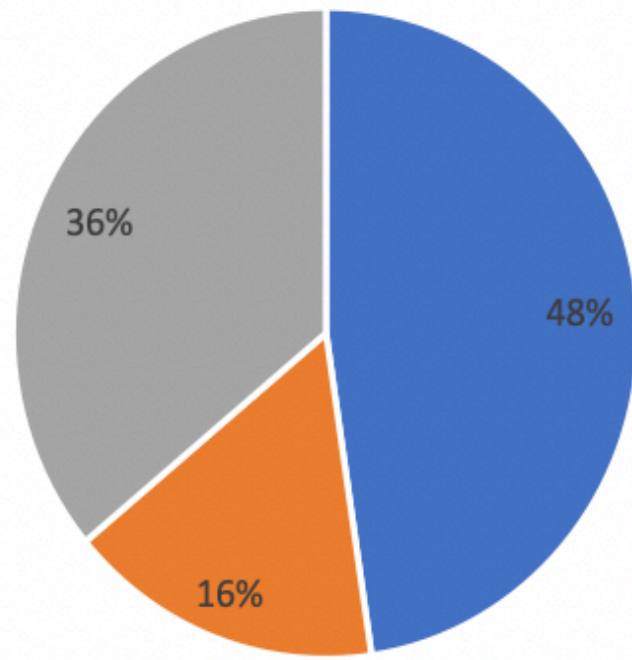
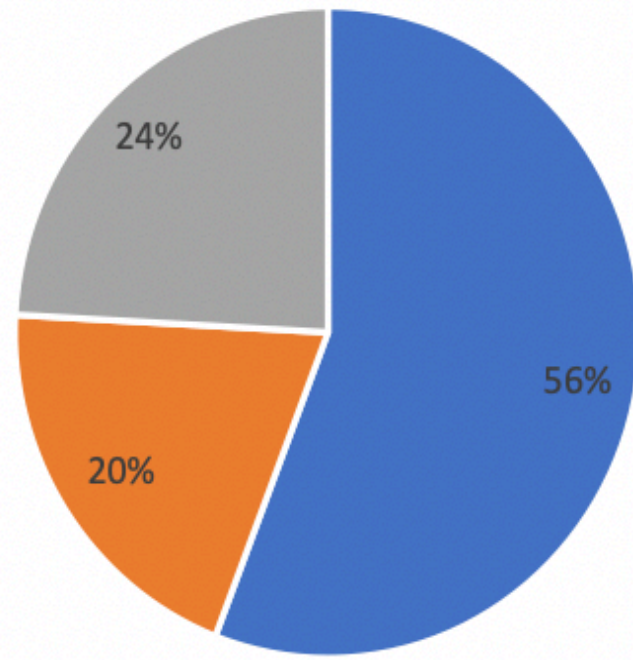
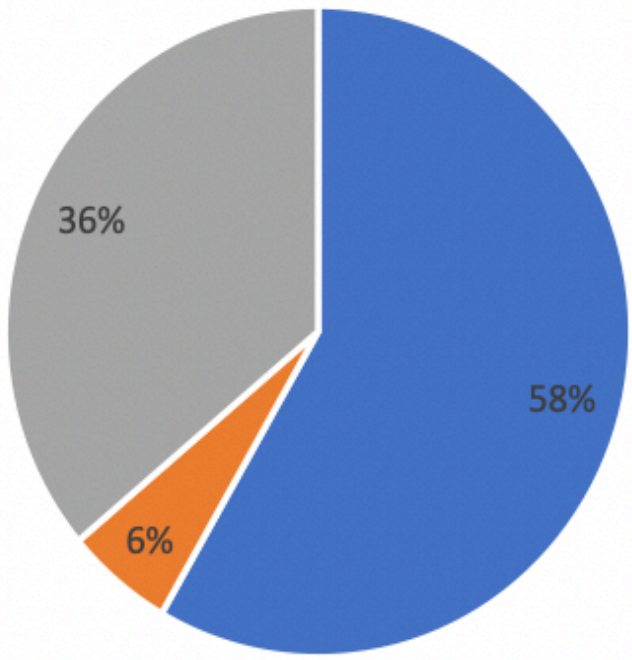


