

Quick Facts from National *New Mothers Speak Out* Report: Challenges for Mothers with Young Children and Opportunities for Improvement

About *New Mothers Speak Out* (2008)

New Mothers Speak Out provides a ground-breaking look at experiences of U.S. mothers in the first 18 months after giving birth. This new report is based on combined results from

- Childbirth Connection's national *Listening to Mothers II* survey and
- a follow-up survey (*Listening to Mothers II Postpartum*) that reached most of the original participants 6 months later and focused on postpartum experiences.

Harris Interactive conducted the surveys in early and mid-2006 among women 18-45 who had given birth to a single baby in U.S. hospitals in 2005. The full report and related *Listening to Mothers* documents are at: www.childbirthconnection.org/newmothersspeakout/

Overall view of lives of women with young children in *New Mothers Speak Out* report

New Mothers Speak Out clarifies that recent mothers in the United States have diverse, demanding responsibilities; experience notable social, physical and emotional challenges that frequently persist over many months; and face inadequate policies, services and support. Following sustained attention during pregnancy and around the time of birth, and high rates of surgery and other procedures, medications and tests during childbirth, relatively little systematic support is available to mothers in this country in the first 18 months after birth. The survey results identify many opportunities to improve circumstances for this large population during a crucial period in lives of the women and their babies and families.

Many mothers have new physical and mental health conditions, which often persist

Overall, mothers gave high ratings to their babies' health, but identified many concerns about their own well-being.

- Many mothers, and especially those with cesareans, reported that pain had interfered with routine activities and that physical problems had interfered with their ability to care for their babies in the first 2 months after birth.
- Over 15 specific health problems were experienced as a new problem by 25% or more of the mothers in the first 2 months.
- At 6 months or more, many women continued to experience these problems, including stress (43% of all mothers), weight control (40%), sleep loss (34%), lack of sexual desire (26%), physical exhaustion (25%), backache (24%), and pain at incision site (18% of cesarean mothers).
- (The first *Listening to Mothers* survey (2002) found that except in the case of infections, more than 7 in 10 mothers never consulted a health professional to get help for the specific early or continuing problems they experienced, questions that were not repeated in the more recent surveys due to time constraints.)
- When asked about basic health promotion habits, notable proportions of follow-up survey participants were doing "not at all well" with getting enough exercise (49%), eating a healthy diet (23%), getting enough sleep (22%) and managing stress (14%).
- Overall, postpartum weight loss ended by 3 months. From 4 to 18 months after birth, mothers remained on average at 6 to 10 pounds above their pre-pregnancy weight.
- Validated mental health screening tools found that around the time of the follow-up survey most mothers (63%) were likely to be experiencing some degree of depressive symptoms, and 18% appeared to be experiencing some symptoms of post-traumatic stress with reference to their childbirth experience.

- About 3 in 4 mothers with depressive symptoms and 3 in 5 with notable symptoms of post-traumatic stress had not consulted a professional about mental health challenges since giving birth.

Many mothers received limited support from husband/partners and from others

The follow-up survey asked women whether they had received several types of support from husband or partners (if they had one) and from others since their baby's birth.

- About 20% of mothers said they received support from husbands or partners "none" or "a little" of the time for each type (affectionate, emotional, practical, enjoyment).
- From 17% to 30% of mothers indicated receiving support from others "none" or "a little" of the time.
- Mothers with husbands or partners had disproportionate responsibility for child care, even when employed full time: 49% of mothers employed full time provided more child care, versus 3% of their husbands or partners, while 48% of those couples shared child care equally.

Many mothers did not achieve their goals for starting or continuing breastfeeding

Leading professional groups recommend exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life, with some breastfeeding continuing through at least the first year. Many survey participants were unable to meet their goals for establishing and continuing breastfeeding.

- While 61% of survey mothers intended to exclusively breastfeed as they came to the end of their pregnancy, just 51% were exclusively breastfeeding a week after birth. This group experienced high rates of formula samples/offers, pacifiers, formula or water supplementation and other hospital practices that can disrupt breastfeeding.
- Among mothers who were breastfeeding a week after birth but not at the time of the follow-up survey, just 46% had breastfed as long as they wanted.

Many mothers who were employed after birth faced challenges

At the time of the follow-up survey, 29% of the mothers who were not again pregnant or had not given birth again since 2005 were employed full time and 14% were employed part time.

- Among women who had returned to paid work, 84% were back within 12 weeks of giving birth.
- Just 52% of those who were employed had stayed home as long as they wanted, with financial pressure the primary factor.
- About half (49%) of women who were employed said that being away from their baby had been "a major challenge" in the transition to employment. Other major challenges were child care arrangements (20%), breastfeeding issues (16%), amount of support from partner/spouse (14% of women in these relationships), and lack of workplace support for the woman as a new mother (13%). Many additional women identified all of these areas as "a minor challenge".
- Mothers who were employed or on maternity leave indicated on average that 7 months of paid maternity leave would be ideal, in line with guaranteed benefits in many other affluent nations, yet just 1% who had been employed outside the home during pregnancy actually had 4 or more months of fully paid leave.

Go to www.childbirthconnection.org/listeningtomothers/ to get all three *Listening to Mothers* reports, along with companion documents about survey methodology and other topics, without charge:

- *New Mothers Speak Out* (2008)
- *Listening to Mothers II* (2006)
- *Listening to Mothers I* (2002).