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Challenges in Modern Parenting

"Hidden Realities" Influencing Parent's Feeding Choices and Behaviours

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Parenting Index: Understanding the Challenges and Opportunities of Supporting Parenting Today

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Role of Health Care Professionals Scale-Up Nutrition and Behavioral Education that Support Parents During Infant Feeding

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“Hidden Realities” Influencing Parent’s Feeding Choices and Behaviours

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Key messages:

- Nutrition during the first 1000 days has critical influence on the immediate and long-term physical and cognitive development of infants.
- Infant feeding is a large component of parenting that encompasses the social, cultural, and economic structure of a parent’s life.
- Education and support from health care providers that empowers parents to adopt recommended infant feeding guidance provides an unmet opportunity within nutrition education.

Nutrition during the first 1000 days, spanning from conception to age 24 months, has critical influence on the immediate and long-term physical and cognitive development of infants. Significant progress with improved infant feeding and nutrition has been realized through nutrition education efforts. However, childhood growth faltering, as evident by the number of children at both the lower and upper percentiles of the World Health Organization growth standards, remains a significant public health concern across the globe¹.

The period from birth through the first 12 months characterizes a unique time when parents or caregivers make essentially all feeding decisions about what and how their infant is offered food². Although the definition of a modern family is changing, parents are currently described as the main caregivers of children in the home. From a human development perspective, parenting has been described as a means of training and promoting the physical health and safety, as well as emotional, behavioral, and cognitive competence of children to meet demands within their culture

in which they are to survive and thrive³. As early nutrition and feeding is an integral component of parenting that encompasses the social, cultural, and economic structure of a parent’s life⁴, understanding the current modifiable determinants influencing parents’ feeding choices and behaviors is essential in providing support and education.

A recent systematic review⁵ summarizes 73 qualitative studies published between 2015 and 2019 related to parent attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions regarding infant feeding (Figure 1). Four major themes are identified:

- Breastfeeding is best for an infant
- Distinct attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of mothers that breastfeed, and those that could not or chose not to breastfeed, are evident
- Infant feeding behaviors are influenced by the socio-cultural environment of the family
- Parent’s expectations of education and support addressing their personal infant feeding choices from health care providers are not always met

