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Socio-cultural and environmental influences on infant feeding practices' of Brazilian immigrant mothers living in the United States

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Exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life and timely introduction of appropriate solid foods are important determinants of weight status in infancy and later life stages. Disparities in obesity rates among young children suggest that maternal feeding practices during the first 2 years of life may contribute to these disparities. Brazilians are a growing immigrant group in the United States, yet little research has focused on parental beliefs and behaviors affecting the health of Brazilian immigrant children in the United States. This study aimed to explore beliefs and infant-feeding practices of Brazilian immigrant mothers in the United States. Focus group discussions were conducted with Brazilian immigrant mothers. Transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis and themes categorized using the socio-ecological model. Twenty-nine immigrant Brazilian mothers participated in the study. Analyses revealed that all participants breastfed their infants. The majority initiated breastfeeding soon after childbirth. However, most mothers did not exclusively breastfeed. They used formula and human milk concomitantly. Family and culture influenced mothers' infant-feeding beliefs and practices in early introduction of solid foods. As the number of children in the United States growing up in families of immigrant parents increases, understanding influences on Brazilian immigrant mothers' infant-feeding practices will be important to the development of effective interventions to promote healthy infant feeding and weight status among Brazilian children. Interventions designed for Brazilian immigrant families should incorporate an understanding of social context, family, and cultural factors to develop health promotion messages tailored to the needs of this ethnic group.

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