

The Impact of Birth Experience & Pain on Breastfeeding Outcomes

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Introduction

Reasons for premature discontinuation of breastfeeding are complex; however the majority of research focuses only on the technical and physical challenges of breastfeeding and issues with the nipple itself. This survey-based study investigated how actual experiences of birth and breastfeeding differed from the mother's pre-birth intentions, and any subsequent perceived impact on breastfeeding experience for mothers in the USA.

Method

Data was collected through use of an online survey of US-based women. Participants had all given birth to their youngest child within the last 24 months, initiated breastfeeding and had completed their breastfeeding journey ($n=364$). The survey was divided into two parts, completed a few days apart. The first survey was an attitudinal study examining plans and intentions regarding birth and breastfeeding. The second survey focused on actual experiences of birth, breastfeeding, and the effect of pain relating to the birth.

Results

Breastfeeding Intentions and Reality:

Most respondents intended to exclusively feed breastmilk (86%), however in reality, 44% combination fed as part of their breastfeeding journey. Over two thirds of the respondents (67%) pumped and fed expressed breastmilk. Of those who wanted to mainly breastfeed, the majority (68%) had planned to breastfeed for 12 months, however less than half (41%) were still breastfeeding at this point.

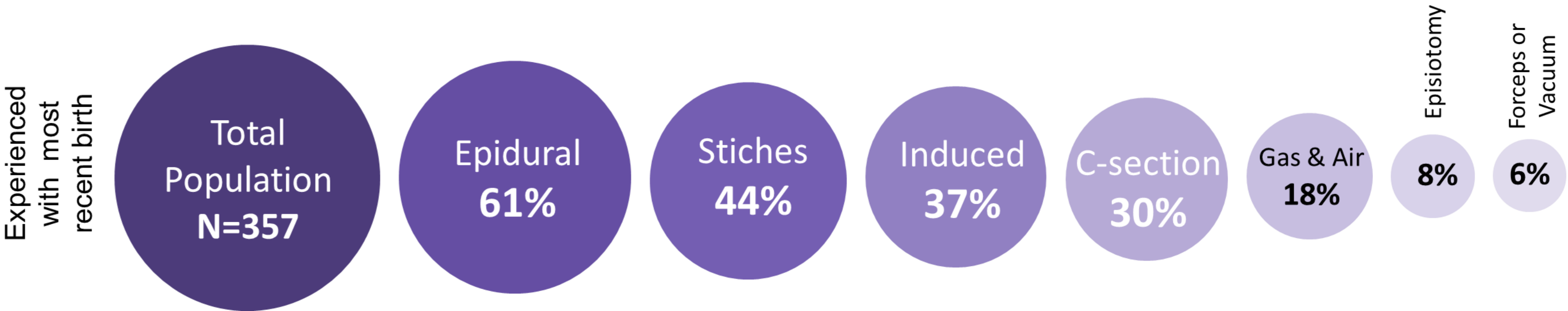


Used formula Didn't Use formula

68% had to incorporate more formula at some point in their breastfeeding journey than they originally planned

Birth Experience

Regarding their most recent birth, 44% required sutures, 30% had a C-section and 8% had an episiotomy. Only a third of respondents said their birth went well and to plan, with unplanned C-sections being the biggest change. When respondents were asked why the birth had affected their breastfeeding, C-section and being separated from the baby were the biggest impacts, followed by mom's poor health and a delayed let down.



