Feeding practices in the Netherlands during the first four months of life. A study of the motives for discontinuing breastfeeding and for the subsequent feeding method selected
Bulk-Bunschoten, A.M.W.

Citation for published version (APA):
Bulk-Bunschoten, A. M. W. (2002). Feeding practices in the Netherlands during the first four months of life. A study of the motives for discontinuing breastfeeding and for the subsequent feeding method selected
Preface

The kind of food taken during the first few months of life has consequences for physical and mental health not only in infancy but probably also later in life. Well-baby clinics with their preventive task in health care are traditionally the organisations that give attention to the kind of food taken and the feeding practices adopted during infancy.

Well-baby clinics were established in The Netherlands more than a hundred years ago. In the early days the main aim was to reduce the high mortality of infants. Infant mortality was particularly high when the parents lived in poverty. An important way of lowering the mortality rate was to ensure that mothers breastfed their infants and that mothers were fully instructed about good hygiene. At that time the mortality rate of bottle-fed infants was higher than that of breastfed infants. This was mainly due to the higher frequency of serious infections in bottle-fed infants. Over the last hundred years the difference in the mortality rate of breastfed infants and bottle-fed infants has almost disappeared due to improvements in formula feeding and hygiene. Notwithstanding these facts, scientific data collected during the last few decades of the 20th century show that breast milk is superior to formula, particularly in immunological aspect.

After World War II Dutch mothers switched in large numbers from breastfeeding to formula feeding. Greater prosperity and the availability of formulae were factors involved in this switch, but the main reasons were cultural changes within Dutch society.

In the last decades breastfeeding has slowly gained in popularity. Breastfeeding becomes more and more the norm particularly in the wealthier sections of the population. Nevertheless, a considerable percentage of mothers in The Netherlands do not breastfeed their babies or they breastfeed them for only a short time. If breastfeeding is to be promoted by well-baby clinics, insight is needed into the factors that determine breastfeeding practices. For this reason it was decided to perform a study of breastfeeding practices as recorded in well-baby clinics. Well-baby clinics are particularly suitable places for such a study because 98% of the infants born in The Netherlands are brought to a well-baby clinic. The study started in 1998. Nationwide data were gathered about the changes that occurred in the method of infant feeding between 0-4 months. The study became known as ‘the national study of changes in infant feeding (0-4 months): LOVZ (Landelijk Onderzoek Voeding Zuigelingen)’. 
The study aimed to find answers to the following questions:

- How many infants in The Netherlands start with breast milk on the day of birth?
- What are the reasons for discontinuing breastfeeding and at what moment does this occur?
- Are the differences of breastfeeding (start and duration) related to rural or urban living, to ethnic background, to age, to lifestyle or to the economic level of the mother?
- What are the reasons in the first four months for changing the feeding method chosen at birth? Are they infant-related, mother-related or are there other reasons?
- Do the changes in feeding method differ according to the ethnic descent of the mothers?
- Do the different feeding methods have an influence on the weight gain recorded at the age of four months?