

REVIEW ARTICLE

Breastfeeding Friendly Working Environment

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ABSTRACT

Breastfeeding is a key to the comprehensive development of children, for mothers and society. Breastfeeding support is crucial as breastfeeding nourishes and provides all children with the best start in life. Breast milk acts as a baby's first vaccine, providing critical protection from diseases and even death. Breastfeeding also allows for secure attachment, cognitive development and reduces the burden of childhood and maternal illness, lowering health care costs creating healthier families and strengthening the development of societies. The implementation of breastfeeding room or space creates greater job satisfaction because facilitates greater balance between breastfeeding and work and allows women to combine work with motherhood, in the form of continued breastfeeding.

Aim and objective: The significance of provision for breastfeeding in working environment.

Methodology: Information will be collected from textbooks various journals, websites regarding breastfeeding support at workplace.

Result: Supporting breastfeeding in the workplace has significant human and economic benefits.

Discussion: The provision of workplace, breastfeeding rooms, paid nursing breaks and an enabling breastfeeding environment culture are low cost interventions that can contribute to improve breastfeeding, job productivity and employee retention. The implementation of breastfeeding room or space creates greater job satisfaction because facilitates greater balance between breastfeeding and work that allows women to combine work with motherhood, in the form of continued breastfeeding.

KEYWORDS

• Breastfeeding • Working environment • Productivity Motherhood satisfaction

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INTRODUCTION

Breastfeeding is important for the baby, the mother, the community and the employer.

⁽¹⁾ Family friendly policies enable parents to provide the best start in life for their children; they pay off in healthier, better educated children, a better equipped workforce and lead to sustainable growth. Breastfeeding support is crucial as breastfeeding nourishes and provides all children with the best start in life. Breast milk acts as a baby's first vaccine, providing critical protection from diseases and even death. Breastfeeding also allows for secure attachment, cognitive development and reduces the burden of childhood and maternal illness, lowering health care costs, creating healthier families and strengthening the development of societies. Research has found that returning to work without adequate support mechanisms can hamper optimal breastfeeding practices. The provision of workplace, breastfeeding rooms, paid nursing breaks and an enabling breastfeeding environment culture are low cost interventions that can contribute to improve breastfeeding, job productivity and employee retention.⁽²⁾ Not only will providing a safe, comfortable space for a mother to express milk or breastfeed help boost employee morale and save company in healthcare costs it's also the law.³ So governments, business, civil society and families can work together to protect and facilitate this practice to protect women's health and ensure that children are able to survive and thrive.

Definition of workplace breastfeeding support interventions⁴

Workplace breastfeeding support includes programs or company policies which enable working mothers to breastfeed exclusively for 6 months and continually up to 2 years. Such programs can include: respecting or exceeding national laws on duration of paid maternity leave (ensuring 6 months minimum); providing an appropriate place and time to express/pump milk during work hours and providing options for working mothers such as onsite child care and flexible work schedules.

Benefits⁵

- Supporting breastfeeding in the workplace has significant human and economic benefits. Improving the

corporate image of business, showing that they care about the health and wellbeing of working women and their families.

- Reducing the amount of leave requests, made to attend doctor's appointments, for both mother and child, as well as the amount of sick leave.
- Reduced maternity related absenteeism, which can translate into 30-70% fewer absences.
- Increasing the retention of female workers, as they feel more supported by the company.
- Reducing the employee turnover rates, and saving the company money by eliminating the need to hire and train new staffs.

The implementation of breastfeeding room or space creates greater job satisfaction because it:

- Facilitates greater balance between breastfeeding and work.
- Helps breastfeeding women feel more at ease during working hours and in their lives generally.
- Increases breastfeeding women's sense of belonging and commitment to the company.
- Increases working women's performance as they feel more motivated and content to carry out their duties.
- Allows women to combine work with motherhood in the form of continued breastfeeding.
- Shows that staff are recognized, respected and supported as mothers.

Benefits for the child and mother⁶

- Breast milk protects the child from infectious diseases such as diarrhea and respiratory infections like allergies and asthma.
- Breastfeeding prevents non communicable diseases such as obesity, being overweight, hypercholesterolemia, type 2 diabetes mellitus and cardiovascular diseases. It is one of the practices that help prevent sudden infant death syndrome.
- Encourages a speedy recovery after delivery as it prevents heavy bleeding.

