

# Exploring Public Attitudes to Breastfeeding in Northern Ireland

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## Infant feeding status at discharge 2019

- Total breastfeeding 38%
- Breastfeeding and formula 12%
- Infant formula 50%

Rates of any breastfeeding has been increasing since 2017 from 47% up to 50% in 2019

(NIMATS 2019)

## Breastmilk facts:

- Tailored to individual babies health needs
- Mums diet has no impact on milk quality
- A dynamic living substance which changes throughout the day
- Proven to have health benefits for children for at least up to two years
- Antibodies identified in COVID-19 positive mums breastmilk



(Gao et al, 2020; Shenker et al, 2020; Wong 2017; Al-Shehri et al, 2015)

# Breastmilk comes in many forms...

- At the breast
- Expressed bottle feeding
- Nasogastric (NG) tube
- Supplementary Nursing System (SNS)
- Mixed feeding



## Longer term benefits:

- Mental health benefits for mum, baby and extended family
- Baby's brain development
- Bonding
- Comfort
- Financial



# 10

good things  
you need to know about  
**exclusive\* breastfeeding**



### **saves life**

and protects baby against disease with antibacterial agents.



### **provides**

all nutrients baby needs for the first 6 months.



### **ensures**

clean and safe source of food, especially in emergencies.



### **makes**

child grow strong and intelligent.



### **breaks**

the cycle of diarrhea and malnutrition.



### **bonds**

mother and child.



### **reduces**

the mother's risk of ovarian and breast cancer.



### **helps**

space pregnancies, a natural method of birth control.



### **saves money**

by not having to buy infant formula and feeding equipment.



### **protects**

the environment with no need for packaging and disposal.

**\*exclusive** means 100% breastmilk, no water, no solid food, nothing else.

***Breastfeeding – A Great Start, A Strategy for Northern  
Ireland 2013-2023 (DHSSPS, 2013)***

*‘The vision for the strategy is that Breastfeeding is the social and biological norm, and mothers will be supported to give their babies a good start in life.’*



**The Breastfeeding Strategy 2013-2023 has four strategic outcomes:**

1. Supportive environments for breastfeeding exist throughout Northern Ireland;
2. Health and Social Care (HSC) has the necessary knowledge, skills and leadership to effectively protect, promote, support and normalise breastfeeding;
3. High quality information systems are in place that underpin the development of policy and programmes, and support strategy delivery; and
4. An informed and supportive public.



