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### **An exploration of infant feeding practices among Western African mothers living in the community in Ireland**

*Sarah Brennan(1,2), A McFarlane(1,3)*

*(1) Department of General Practice, NUI Galway, Galway, Co. Galway, Ireland*

*(2) Letterkenny Medical Academy, Letterkenny University Hospital, Donegal, Ireland*

*(3) Department of Primary Care, University of Limerick, Co. Limerick, Ireland*

*Corresponding author: Dr Sarah Brennan, NUI Galway, Department of General Practice, Letterkenny, Ireland. E-mail: sarah.s.brennan@nuigalway.ie*

**Background and Aim:** Breastfeeding is seen as an unequalled infant nutrition method. Interestingly international evidence shows that migration has a detrimental effect on breastfeeding. In the past 20 years Ireland has experienced significant inward migration. Little is known about how 'new' ethnic minority communities experience breastfeeding in their new Irish community setting. This 'gap' reduces the scope for health care providers to optimally promote, protect and support breastfeeding among these minority communities. This study aims to explore infant feeding practices of Western African women with objectives to examine levers and barriers to breastfeeding practices in an Irish community context.

**Methods:** This is a qualitative study. A narrative approach to data collection and analysis was adopted which suited the cross-cultural nature of the research. The study participants were 9 women from West Africa. Each interview consisted of two sub-sessions based on Wengraf's Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM), an initial sub-session with an open-ended question aimed at inducing narrative and a second sub-session using particular questions aimed at inducing narrative generated from the responses in sub-session one. This paper presents an in-depth analysis of 2 cases and thematic analyses of all 9 participants. Techniques were employed to enhance reliability and validity.

**Results:** Jemma's case illustrates the ways in which 'superior' breast feeding practices may deteriorate in the Irish community setting due to mitigating socio-cultural circumstances. In contrast, Sara's case shows that breastfeeding practices can also flourish with positive breastfeeding experiences building on subsequent successful breastfeeding practices. Thematic analyse of all participants lead to the development of a Circles of Experiences framework for understanding how different experiences can have a positive and negative effect on the optimal practicing of Breastfeeding.

**Conclusion:** Migration can have a detrimental effect on breastfeeding practices. However, breastfeeding may flourish. General practitioners AND Health Care Professionals should be aware of the experiences that promote or inhibit breastfeeding practices for mothers from ethnic minority communities so that they can discuss practices and options with the mothers in culturally appropriate ways.