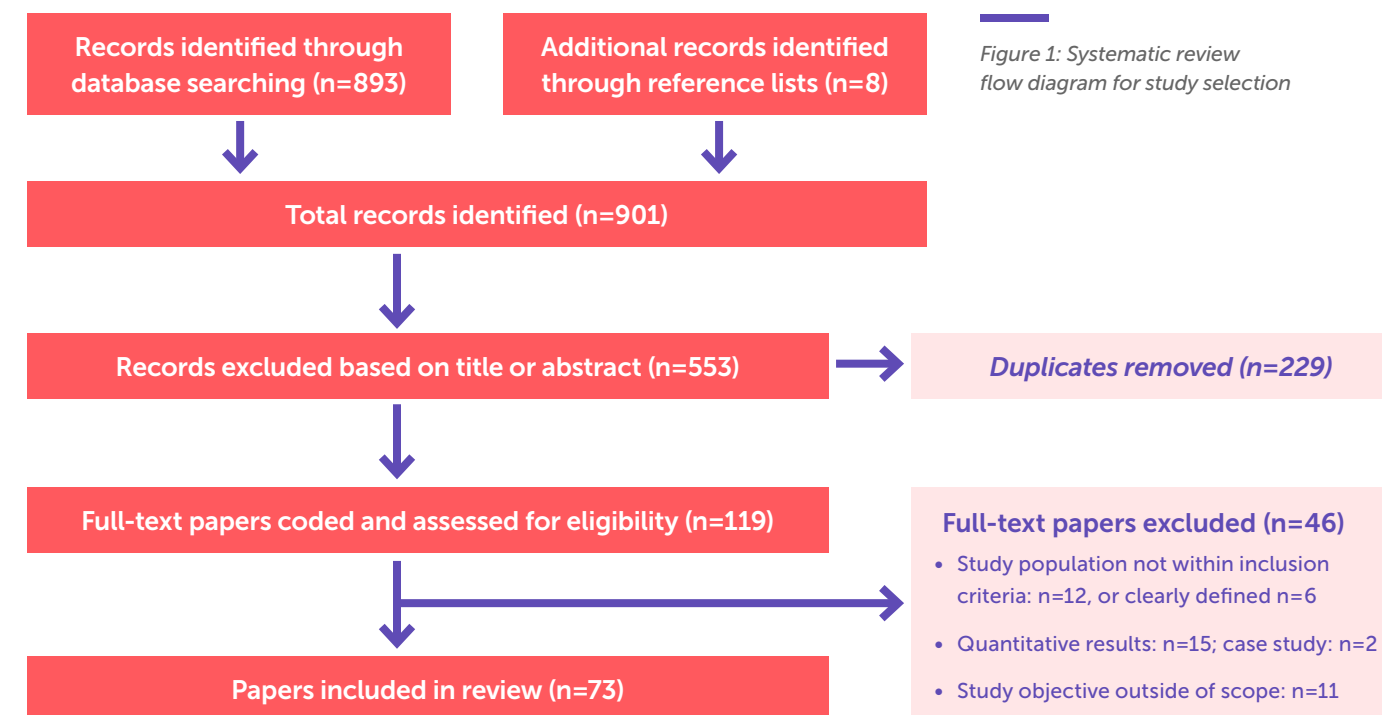


Figure 1: Systematic review flow diagram for study selection

Results from this review identified that parents predominately agree that breastfeeding is the best way to feed infants. As similar to conclusions from older systematic reviews, recent mothers described breastfeeding in terms of their “perceived expectations, compared to the reality they experienced.” Similarly, a dichotomous desire to be a good/perfect mother (compared to feeding approaches perceived inconsistent with “good mothering”)^{6,7} was realized in the current review.

Although some large studies have reported that mothers often decide about infant feeding on their own initiative⁸, previous qualitative literature reviews have concluded that family and cultural practices are strong influences on infant feeding behaviors^{6,7,9,10}. The results expand upon previous themes with specific new findings. In particular, parents report a desire, and have expectations, that they will be offered factual education related to their individual and personal infant feeding choices, provided with sensitivity, in a non-judgmental manner.

Family and cultural practices are strong influences on infant feeding behaviors^{6,7,9,10}

Education and support that addresses family and cultural priorities and empowers parents to adopt recommended infant feeding guidance, while preventing or addressing internalized feelings of shame or guilt, provides an unmet opportunity within nutrition education⁵.

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Parenting Index: Understanding the Challenges and Opportunities of Supporting Parenting Today

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Key messages:

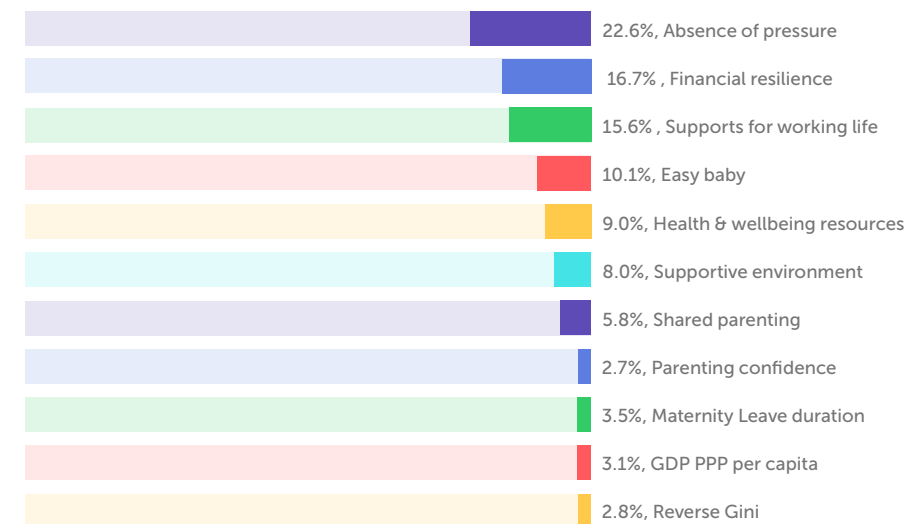
- There are universal challenges for parents, no matter where in the world they are raising their children.
- The Parenting Index is a new lens to help understand the experiences of parents today.
- This new Index provides a quantitative measure that informs how all parts of society can better support parents all over the world.

Becoming a parent is one of life's greatest experiences, but it is seldom easy. Parenting comes with many challenges. Every day is unique, and the experience can be both amazing and overwhelming.

Parenting is often described as a primary means of training and preparing children to meet the demands of their environments and to take advantage of opportunities within those environments¹. However; the reality of parenting is complex, and there is no single way in which it is approached². To promote early childhood development³, and as recommended by the World Health Organization⁴, all infants and children should receive responsive care and parents should be supported to provide such responsive and nurturing care, particularly in the first three years of a child's life. By recognizing the needs, feelings and experiences that make up the complexities of the early parenting journey, society will be better able to support mums and dads all over the world.

A new report that aimed to describe the realities of parenting today shines a light on the experiences and opportunities by identifying key factors which impact the ease of parenting around the world. The Parenting Index, commissioned by Nestle, with research conducted by Kantar, is based on a quantitative survey of 8,000 parents, from 16 countries. The Parenting Index is not a measure of "right" or "wrong", but rather it was designed, based on standard survey research approaches⁵, to identify factors that impact the ease of parenting of infants and young children.

