



1. Introduction

- Ireland's breastfeeding initiation and maintenance rates are among the lowest rates worldwide: 61.4% any breastfeeding, 47% exclusive breastfeeding (2020).
- The prevalence of expressing breastmilk is growing worldwide, while we know Irish women are expressing, there is currently no data describing the prevalence.
- Milk sharing occurs when a woman with a surplus of milk chooses to donate or share with a recipient who has a shortage of milk.
- Two versions of shared milk.
 - Formal - milk bank e.g. The Western Trust Milk Bank.
 - Informal – Occurs between family members, friends, strangers.

2. Aims

- To examine the prevalence and duration of breastfeeding among a convenience sample of participants.
- To determine the prevalence of breastmilk expression in Ireland and to establish the awareness and prevalence of milk sharing.

3. Methodology

- Pre-collected data from the “Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies – Ireland Survey, 2020” created by Dr. Elizabeth O'Sullivan and Dr. Aileen Kennedy.
- Used a subsection of the data analysing infant feeding practices based on information from 745 participants.
- Carried out between 11th May – 12th June 2020.
- Survey included demographic questions, the first and last breastmilk feed and infant feeding questions e.g. First and last breastmilk feed, time of the breast feeding, expressed milk consumption, consumption of milk from another mother and formula consumption.
- SPSS version 28 was used to carry out a quantitative analysis.
- Variables created for continuous and categorical data.
- Child's age and feeding duration in days/weeks/months/years was calculated in months.
- Using Syntax new variables explored the proportion of infants consuming each source of milk at 3-, 6- and 12-month intervals while excluding those who had yet to reach the relevant age.

