

Are Teenage Peer Supporters Successful In Increasing Breastfeeding?

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Background

Breastfeeding benefits the health of both a mother and their baby(1) and can also help with bonding. Only 58% of teenage mothers initiate breastfeeding, much lower than the national average of 81%. At 6 months this gap widens further with 7% breastfeeding compared with the national average of 34%(2). This shows the need to support teenage mothers to breastfeed.

Evidence

A randomised controlled trial (RCT) with teenage mothers concluded that those who received peer support had an increased duration of breastfeeding(3). This was supported by a larger RCT (4) and a review of evidence which both concluded that teenage peer supporters did increase the length of time mothers would breastfeed(5). Further studies looking at the use of peer supporters have found them to be effective (6,7).



Alternatives

Interventions that have been shown to be most effective in supporting breast feeding are breastfeeding support groups, home visits, telephone support combined with peer support(8). Family nurse partnerships have been shown to produce good outcomes with teenage mothers but unfortunately it is not available in this area (9).

Conclusion

The availability of peer supporters is limited in Hampshire. Research suggests that they are successful and would benefit health if they were more widely available. Qualitative research is needed to appreciate mothers experiences so the service can be further developed. Research evidence highlights the need to support breastfeeding in this vulnerable group.

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