

**Breastfeeding and postnatal depression**  
**A prospective cohort study in Sabah, Malaysia**

**Abstract**

**Background:** Postnatal depression is a disorder that can lead to serious consequences for both the mother and infant. Despite the extensively documented health benefits of breastfeeding, its association with postnatal depression remains uncertain.

**Objective:** To investigate the relationship between full breastfeeding at 3 months postpartum and postnatal depressive symptoms among mothers in Sabah, Malaysia.

**Methods:** A prospective cohort study of 2072 women was conducted in Sabah during 2009-2010. Participants were recruited at 36 to 38 weeks of gestation and followed up at 1 and 3 months postpartum. Depressive symptoms were assessed using the validated Malay version of the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS). Repeated-measures analyses of variance was performed to compare the depression scores over time and between subgroups of breastfeeding mothers.

**Results:** Approximately 46% of women were fully breastfeeding their infants at 3 months postpartum. These mothers had significantly ( $P < .001$ ) lower mean EPDS scores at both 1 and 3 months postpartum (mean  $\pm$  SD,  $4.14 \pm 4.12$  and  $4.27 \pm 4.12$ , respectively) than others who did not initiate or maintain full breastfeeding for 3 months ( $4.94 \pm 4.34$  and  $5.25 \pm 4.05$ , respectively). After controlling for the effects of covariates, the differences in EPDS scores remained statistically significant ( $P = .001$ ) between the 2 breastfeeding groups.

**Conclusion:** Full breastfeeding appeared to be negatively associated with postnatal depressive symptoms for mothers residing in Sabah.