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Emerging Social Issues Division

Social Policy and Population Section

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Article **The Impact of Maternal Work Participation on Duration of Breastfeeding among Poor Women in South India (Demographer's Notebook)**

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Abstract This paper seeks to examine the impact of mother's work participation on the duration of breastfeeding among poor populations. It also looks at the effect of work status at the time of breastfeeding on the risk of terminating breastfeeding. The data are from a survey of 529 women in urban slums and rural Scheduled Caste settlements in Tamil Nadu, a southern state of India. Life-table analysis shows that the mean length of breastfeeding is higher among non-working women as compared with working women by about 2 months (19.3 months for working women and 21.6 for non-working women) in urban areas. However, in rural areas, the mean length of breastfeeding is longer by about one and half months among working women (23 months) than among non-working women (21.6 months). Proportional hazards analysis shows that the risk of stopping breastfeeding is significantly higher among working women than non-working women in urban areas when controlling for other socio-economic and demographic variables. But in rural areas, participation of women in the labour force does not have any significant effect on the discontinuation of breastfeeding. Proportional hazards analysis with work participation as a time-dependent covariate confirms those results. Thus, labour-force participation of women is incompatible with breastfeeding in the urban areas but not in the rural areas.

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