

Are catholic women less likely to breast-feed?

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(HealthDay)—Could religion play a role in breast-feeding practices?

Women in Western nations with a strong Protestant heritage are more

likely to breast-feed. However, the reverse seems to be true for those in nations with a strong Catholic heritage, new research suggests.

"Our results suggest that women living in a country or region where Catholicism has historically dominated are less likely to initiate breast-feeding," according to the researchers. The study was led by Dr. Jonathan Bernard of Inserm, the national health research institute in France.

"Breast-feeding promotion policies should be adapted to better fit populations' cultural and religious norms," Bernard and his colleagues added.

The study doesn't prove that religion directly affects breast-feeding rates, however. It only suggests that they may be linked.

The World Health Organization advises mothers to solely breast-feed their babies for the first 6 months of life and then continue to do so some of the time until the child is 2 years old.

But there are wide differences around the world in rates of breast-feeding, the researchers noted. Important factors in breast-feeding rates may include mothers' education levels, age, and their previous experience with breast-feeding.

For this study, Bernard's team sought to understand the possible role of religion. The investigators looked at breast-feeding statistics in 135 nations and in specific regions of France, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States.

In Western countries, the higher the percentage of Catholics, the lower the breast-feeding rates, the researchers discovered.

Further research is needed to confirm or refute these findings, the researchers said. "If confirmed at the individual level, our findings may help improve current breast-feeding promotion policies," the study authors concluded.

The study was published online Dec. 5 in the journal *BMJ Global Health*.

More information: For more about breast-feeding, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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