



**OPERATIONAL
RESEARCH
SNAPSHOT**

Promoting Breastfeeding in Conflict Setting



In conflict-affected Borno State, Nigeria, infants under 6 months face high malnutrition risk

In conflict-affected Borno State, North-East Nigeria, infants under six months are highly vulnerable to malnutrition. Although breastfeeding is a vital source of nutrition and protection, sustaining it amid displacement, insecurity, and food scarcity is extremely difficult. Mothers face emotional stress, disrupted family structures, and deeply rooted social and family norms that can influence infant feeding decisions and sometimes make exclusive breastfeeding harder to maintain.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) implemented breastfeeding support within its nutrition program in Maiduguri. This qualitative study explored caregivers' and health workers' experiences.





In-depth interviews, focus groups, and observations (done in March 2022) with caregivers of infants under 6 months and MSF health workers.

Reflexive thematic analysis was applied.



The results showed that barriers included:

- Perceived “insufficient milk”
- Family pressure for mixed feeding
- Lack of post-discharge support.



Inpatient re-lactation (e.g., supplementary suckling) was acceptable and effective, but continuity at home was fragile. Health workers noted the need for more hands-on lactation skills and culturally adapted counseling.



Policy and Practice

- Integrate breastfeeding promotion with psychosocial and community support.
- Address social norms and household influence, not only mothers' knowledge.

- Strengthen community follow-up to sustain gains.
- Adapt guidelines for safe formula use only when breastfeeding support fails.

Original Study: Amat Camacho N, Hakeem R, et al. "Promoting and supporting breastfeeding in a protracted emergency: a qualitative study on the views of caregivers and health workers in North-East Nigeria." *Frontiers in Public Health*. 2023;11:1077068. doi:10.3389/fpubh.2023.1077068

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