

## Baby-Friendly Hospitals: Aren't They All?

### Hospitais Amigos dos Bebés: Não São Todos?

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**Palavras-chave:** Aleitamento Materno; Hospitais; Promoção da Saúde

Dear Editor,

We would like to acknowledge the article “Prevalence and Predictive Factors of Exclusive Breastfeeding in the First Six Months of Life”, published in your journal with further discussion in two letters to the editor in January.<sup>1-3</sup> This work contributed valuable insights to the ongoing debate on breastfeeding and the current reality in Portugal.

Breastfeeding has several advantages for infants and mothers. In 1991, the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) was launched, which was aimed at promoting this practice. The program was updated in 2009, and covered mother-friendly care, breastfeeding-friendly practices in other facilities and communities, and support for non-breastfeeding mothers, ensuring that all mothers, regardless of the feeding method, received the support they needed. Furthermore, the implementation guidance for the revised BFHI was published in 2018.<sup>4</sup>

While well-intended, the designation ‘non-baby-friendly hospital’ for institutions not certified as baby-friendly, may inadvertently foster misconceptions among facilities and lead to unjustified stress in families with babies born in un-certified maternities.

Some key metrics of the BFHI, such as the avoidance of pacifiers or formula feeds, can be difficult to meet and may impose stress on exhausted mothers. While exclusive breastfeeding is widely acknowledged as the most beneficial feeding option, it is not always feasible or the best choice for every mother/baby pair.

Moreover, our experience has shown that many ma-

ternities not certified as Baby-Friendly Hospitals (BFH) actively promote breastfeeding, and it is our conviction that a national study would disclose interesting results.

So, rather than fostering a binary distinction, our focus should shift towards a more nuanced understanding of maternity care that emphasizes support and inclusivity for all mothers and infants regardless of their feeding choices, as approached in the updated package of the BFHI.

Comprehensive support and information are crucial in enabling mothers to make informed feeding decisions that are aligned with their circumstances and preferences. This includes evidence-based education during prenatal care, postnatal lactation support services, and the development of breastfeeding-friendly environments in workplaces and public spaces. As we navigate the complexities surrounding breastfeeding, it is imperative for policymakers, healthcare professionals, and communities to collaborate in fostering environments that empower mothers to make the best feeding decisions for themselves and their infants.

While programs like the BFHI have had many advantages over the years, it is about time to reconsider the current designation and our approach to maternity care to ensure inclusivity and support for all mothers and newborns.

#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed equally to this manuscript.

#### COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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