

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Army

## Do Black-White Racial Disparities in Breastfeeding Persist in the Military Community?

Lundquist, J., Xu, Z., Barfield, W., & Elo, I. (2015). Do black-white racial disparities in breastfeeding persist in the military community? *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 19(2), 419-427. doi:10.1007/s10995-014-1524-x

**SUMMARY:** There are many well-known health benefits of breastfeeding for mothers and infants. This study examines the difference in breastfeeding rates for military-affiliated women and civilian women while considering racial differences within those groups as well. The findings suggest that breastfeeding is more common among military-affiliated women than civilians.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Breastfeeding is 17% more prevalent among women affiliated with the military than civilian women.
- White civilian women breastfeed more than Black civilian women but in the military community there is a similar rate of breastfeeding initiation and duration among White and Black women.
- Military-affiliated women, on average, breastfeed for a week longer than their civilian counterparts.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer education to military-affiliated women to explain the importance of breastfeeding
- Target low income, unmarried, and non-college educated mothers to recruit them for workshops and offer them resources because they are the least likely to breastfeed
- Promote events that encourage and support women through the breastfeeding process to ensure that the ideal duration is met

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage awareness campaigns about the benefits for infants and mothers to breastfeed
- Recommend the development of processes through which new mothers in the military community can be connected to resources that encourage healthy breastfeeding habits
- Continue to support high quality healthcare for women affiliated with the military

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## METHODS

- The data were collected through the pregnancy risk assessment monitoring system that monitors maternal behaviors among woman who recently delivered an infant during a 10-year period from 1995 through 2005.
- Participants were given surveys on paper or by phone that included questions regarding breastfeeding initiation and duration.
- Data were analyzed to see how mothers' responses compare between civilian and military-affiliated populations.

## PARTICIPANTS

- The study included 6,631 military-affiliated women and 306,808 civilian women who recently delivered a live-born infant.
- The ethnic breakdown of participants included 65% White, 18% Black, 5% Asian-American, 11% Latina, and 1% identified as other.
- The breakdown of the mother's age included 11% under 20 years, 58% 20-29 years, 20% 30-34 years, and 11% 35 years or older.
- Military-affiliated women included women Service members and wives or daughters of Service members.

## LIMITATIONS

- Researchers did not distinguish between Active Duty Service members and spouses or daughters of military Service members, so it is unclear whether breastfeeding differs for those two groups.
- There was no information to indicate whether or not the mothers were employed, which could help explain the differences in breastfeeding initiation and duration.
- There were no measurements used to explain the association between Black women breastfeeding less than White women in breastfeeding duration.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore the role that deployment has on breastfeeding initiation and duration
- Examine factors that may contribute to the differences between those who initiate breastfeeding in the civilian and military setting
- Investigate the features of military environment that may lead to higher rates of breastfeeding

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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