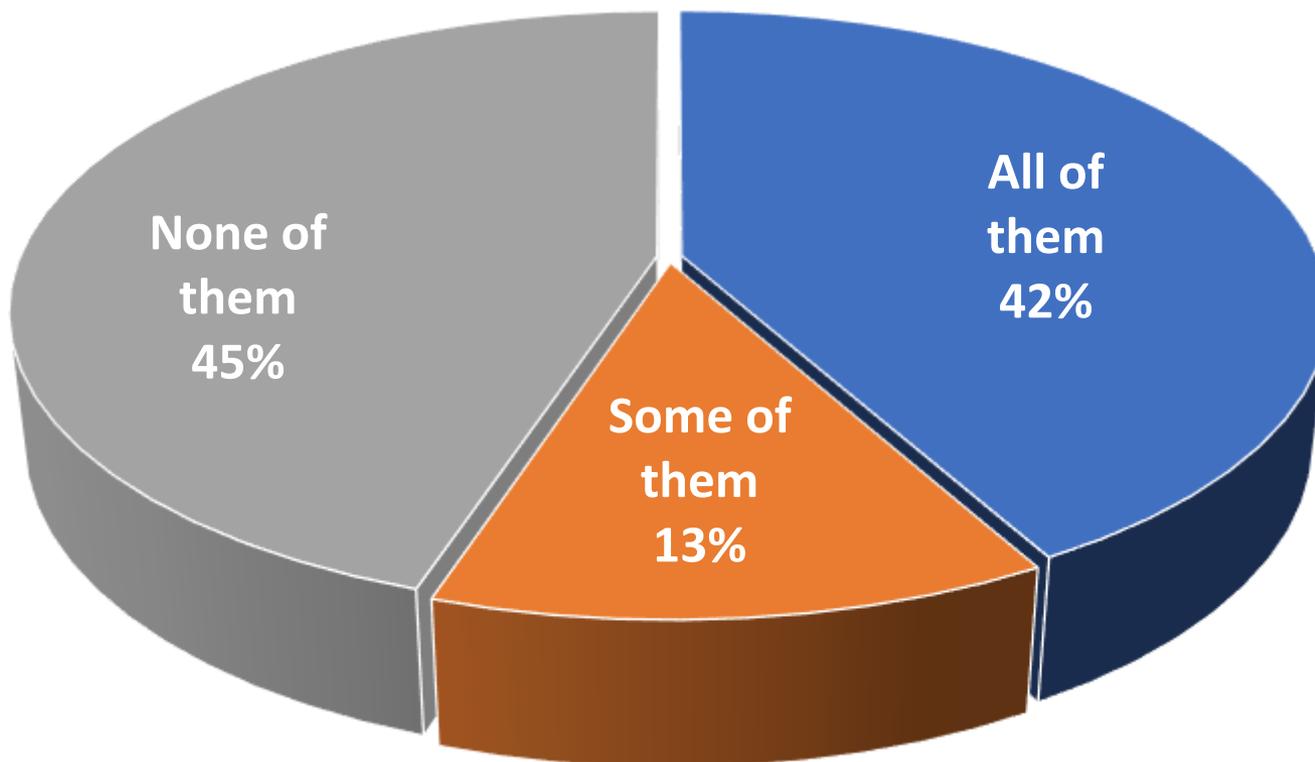


# NILT

Northern Ireland LIFE & TIMES

## Breastfeeding Survey Data 2019

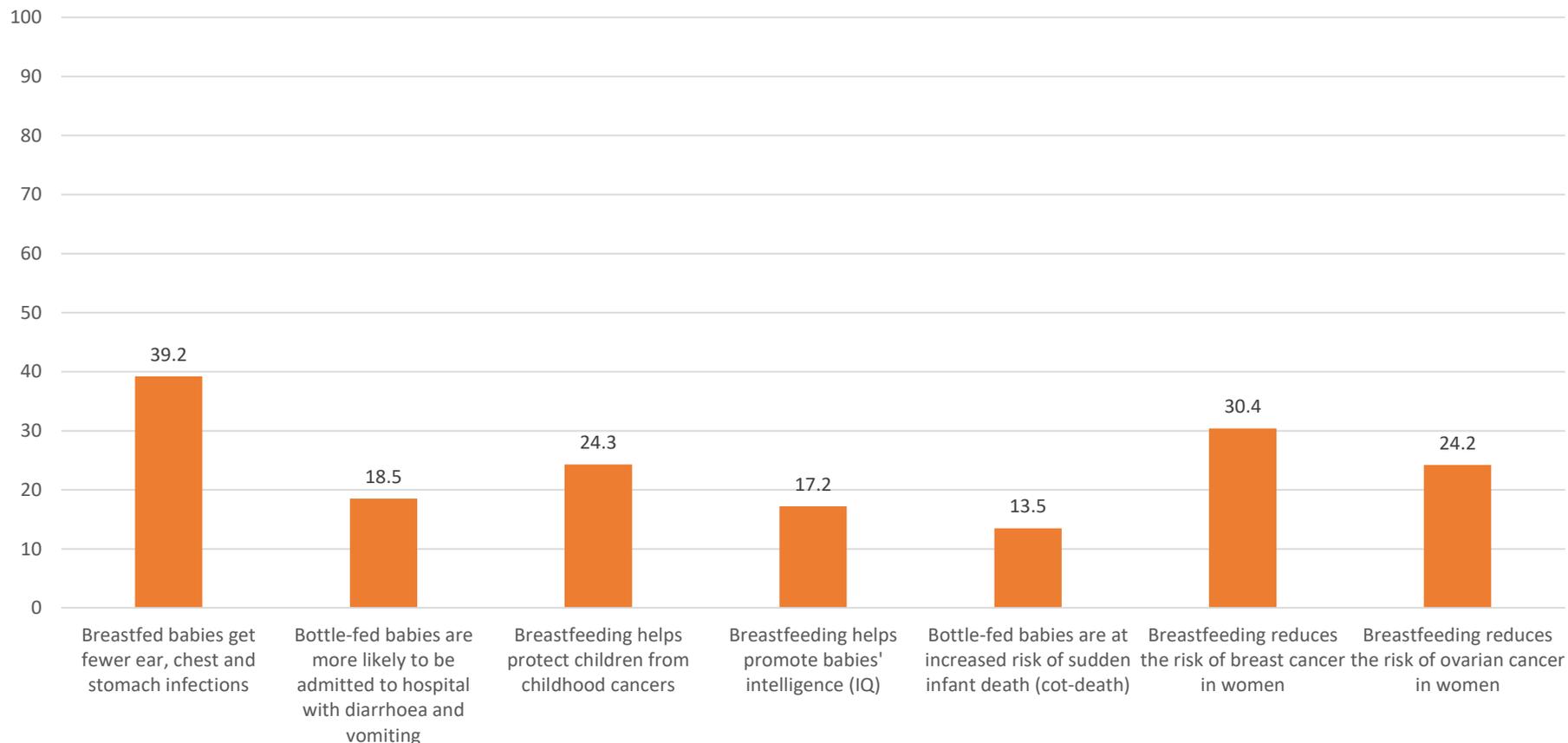
# Were any of your children breastfed at least once?



