Making it Work: Supporting Low-Wage Earners with Breastfeeding

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Objectives

• Name three major barriers to breastfeeding among women working in low-wage job settings.

• Identify practical solutions for helping mothers manage milk expression in non-office job settings.
Breastfeeding in Low-Wage Jobs
Low-Wage Earners

- Non-standard hours
- Greater chronic health problems
- Less autonomy and flexibility in the job
- Less likely to have sick pay and family leave
- Less control over their job situation
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Job Reality</th>
<th>Low-Wage Earners</th>
<th>Middle Income Workers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can Take Off to care for Sick Child</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>54%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have a say in when to take breaks</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>57%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have a say in the start/quitting time</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>26%</td>
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How Employment Affects Breastfeeding

- Welfare to Work Reform Program
- Maternity leave
- Full time vs. part-time employment
- Income
WHY is it so hard?

- Lack of accommodations
- Lack of flexibility
- Real or perceived low milk supply
- Embarrassment
- Fatigue and stress
- Limited child care options
- Lack of support
New York Listening Sessions with WIC Participants, Staff, and Employers
We Asked Moms

- Prenatal mothers (n=17)
- Mothers of infants/children (n=28)
We Asked Staff

Peer counselors (n=10)

Breastfeeding coordinators (n=3)

WIC Clinic coordinators (n=2)
Race/Ethnicity of Moms
Age range: 18-44 years

- Hispanic: 21
- White: 10
- African-American: 9
- Asian: 5
Where New York Moms Work

- Healthcare: 7
- Retail: 5
- Restaurant: 4
- Office: 2
Why Moms Stop Breastfeeding

- Did not latch
- Work
- Sick
- Out of state
- Hurts
- Sleep deprived
- Not enough milk
- Busy
Moms’ Characteristics

- Determined
- Embarrassed
- Tired
- Comfort with Boss
- Fear of retaliation
- Expectations of manager’s reaction
Key Findings

- WIC mothers are not aware of the Federal nursing breaks law
- Though all women wanted to continue breastfeeding, most were not comfortable talking with their employer about their needs
- Biggest issue was TIME, along with private space
- Women need help from employer to navigate
- Difficulty eating and pumping at the same time
Expectation of Managers’ Reactions

Powerlessness

“I’m not intimidated... It’s that you know the response so why would I bother?  So you don’t even try because you know the answer.”
Difficult Managers

• “Old grumpy men and old ladies”
• Managers who have no children
• Women managers who did not breastfeed
Managers Were Often Understanding

“I have been here eleven years and very, very, very rarely do I have a mom that says she is not allowed to pump, very rarely. It’s funny because I have the moms expecting to be rejected when they aren’t being told no at all.”
We Asked Employers

- Child Care (n=4)
- Hospitals (n=2)
- Hotels (n=4)
- NYC Businesses (n=18)
Key Findings

• While HR directors are typically aware of the law, company managers and supervisors are NOT
• Nearly all were unaware of the benefits to the business
• Most have NEVER even thought about the issue!
• Very few have ever been approached by a woman wanting lactation accommodations
• Male managers are embarrassed about breastfeeding, but are nevertheless enthusiastic about supporting moms at work
• Female managers were split in their support
• Major barriers:
  – Women might take advantage of the privilege
  – Lack of space and limited break time
  – More willing to support responsible employees
What Employers Need

• Just ask!

• Provide information on:
  – Benefits of breastfeeding to the employer and workplace
  – What lactation accommodations look like
  – Solutions for space
  – How much time it takes
  – What the manager needs to do

• Share best practices from other businesses
What Do WIC Moms Need?

- Information about expressing milk at work
- Information about the law and their rights
- Handouts to give their employer/supervisor
- “Words” to use when approaching their supervisor
- To be empowered
- Someone to pave the way!
Role of WIC Staff

“If moms don’t have the voice we need to be able to tell them to come to us and we will talk to your employer.”
Solutions for Breastfeeding in Low-Wage Work Environments
Emotional Considerations

- Competing demands
- Fatigue
- Sadness
- Depression
- Guilt
- Family support
Family Support
Pumping Tips
Hands-On Pumping
Getting Organized
Gradual Return to Work

- Part-time options
- Flex time
- Telecommuting
- Starting toward the end of the week
Approaching Supervisors
Develop a Plan!

• Benefits of breastfeeding to the business
• Expected frequency for milk expression
• Options for time and space
• Options for coverage while away
• Resources
Engaging Co-Workers

• Breastfeeding benefits everyone at work!
• Breaks are predictable; absences are not.
• Breastfeeding needs are temporary.
• We can all work together to build a great team.
• It works both ways: covering for one another.
Child-Care

• Look for provider close to work, if possible
• Breastfeed at the childcare center/provider when possible
• Forewarn the provider about reverse cycle feeding
Creative Solutions for Hourly Workers
Creative Solutions for Managing Time

• Split shifts
• Going home to breastfeed
• Organizing breaks
• Healthy meal options that can be eaten with one hand
Creative Solutions for Space
Flexible Space
Shared Space
Creating a Private Area

- Cubicle walls
- Partitions
- Rolling partitions
- Curtains
Dedicated Space for Lactation
Single Use Rooms
Simple Accommodations
Elaborate Accommodations
What Goes IN the Space

DOL Interpretation of the Law Suggests:
• Chair
• Flat surface for the pump

Ideal:
• Electrical outlet
• Anti-microbial wipes
Cozy
Artwork
Storing Human Milk
Sink
Retail Stores
Wal-Mart
Palestine, Texas
Grocery Stores
Queens, New York
Convenience Stores
Hattiesburg, Mississippi
Restaurants
Cortez, Colorado
Burgerville
Oregon and Washington
Manufacturing
Hampton Inn
Indianapolis, Indiana
Elite Screen Printing
Hattiesburg, Mississippi
University
Davis, California
Shared Room in a Building
North Harlem Perinatal Partnership
Look for a “Funny Little Space”
Schools
Mobile Nursing Station
Agriculture
Reiter Berry Farm, California
Pop-Up Tents
Construction Sites
Ambulance Lactation Station
Portland Mobile Stations
Bolstering Confidence
National Initiatives and Resources
National Searchable Resource

www.everymother.org/workplace
Outreach with Business Organizations

- National Restaurant Association
- National Retail Federation
- Society for Human Resource Management
- American Society of Hospital Human Resource Association
- College & University Work Family Association
- American Federation of Teachers
- National Grocers Association
New York Resources

www.breastfeedingpartners.org
HHS Business Case for Breastfeeding

• Business Case for Breastfeeding
  – Bottom-Line Benefits
  – Dear Supervisor Letter (*Employees’ Guide*)
  – Physician Letter (*Outreach Guide*)

[www.ask.hrsa.gov](http://www.ask.hrsa.gov)

[www.womenshealth.org](http://www.womenshealth.org)