Breastfeeding after Spinal Cord Injury: a descriptive study

Dr E Carson High Risk Obstetric Fellow, Dr Anne Berndt MFM
Sunnybrook Hospital, March 2023

Background	Introduction There is little in the current literature which informs us about the experience women have of breastfeeding after a previous spinal cord injury (SCI). We collected data on 272 women who had a pregnancy >20 weeks after a previous spinal cord injury, the largest assessment to date. We assessed success with breastfeeding, support provided by healthcare providers, and difficulties particular to their injury, such as autonomic dysreflexia or difficulty with let-down reflex.		Method This is a descriptive subgroup analysis of a larger online questionnaire distributed electronically in four languages to people assigned female at birth with SCI, collecting demographics as well as detailed pregnancy and pelvic floor function information. The recruitment rate was 85.4% (1056/1237) and completion rate was 73.8% (780/1056). The current study included data on those who had a live birth >20 weeks following SCI, and obtained results for 267 pregnancies.																							
	Breastfed any duration	C Spine n=86 <table><tr><th>Category</th><th>Percentage</th></tr><tr><td>Breastfed</td><td>48%</td></tr><tr><td>Bottle fed</td><td>16%</td></tr><tr><td>Mixed</td><td>36%</td></tr></table> T Spine n=145 <table><tr><th>Category</th><th>Percentage</th></tr><tr><td>Breastfed</td><td>56%</td></tr><tr><td>Bottle fed</td><td>20%</td></tr><tr><td>Mixed</td><td>24%</td></tr></table> L Spine n=36 <table><tr><th>Category</th><th>Percentage</th></tr><tr><td>Breastfed</td><td>58%</td></tr><tr><td>Bottle fed</td><td>6%</td></tr><tr><td>Mixed</td><td>36%</td></tr></table>	Category	Percentage	Breastfed	48%	Bottle fed	16%	Mixed	36%	Category	Percentage	Breastfed	56%	Bottle fed	20%	Mixed	24%	Category	Percentage	Breastfed	58%	Bottle fed	6%	Mixed	36%
Category	Percentage																									
Breastfed	48%																									
Bottle fed	16%																									
Mixed	36%																									
Category	Percentage																									
Breastfed	56%																									
Bottle fed	20%																									
Mixed	24%																									
Category	Percentage																									
Breastfed	58%																									
Bottle fed	6%																									
Mixed	36%																									
Results and Conclusion	Autonomic Dysreflexia 9 patients who breastfed were affected by by autonomic dysreflexia (Levels ranged from C5-T8). • For 4/9 (44%) of these women it was their first episode of AD, and the remaining 5/9 (56%) women had previous triggers. If a person had previous episodes of autonomic dysreflexia there was a <u>6% chance of autonomic dysreflexia being triggered by breastfeeding.</u>	Difficulty with Let Down Reflex 28 had difficulty with let down reflex (levels ranged from C4-S1). Techniques to overcome this include: • Counselling • Visualisation • Massage • Hot towels.	Conclusion This is the largest study to date assessing breastfeeding in people with spinal cord injury. Overall the majority of women who had a pregnancy following SCI attempted to, and were successful in breastfeeding for at least 2 weeks, with 46% breast feeding for over 6 months. This outcome was regardless of level of injury, and this varied from C4-S1. 90% of women felt they were supported in their journey , and 55% received additional support from lactation consultants. Barriers in the form of AD or difficulty with let down reflex were uncommon. This study should help to encourage pregnant women post SCI and provide support for counselling by their healthcare providers.																							

References: A. Krassioukov et al, Breastfeeding and motherhood after spinal cord injury: Barriers and challenges, (2018) *Annals of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine*; Ghidini, A. & Simonson, M.R, Pregnancy After Spinal Cord Injury: A Review of the Literature. (2010) *Topics in Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation*; Bertschy S, Perceived needs and experiences with healthcare services of women with spinal cord injury during pregnancy and childbirth: A qualitative content analysis of focus groups and individual interviews. (2015)*BMC Health Services Research*; Cowley K. C, Psychogenic and pharmacologic induction of the let-down reflex can facilitate breastfeeding by tetraplegic women: A report of 3 cases. (2005) *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*; Holmgren, T, The Influence of Spinal Cord Injury on Breastfeeding Ability and Behavior (2018) *Journal of Human Lactation*