

# Partner Support and Breastfeeding Success in Very Low Birthweight infants: Insights from Latina Mothers living on the US-Mexico Border

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## Introduction

Being from an underserved Latino community along the US-Mexico border, Latina mothers with very low birthweight (VLBW) infants face many challenges, and initiating and sustaining breastfeeding should not be one of them, but it is. Within this population where 15% are newly emigrated from Mexico and 95% live near or at the poverty level, the lack of partner support exacerbates the already high incidence of maternal anxiety and depression in NICU settings. This study aims to assess the impact of partner support on Latina mothers' ability to establish and sustain breastfeeding by administering a 10-item Parental Support of Breastfeeding Questionnaire (PSB) to twenty-five NICU mothers, with scores indicating varying levels of partner involvement ranging from high to minimal support.

## Methods and Materials

In my role as a certified lactation counselor, I administered a 10-item Parental Support of Breastfeeding Questionnaire (PSB). The PSB evaluates partner support among twenty-five NICU mothers who were exclusively breastfeeding. Scores obtained from the PSB delineate levels of subjective partner involvement during the NICU breastfeeding process, categorized as high (>85), moderate (50-84), or minimal (<50) support.

Qt. #	Question	Type of Answer	Rate
1	Overall, did you feel supported by your partner during your NICU breastfeeding journey?	Rate 1-10 Ordinal	6
2	Did your partner encourage you to breastfeed?	Yes/No Nominal	7
3	Did your partner help you at night with breastfeeding?	Yes/No Nominal	8
4	Did your partner help you with the equipment needed for breast pumping?	Yes/No Nominal	9
5	How responsive was your partner to your breast pumping schedule?	Rate 1-10 Ordinal	10

## Results

The results of the PSB questionnaire for twenty-five NICU mothers that successfully established breastfeeding during NICU stay indicate a high-level of support from their partner (M= 10.0), encouragement from partner (M = 10.0), partner help at night ( M =10.0), help with equipment ( M=10.0), support of pumping schedules (M = 9.8), partner accommodations to needs (M= 9.9), would breastfeed without support ( M = 8.0), partner supportive of diet and nutritional (M = 10.0) supportive rest and sleep (M=10.0), and that the partner played a role in breastfeeding ( M=10.0). All 25 participants scored higher than an > 85 for the PSB, which indicated high parental involvement in breastfeeding.

Question #	Participant # (NICU Mother)											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
6	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
7	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
10	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Mothers' Scores

Question #	Participant # (NICU Mother)													
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	
1	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	
2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
5	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	9	9	9	8	
6	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	9	9	
7	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	
8	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	
9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	
10	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	90	89	89	88	87	

Mother's Scores



Additionally, I asked the mothers for the three most important ways that partners successfully supported the breastfeeding process;

1. Cleaning and maintaining breast pump equipment.
2. Self education about the importance of breastmilk in the NICU (by partner)
3. Supporting breastfeeding at night.

## Conclusion

Successful breastfeeding among Latina mothers with VLBW infants in a Level III NICU are significantly influenced by partner support, with those receiving excellent partner support demonstrating higher success rates compared to those lacking such support. Conversely, mothers without partner support are less likely to breastfeed successfully. The presence of support, particularly from partners, is crucial for NICU mothers in providing breastmilk for their infants, highlighting the importance of integrating partners into lactation education programs.

## Discovery and Translational Effect

During my training as a lactation consultant, I learned the general concept of partner support. This study establishes the great value of partner support in this underserved underrepresented community.

The critical information gathered by this study was that partners can support NICU moms by: cleaning and maintaining pumping equipment, self educating about the importance and affects of breastfeeding, and supporting the mothers at night during breastfeeding.

These findings have now been integrated in this hospital's breastfeeding policy, parent education policy, and the new partner support breastfeeding policy.

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