did not vary with respect to either war-related or geographic areas of the country. Breast-feeding was significantly longer in war-free than in war-affected areas ( $3.7 \pm 3.1$  vs.  $2.7 \pm 2.1$  months, respectively;  $p=0.015$ ). The duration of breast-feeding in Croatia's geographic regions, Istria, Hrvatsko Primorje, and Gorski Kotar, was significantly longer than in Slavonia ( $3.9 \pm 3.4$  vs.  $3.4 \pm 3.0$ , respectively;  $p=0.037$ ). On the country level, 49.4% of babies were fed on demand and 43.3% according to a daily schedule. The percent of children who were not breast-fed was significantly higher ( $p=0.002$ ) in the older age group (2-5 years of age, 9.3%) than in the younger age group (up to 2 years of age, 5.4%).

**Conclusions.** The war decreased the prevalence and duration of breast-feeding, which might be related to regular humanitarian donations of infant food and mother's milk substitutes, especially in the war-affected areas. UNICEF breast-feeding campaign, which started in 1993, appeared to be effective.

**Key words:** *breast-feeding, child nutrition; Croatia; food supply; health education; humanitarianism; infant nutrition; milk, human; war*