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**Title:** Breastfeeding beyond the clinic walls– breastfeeding in the socio-cultural context of South Africa

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## Introduction

Despite the scientific evidence on the benefits of breastfeeding, the data over the past decade indicates that in South Africa, breastfeeding is not a standard practice of care. Since 1994, policies and programmes have been put in place to promote, support and protect breastfeeding in South Africa. The most recent Lancet Series on Breastfeeding, 2016 has shown that women are 2.5 times more likely to breastfeed where breastfeeding itself is protected, promoted and supported. Yet, South Africa has dismal breastfeeding rates across the continuum of 0-24 months.

## Methods

To review progress of breastfeeding interventions within the socio-cultural context of South Africa, a policy review and breastfeeding data tracking was undertaken. Data shows that despite a robust policy environment and while early breastfeeding seems to be a universal practice in South Africa, the exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) rate remains the lowest in the developing world at 7.4% which is far off from the global target of increasing EBF to 50% by 2030.

## Conclusion

Despite having the labour law to call on, returning to work is one of the most cited reasons for early and premature cessation of breastfeeding. There is evidence that shows that women are still faced with negative reactions even at health facilities and the public is uncomfortable with breastfeeding.