



Affording Formula: HIV+ women's experiences of the financial strain of infant formula feeding in the UK

Body & Soul

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Body & Soul

- ♥ Who we are – frontline support organisation for families
- ♥ Weekly support
- ♥ Donation of formula milk

“My benefits were cut at the time. I found it really difficult to afford formula milk. I would rather walk the streets asking for change than resort to breastfeeding, which I did have to do sometimes. I went to my hospital crying because I was really struggling to afford formula milk.”

Background

- ♥ UK guidance recommends formula feeding
- ♥ Global guidance recommends breastfeeding
- ♥ Perception of risk
- ♥ Financial strain of formula feeding
- ♥ Provision of milk across London patchy



Methodology

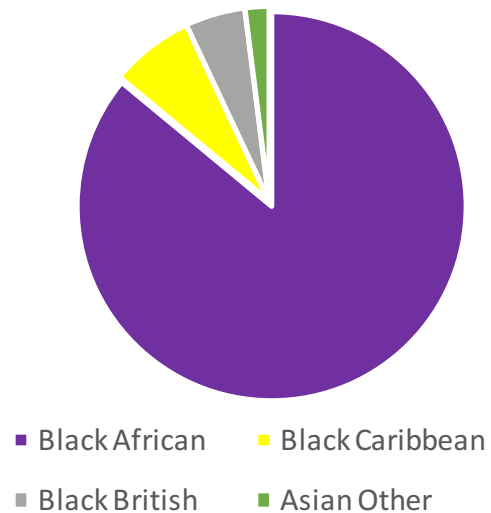
- ♥ Designed semi-structured interview questions
- ♥ Eligible women (n = 70) invited to take part
- ♥ Criteria: HIV+ women given birth in past 3 years, member of B&S
- ♥ 42 consented to take part
- ♥ Interviews were conducted over the phone



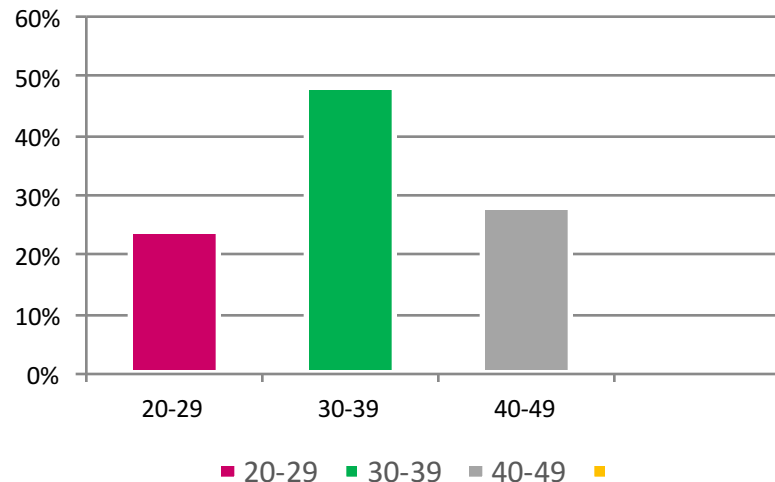
Demographics

- ♥ Women lived across 18 London boroughs with 64% coming from outer London and 36% from inner London
- ♥ 48% did not have recourse to public funds

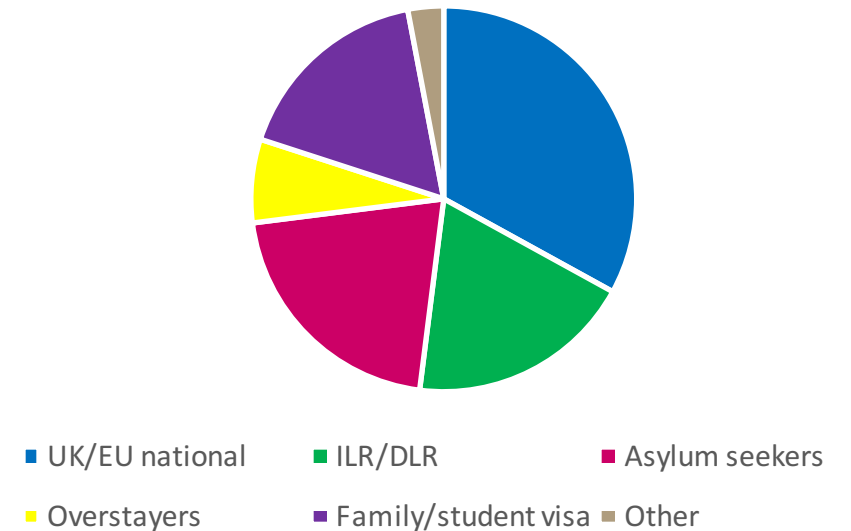
Ethnicity



Ages



Immigration status



Results: Advice

- ♥ 76% of women told not to breastfeed and to only use formula milk
- ♥ 12% of women given options but strongly advised to formula feed
- ♥ 10% of women had breastfeeding or formula feeding presented as an option though the majority of these chose to formula feed
- ♥ 1 woman not given any advice from a health professional on how to feed her baby



Results: Provision

- ♥ 25% did not receive any provision for formula milk (although 3 of these 11 accessed it from food banks)
- ♥ Almost half of participants did not receive any grants to help with costs
- ♥ 71% spent >£10/week on formula milk with 7% spending >£20
- ♥ 64% did not feel the provisions they were given were adequate to cover their weekly costs
- ♥ More than half of women admitted there were times when they or a family member went hungry in order to buy formula milk
- ♥ 2 women revealed they had resorted to breastfeeding as they didn't have enough money
- ♥ 1 in 2 women reported feeling unsupported to formula feed their baby

Qualitative answers

“We bought less food to make sure we could afford milk. I will be happy when my baby is [weaned] so there is less financial strain. Formula feeding is very expensive, I found it a struggle to afford. I felt sad not being able to breastfeed especially as culturally I am expected to.”

“I had twins...When I couldn't afford to buy my family food each week, Body & Soul provided support by applying for grants and Food Chain.”

“The cost was too high. I didn't feel supported by my health visitor. I had difficulties because people wondered why I wasn't breastfeeding as it was much cheaper.”

Conclusions

- ♥ Lack of choice and lack of advice
- ♥ Costs of formula feeding: financial and emotional
- ♥ Lack of support in accessing formula milk even for those eligible for benefits

What were the limitations?

Recommendations:

- ♥ Free formula milk commissioned by NHSE available to **all** WLWH
- ♥ Vouchers for use in supermarket preferred way of receiving milk
- ♥ More education around choices