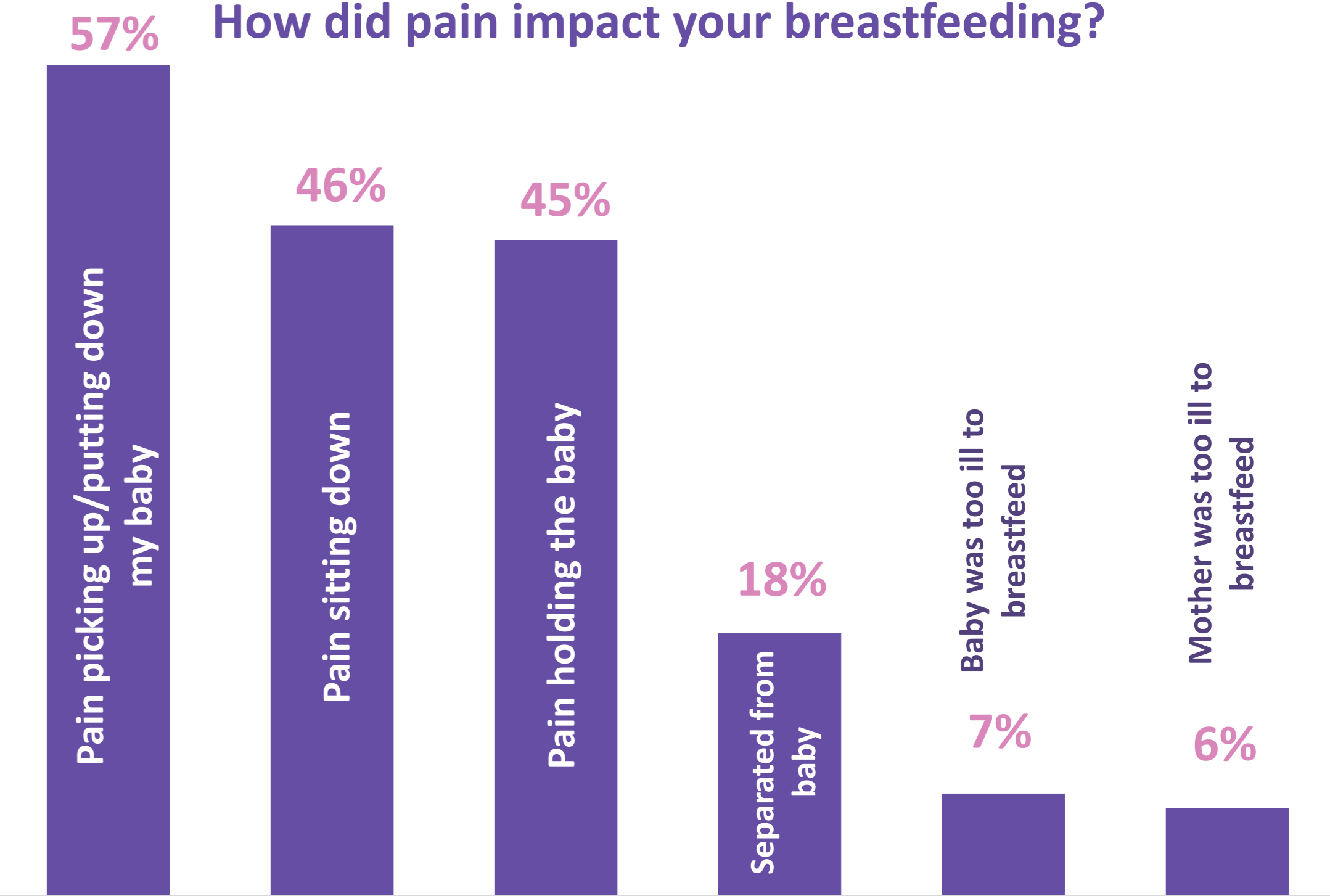
Over a third of respondents stated that their birth experience had negatively impacted their breastfeeding plan; women experienced a range of interventions.

Impact of pain on breastfeeding

Nearly half of respondents couldn't follow their breastfeeding plan, with the biggest impact being early cessation of breastfeeding. Pain from birth that impacted breastfeeding affected 27% of respondents, making breastfeeding difficult rather than preventing it. C-section was the biggest reason for this pain, affecting 55% of the respondents who reported birth related pain.

36% of moms whose birth-related pain impacted breastfeeding said it contributed to them stopping earlier than intended

How did pain impact your breastfeeding?



Conclusion

Pain relating to birth may be an under-considered factor in early cessation of breastfeeding. When considering challenges experienced when establishing and maintaining breastfeeding, it is essential to consider the cumulative pain and discomfort experienced from all sources. When looking at the mothers wellbeing as a whole, pain experienced from birth is often overlooked. The postpartum period is not widely discussed or understood by expectant mothers. Better understanding and management of birth-related postpartum pain may have a positive impact on a new mother's breastfeeding journey.