

SUPPORT FOR BREASTFEEDING MOTHERS AND DETERMINANTS OF LONG-
TERM BREASTFEEDING IN THE UNITED STATES

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by
JAYME CISCO
Dr. Mary Shenk, Dissertation Supervisor
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Approval

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

SUPPORT FOR BREASTFEEDING MOTHERS AND DETERMINANTS OF LONG-TERM BREASTFEEDING IN THE UNITED STATES

presented by Jayme Cisco,

a candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Dr. Mary Shenk

Dr. Lisa Sattenspiel

Dr. Robert Walker

Dr. Marjorie Sable

Dedication

To my family, and families everywhere, who give life meaning.

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To my mother, Eva, who has always inspired me to follow my dreams and convinced me that I could achieve anything I set my mind to. You were my inspiration for motherhood, my greatest dream. Thank you for everything you have sacrificed to make my life better; your sacrifices were not in vain. I would not be the person or mother I am without you.

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To my son, husband, mother, and all those I love:

I hope you feel like a welcomed spark to my life, not an inconvenience, annoyance, or bother to my day.

I hope you feel comfortable in your skin, not constantly wondering how many things you need to change before you're loved and celebrated.

I hope you feel heard, valued, and understood, not dismissed for being too young or too inexperienced to have an opinion or know what you need to thrive.

I hope you feel capable and confident, not incapable of doing something without constant supervision and correction.

I hope you feel brave to bare the colors of your soul, not pressured to hide your light or play small to gain acceptance.

I hope after spending an hour ... a day ... a lifetime in my presence,

I leave your heart fuller, your smile wider,

your spirit stronger, your future brighter

than you could have ever imagined by yourself.

- Rachel Macy Stafford, 2015

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ABSTRACT

Despite expert recommendations to breastfeed for at least 12 months, the average age of weaning in the U.S. is three months. Drawing on a sample of 594 American mothers, this mixed methods study aimed to: 1) determine who supports breastfeeding women and what effect support has on breastfeeding duration; and 2) assess what factors influence the duration of long-term breastfeeding including weaning strategies and social support. Quantitative analyses reveal that mothers receive significant social support. Cox regression results indicate that frequently discussing breastfeeding with La Leche League and maternal grandfathers positively impacts duration, while discussing breastfeeding with physicians has a negative effect. Qualitative methods indicate that mothers who breastfeed long-term feel pressured to wean after 12 months, and that these mothers tend to follow a child-led weaning strategy. In order to promote breastfeeding for any duration, education is essential for those who support breastfeeding mothers, including health care providers.