4. Results

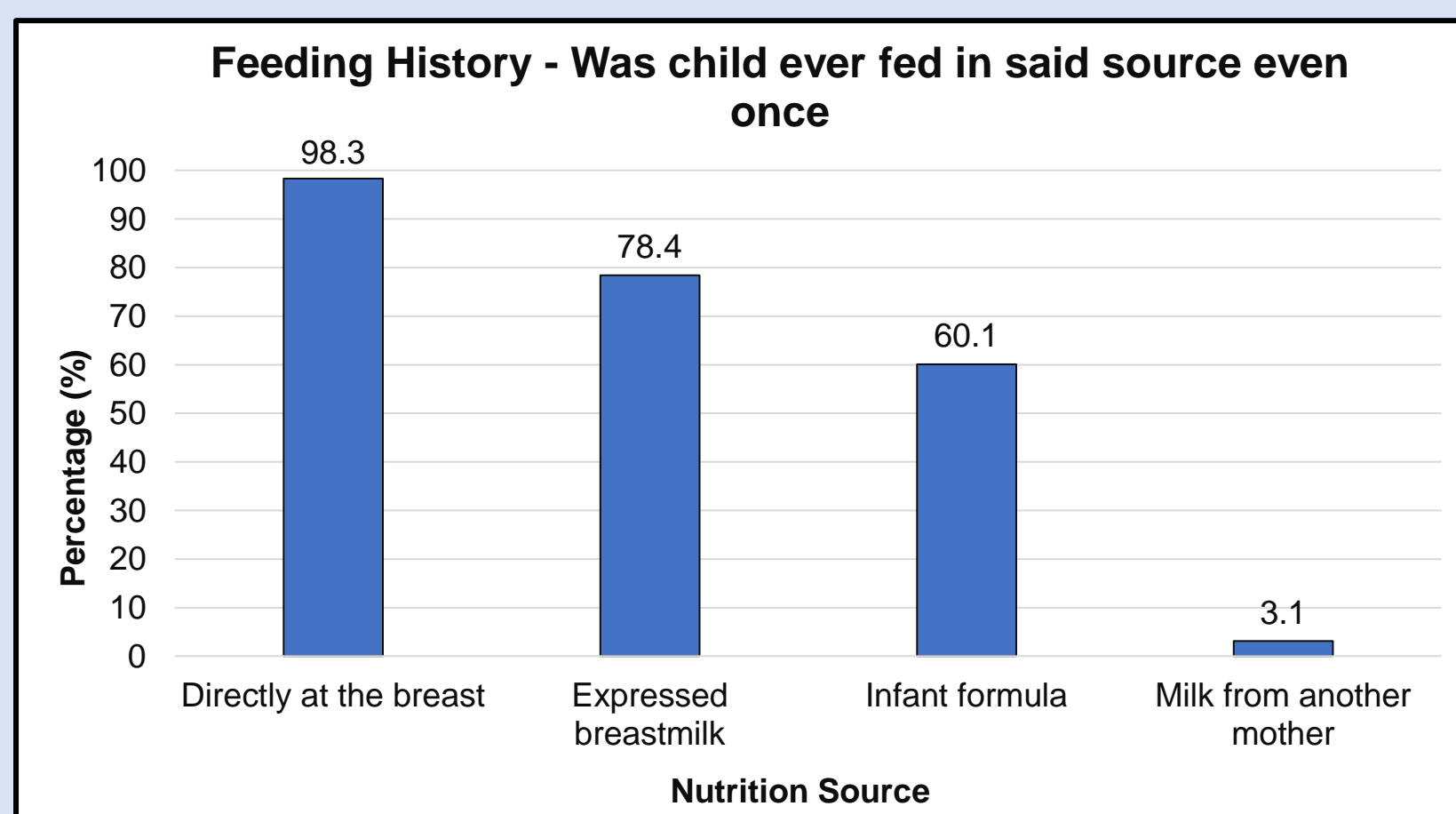


Figure 1: Nutrition source used in child's life as of questionnaire completion time.

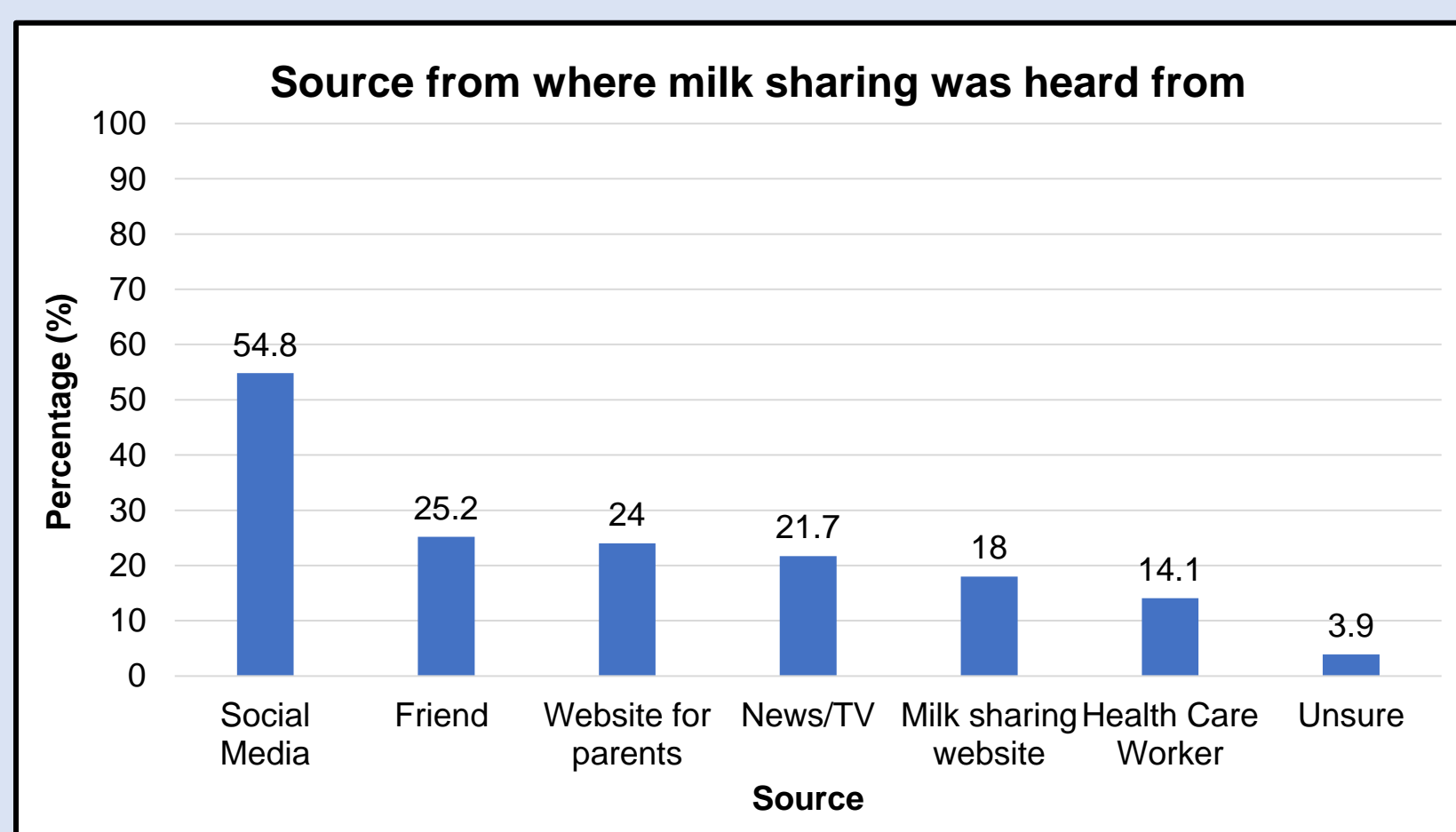


Figure 3: Source where milk sharing was first heard.