- It reduces risk of chronic diseases such as breast and ovarian cancers, heart disease and diabetes.
- It also improves birth spacing.
- Decreased risk of osteoporosis and bone fracture later in life.⁷
- Better management of stress.⁸

Benefits for the society and the environment⁹

- Breastmilk is always available and within the reach of any economy. It offers advantages that cannot be replicated by any other food.
- Breastfeeding encourages family savings, as there is no need to spend money on purchasing, as well as savings on medical costs, as children get sick less.
- Breastmilk is a natural, renewable and sustainable resource, which does not generate waste nor pollution.

Breastfeeding rooms:¹⁰

Breastfeeding room includes dedicate a room in the building as a permanent Lactation room for all breastfeeding employees to use; allow a flexible time schedule to accommodate for expressing milk.

Provide options of part time work, working from home or job sharing to breastfeeding employees to ease the transition back to work.

Rights and obligations¹¹

- A breastfeeding room should be a clean, comfortable, safe and a private space for women. The main function is for mothers to effectively express and store milk during working hours.
- A breastfeeding room should be located in a physically separate area, with direct access, away from the restrooms, but close to the work place.
- Ideally, the breastfeeding room should have hand washing facilities and necessary supplies such as drinking water, liquid soap, dispenser, hand sanitizer, cleaner for surfaces and paper towels.
- In order to preserve the breastmilk until the mother takes it and feeds it to the child, it is necessary to have a cold storage system available which should preferably be a freezer or fridge.

- The room must have a comfortable chair, such as an armchair with adjustable height and good back support. This must be made of a material that allows it to be easily washed and disinfected.
- Natural light is preferred, but if this is not possible due to the constraints of the space, suitable artificial lighting, ventilation and heating must be provided. The use of air conditioning is recommended to maintain suitable temperatures.
- Cleaning should be done with odourless, food safe products used exclusively in the breastfeeding room.
- Some aspects of breastfeeding rooms are not required by law, but they help to encourage and support mothers at this very important stage of their lives. These include:
 - A library with books, guides, brochures and posters containing information on pregnancy, early childhood and breastfeeding.
 - Second chair and footrest to ensure comfort while breastfeeding.
 - Providing a breast pump, even if it is not a formal requirement.
 - Supplying nursing pads, breastfeeding gel packs, as well as glass containers or bottles with plastic lids in which to transfer the expressed milk. If children facility is nearby, can breastfeed the child on breaks.

Breastfeeding support during COVID 19¹²

- Mother and infant, while breastfeeding, should maintain a distance of at least one meter from other people and the mother should avoid touching her eyes, nose and mouth.
- Women should be advised to wear a mask while breastfeeding, wash their hands with soap before touching the baby; wash breast milk pumps and milk storage containers after every use; and routinely clean and disinfect the surfaces they touch.
- Where possible, breastfeeding rooms where women can express milk should be kept clean and equipped with disinfecting wipes, a trash bin with a lid, hand sanitizer and handwashing facilities.

DISCUSSION

Creating a breastfeeding friendly work environment isn't just about convenience, but it is also about empowering women. It supports their physical recovery, nurtures emotional strength and fosters mental resilience, helping them thrive as both professionals and mothers. This approach respects the profound journey of motherhood, creating a workplace where every mother feels valued and supported. It strengthens the mother child bond, enhances infant's health and boosts cognitive development. For workplace, it leads to higher employee satisfaction, retention and productivity. On a broader scale, it fosters a healthier, more inclusive society by normalizing breastfeeding and supporting family friendly cultures, ultimately contributing to a stronger, healthier nation.

CONCLUSION

Breastfeeding mothers need to express milk 2-3 times per work day. Breaks to express milk take only around 15-30 minutes. Workplace that provide accommodations for mothers to express breastmilk see lower absenteeism rates due to healthier babies and less time taken off by mothers to care for their child. By incorporating policies and procedures to ensure healthy breastfeeding practices at workplace will send a message to their employees that they are a priority. This will also help breastfeeding employees feel comfortable about returning to work while they are still nursing.¹³ Thus continuing to breastfeed is a wonderful way to reconnect with baby after hours of separation.

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