

Seattle Postpartum Health Project



WHAT ARE OUR STUDY GOALS

We examine the role of infant feeding practices (e.g., breastfeeding, pumping) on reported mental and physical health. We also examine whether these relationships depend on the time since giving birth.

HOW WAS THIS DONE

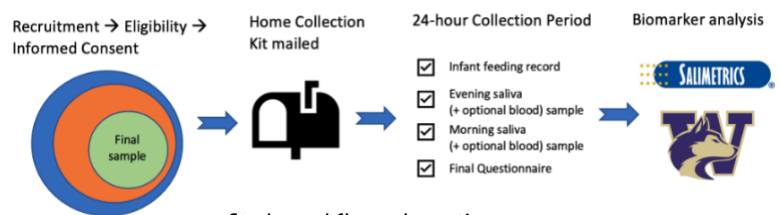
We recruited 96 recently pregnant individuals (i.e., gave birth within the last 6 months from the time of recruitment) from the greater Seattle metropolitan area. We asked all eligible participants to choose a 24-hour period, provide both morning and evening saliva samples (*optional* finger-prick blood spot samples from the same time points), record how and when they feed their infant, and complete a brief online questionnaire. We mailed all study materials and collected samples via curbside pickup. Inflammatory markers collected from saliva and dried blood spots are currently being analyzed.

WHY IT MATTERS

Most research on the postpartum period has focused on infant outcomes. As a result, there is a lot we still don't know about maternal immune function, health, and disease risk during the postpartum period - we'd like to change that.

WHAT WAS FOUND

Using linear Bayesian regression models, we found that at-the-nipple breastfeeding was reliably associated with fewer depression symptoms. The effects of expressing/ pumping breastmilk, however, appear to be dependent on the time since giving birth. Furthermore, only expressing/ pumping breastmilk was associated with more symptoms of physical illness regardless of the amount of time since delivery.



Study workflow schematic

WHAT IT MEANS

We look to study recently pregnant individuals during the postpartum period with a primary focus on infant feeding practices and their effects on mental and physical health. While breastfeeding is largely supported as the gold standard for infant feeding and nutrition, our results suggest that the benefit of breastfeeding is more complex than previously thought. When to breastfeed and how are just two issues that our study touches upon. More work is needed to understand how these breastfeeding practices influence immune tolerance as well as the societal challenges (e.g., who gets to breastfeed) associated with it.

This summary describes the works of:

Hove CM, Chua KJ, & Boddy A. "Breastfeeding behavior corresponds to differences in perceived physical and mental wellbeing among postpartum women." For more information, please see carmenhove.com or contact Amy Boddy, PhD at boddy@anth.ucsb.edu

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