The Parenting Index shows that the factors that affect parents are universal, no matter where in the world they are raising their children. Of the eight key factors identified in the Index, pressure has the biggest effect on how easy it is to be a parent (Figure 1). The pressure variable includes not just the pressure parents put on themselves to do their best for their children, but pressures from the outside world too. Whether from family, friends, or society as a whole,



GPD: Gross domestic product; PPP: Purchasing power parity ; Reverse Gini: The Gini index (also called the Gini ratio), is a measure of statistical dispersion intended to represent the income or wealth distribution of a nation's residents and is the most commonly used measurement of inequality. The lower the Gini ratio, the higher the score for that factor in The Parenting Index and so the factor is named Reverse Gini.



Figure 1: Key factors which impact the ease of parenting around the world

everyone can have an opinion on how best to raise a child.

Other factors, including financial resilience, supports for working life, parent perception of having an easy baby, access to adequate healthcare, and trustworthy information about health and wellbeing also play a role in the challenges parents across the world face every day. The insights from the Parenting Index reveal a roadmap for all areas of society, including employers, to better understand and provide support for parents.

Key results from the Parenting Index Report:

- For the first time, countries have been ranked by how parents perceive what it is like to be a parent today, and the key factors that influence these perceptions have been identified.
- The Parenting Index reveals that 8 key universal factors impact parents, and that this is different from one country to the next.
- Three factors explain 55% of the Index: Pressure: Inside & Out (22.6%),

Financial Resilience (16.7%), and Supports for Working Life (15.6%).

- It doesn't matter where in the world you live, the Absence of Pressure: Inside & Out is the biggest universal issue and the primary theme for The Parenting Index 2020.
- Results from the Index identify that parenting does not become easier with a second child; parenting experience does not change the judgement of others, improve finances, or make work/life balance easier.
- While there is no magic formula, parents who report they have flexibility at work needed to care for their child are more likely to feel greater ease in parenting.

Wherever parents are in the world, the experience of parenting is complex. The Parenting Index is a new lens through which to understand how individuals and society can better support parents in this greatest of journeys.

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Role of Health Care Professionals Scale-Up Nutrition and Behavioral Education that Support Parents During Infant Feeding

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Key messages:

- Infant nutritional advice from the internet, family and friends is not always adequate and of good quality.
- Parents expect the Health Care Professionals (HCPs) they consult will provide individualized instructions on infant feeding.
- A prenatal visit to the pediatrician and after birth and frequent visits to HCPs during the first year of life are of fundamental importance in order to provide nutritional counseling.

The nutrition infants receive during their first 1000 days has a critical influence on their immediate and long-term physical and cognitive development. The first year of life is a unique period in which parents or caregivers make essentially all dietary decisions on what and how to feed their infant.¹

It is common practice for parents to seek advice online, from a wide variety of sources including relatives and friends. This can influence parents' behavior and their nutrition decisions during the child's first two years of life.

However, this lay information they receive is not always appropriate, or of adequate quality. Advice from family and friends is often contradictory to validated nutritional guidelines and based on family habits passed down from older generations. At the same time, nutritional guidance for infants and young children found on many

blogs - often of which are not managed by health professionals - can be based on ideas and opinions with no scientific basis and often in conflict with recommended dietary practices.²

Parents expect Health Care Professionals (HCPs) to provide them with individualized instructions on infant feeding. However, studies indicate that many parents' expectations of education and support addressing personal infant feeding choices from healthcare professionals are sometimes not supported due to time constraints. This may be due to the short consultation times that health care professionals often have. It may also be due to the stigmatization that is present when parents choose not to breastfeed,³ or to the influence of cultural and regional eating habits. They may even not fully understand the emotional impact of these questions on a parent, with all their anxieties about feeding their child correctly.¹



In particular, there are some actions that are essential from HCPs in guiding the mother and the family in their nutritional choices, including the critical support aimed at enabling and maintaining breastfeeding.

After birth, frequent visits to HCPs during the first year of life are of fundamental importance in order to provide ongoing nutritional counseling in accordance with established guidelines and, above all, to guide and support successful continuation of breastfeeding or, in its absence, the use of appropriate infant formulas.

Of major importance is also instruction on complementary nutrition as the child ages, aimed at ensuring the adequate intake of macro and micronutrients and avoidance of possible dietary difficulties.⁴

Nutritional guidance by HCPs is thus of paramount importance in order to monitor and ensure growth and adequate cognitive development of the infant, and to establish healthy eating habits that will accompany the individual throughout life.

A prenatal visit to the GP or Midwife offers the ideal opportunity to create a lasting personal relationship with parents and their health care professionals

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