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## REVIEW ARTICLE

# Intimate partner violence and breastfeeding practices: a systematic review of observational studies<sup>☆</sup>

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### KEYWORDS

Breastfeeding;  
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Review

### Abstract

**Objective:** To review the association between intimate partner violence and breastfeeding practices in the literature.

**Data sources:** The search was carried out in five databases, including MEDLINE, LILACS, SCOPUS, PsycINFO, and Science Direct. The search strategy was carried out in February 2017. The authors included original studies with observational design, which investigated forms of intimate partner violence (including emotional, physical, and/or sexual) and breastfeeding practices. The quality of the studies was assessed based on the bias susceptibility through criteria specifically developed for this review.

**Summary of data:** The study included 12 original articles (10 cross-sectional, one case-control, and one cohort study) carried out in different countries. The forms of intimate partner violence observed were emotional, physical, and/or sexual. Breastfeeding was investigated by different tools and only assessed children between 2 days and 6 months of life. Of the 12 studies included in this review, eight found a lower breastfeeding intention, breastfeeding initiation, and exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of the child's life, and a higher likelihood of early termination of exclusive breastfeeding among women living at home where violence was present. The quality varied between the studies and six were classified as having low bias susceptibility based on the assessed items.

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58**PALAVRAS-CHAVE**Amamentação;  
Leite;  
Humano;  
Violência entre  
parceiros íntimos;  
Violência doméstica;  
Revisão

**Conclusions:** Intimate partner violence is associated with inadequate breastfeeding practices of children aged 2 days to 6 months of life.

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## Violência entre parceiros íntimos e práticas de aleitamento materno: Uma revisão sistemática de estudos observacionais

### Resumo

**Objetivo:** Revisar na literatura a associação da violência entre parceiros íntimos e as práticas de aleitamento materno.

**Fontes dos dados:** Foram utilizadas para as buscas cinco bases de dados, incluindo o MEDLINE, LILACS, SCOPUS, PsycINFO e Science Direct. A estratégia de busca foi realizada em fevereiro de 2017. Foram incluídos estudos originais com desenho observacional, os quais investigaram formas de violência entre parceiros íntimos: emocional, física e/ou sexual e as práticas de aleitamento materno. A qualidade dos estudos foi avaliada a partir da susceptibilidade a vieses por critérios especificamente desenvolvidos para esta revisão.

**Síntese dos dados:** Foram incluídos 12 artigos originais (10 seccionais, 1 caso-controle e 1 coorte) realizados em diferentes países. As formas de violência entre parceiros íntimos observadas foram emocional, física e/ou sexual. O aleitamento materno investigado nos estudos se fez por diferentes instrumentos e avaliaram apenas crianças entre dois dias e seis meses de vida. Dos doze estudos incluídos nesta revisão, oito encontraram menor chance de intenção de amamentar, menor chance de iniciação ao aleitamento materno e de amamentação exclusiva durante os primeiros seis meses de vida da criança e maior probabilidade de interrupção precoce do aleitamento materno exclusivo entre as mulheres que viviam em domicílios onde a violência estava presente. A qualidade variou entre os estudos e seis foram classificados apresentando baixa susceptibilidade ao viés a partir dos itens julgados.

**Conclusões:** A violência entre parceiros íntimos está relacionada às práticas inadequadas de aleitamento materno de crianças entre dois dias e seis meses de vida.

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## Introduction

Breastmilk is unquestionably the ideal food for the healthy growth and development of children.<sup>1,2</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the Brazilian Ministry of Health recommend the early start of breastfeeding within one hour after birth, that children receive breastmilk exclusively during the first six months of life, and that breastfeeding be supplemented by other foods up to 2 years of age or more.<sup>2,3</sup>

Adequate breastfeeding is so critical that it could prevent the deaths of more than 800,000 children under 5 years of age a year; nonetheless, data show that no more than 37% of children worldwide are exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life.<sup>4,5</sup> Furthermore, a longer breastfeeding duration also contributes to the health and well-being of mothers, reducing the risk of ovarian and breast cancer and helping to prevent pregnancy during this period.<sup>5</sup>

The literature emphasizes the immediate and long-term consequences related to the early termination of exclusive breastfeeding and the short duration of breastfeeding. These inadequate practices may be associated with overweight and obesity in childhood, as well as low birth weight

in children under 5 years, one of the leading causes of death worldwide.<sup>2,6-8</sup>

Breastfeeding practices (BFP), such as the decision to start or not breastfeeding, offer breast milk or formula, as well as the duration of breastfeeding, can be influenced by many factors such as birth weight, maternal age, level of schooling, socioeconomic status, income, maternal stress and depressive symptoms, social support, social network, parents' diets, and the living environment.<sup>9-12</sup>

Studies also show that, in violent domestic environments, the quality of mothering and the ability of both parents to cope with the child's needs are impaired.<sup>13-15</sup> Consequently, the ability to care for the child's feeding is also affected.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is defined as the intentional use of physical force, emotional and sexual abuse, or use of power against an intimate partner, and has been indicated in recent studies as one more factor associated with inadequate BFP.<sup>16,17</sup>

The literature on the subject is still scarce and the results of the investigations are contradictory. Some studies show there is an association between IPV and breastfeeding, while others have not found statistically significant associations.<sup>16-19</sup> Problems in the methodologies adopted

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