Respondents with any children = 804

- ✓ Knowledge of breastfeeding
- ✓ Views on infant feeding methods
- ✓ Attitudes to breastfeeding
- ✓ Attitudes to breastfeeding in public
- Employment and breastfeeding
- Breastfeeding and the impact on partners
- External influences on breastfeeding
- Relational issues on breastfeeding

Percentage of Respondents (1203) who answered breastfeeding knowledge questions correctly



## Breastfeeding is good for baby

**YES = 87%**

[ NI Health survey 2014/15 = 90%  
NI Health survey 2017/18 = 86% ]



Formula is as healthy as  
breast milk

**Yes = 20%**

**Don't know = 21%**

NI Health Survey 2017/18 YES = 24%

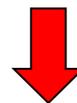


Breast milk is healthier than  
formula

**Yes = 58%**

**Don't know = 19%**

NI Health Survey 2017/18 YES = 62%





# Attitudes to Breastfeeding

Over 3 out of 5 respondents had a positive attitude towards breastfeeding

	Agree or strongly agree (%)	Neither agree/disagree (%)	Disagree or strongly disagree (%)	Don't know (%)
Breastfeeding is embarrassing	15	8	76	2
Breastfeeding is offensive	6	9	84	2
Breastfeeding is normal	89	7	2	2
Breastfeeding is distasteful	7	8	84	2

Women should only breastfeed their babies at home or in  
private

**NO** = 62% **YES** = 14%

2014/15 **YES** = 12%

There should be a law in Northern Ireland to protect women  
who want to breastfeed in public

**YES** = 59% **NO** = 20%

2014/15 **YES** = 71%

Older age groups were more likely to have more negative  
attitudes to breastfeeding in public



**breastfeeding  
welcome here**

- Women and those who had breastfed any children had more knowledge of the health benefits of breastfeeding
- A small number of respondents associated breastfeeding with being offensive or distasteful
- Twice as many women as men agreed that formula is as healthy as breast milk
- Younger participants, those with higher qualifications and those living in urban areas had more positive attitudes



**Thank you**  
**Any questions?**