The prevalence of receiving milk from another mother was assessed:

- 21.3% Thought about feeding another mother's milk.
- No participants received milk from a health care provider.
- 3 Received milk from a relative.
- 5 From a friend.
- 2 From someone they met online.
- 11 Received donor breastmilk while in neonatal intensive care.

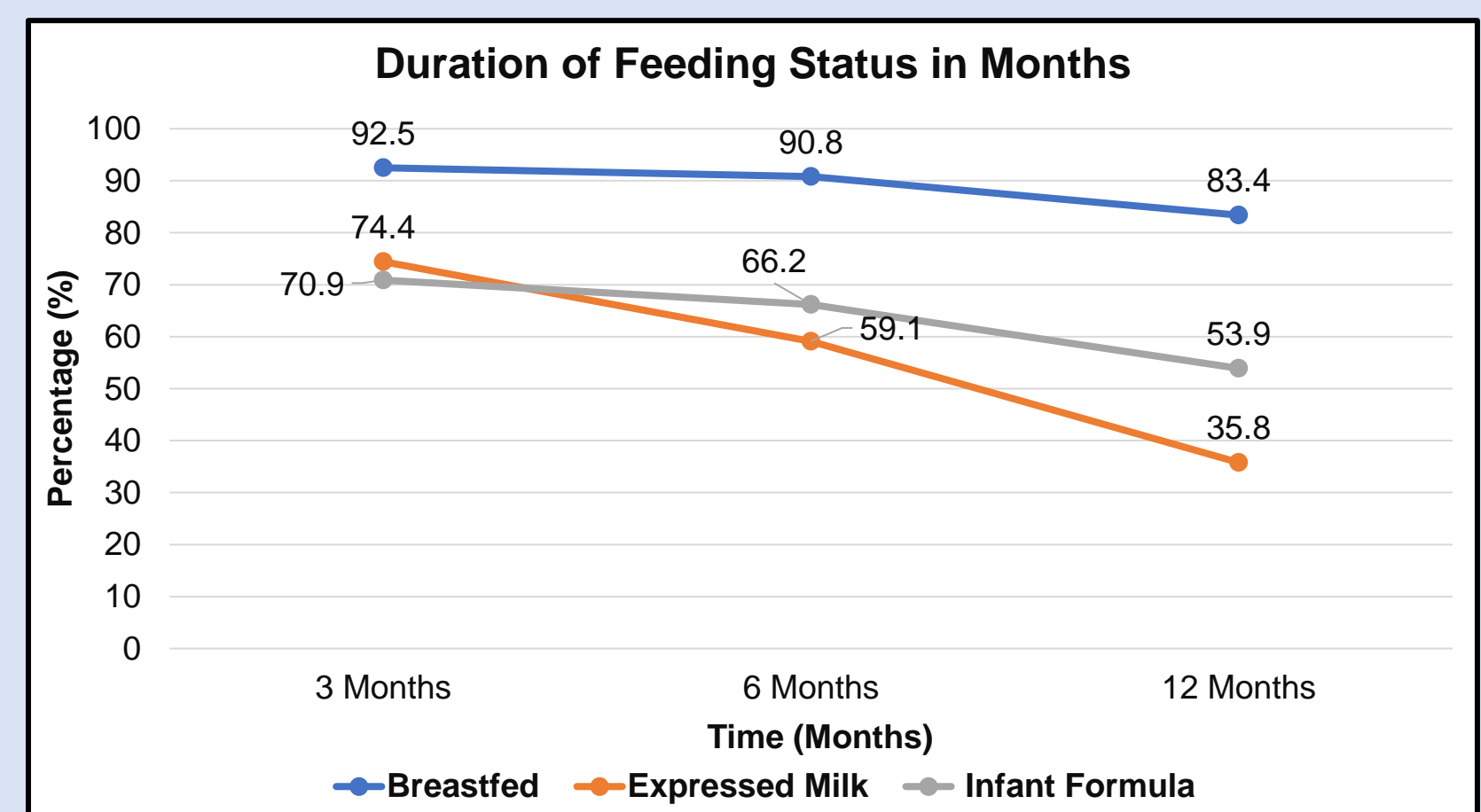


Figure 2: Percentage of feeding mode for those whose child had reached the listed age.

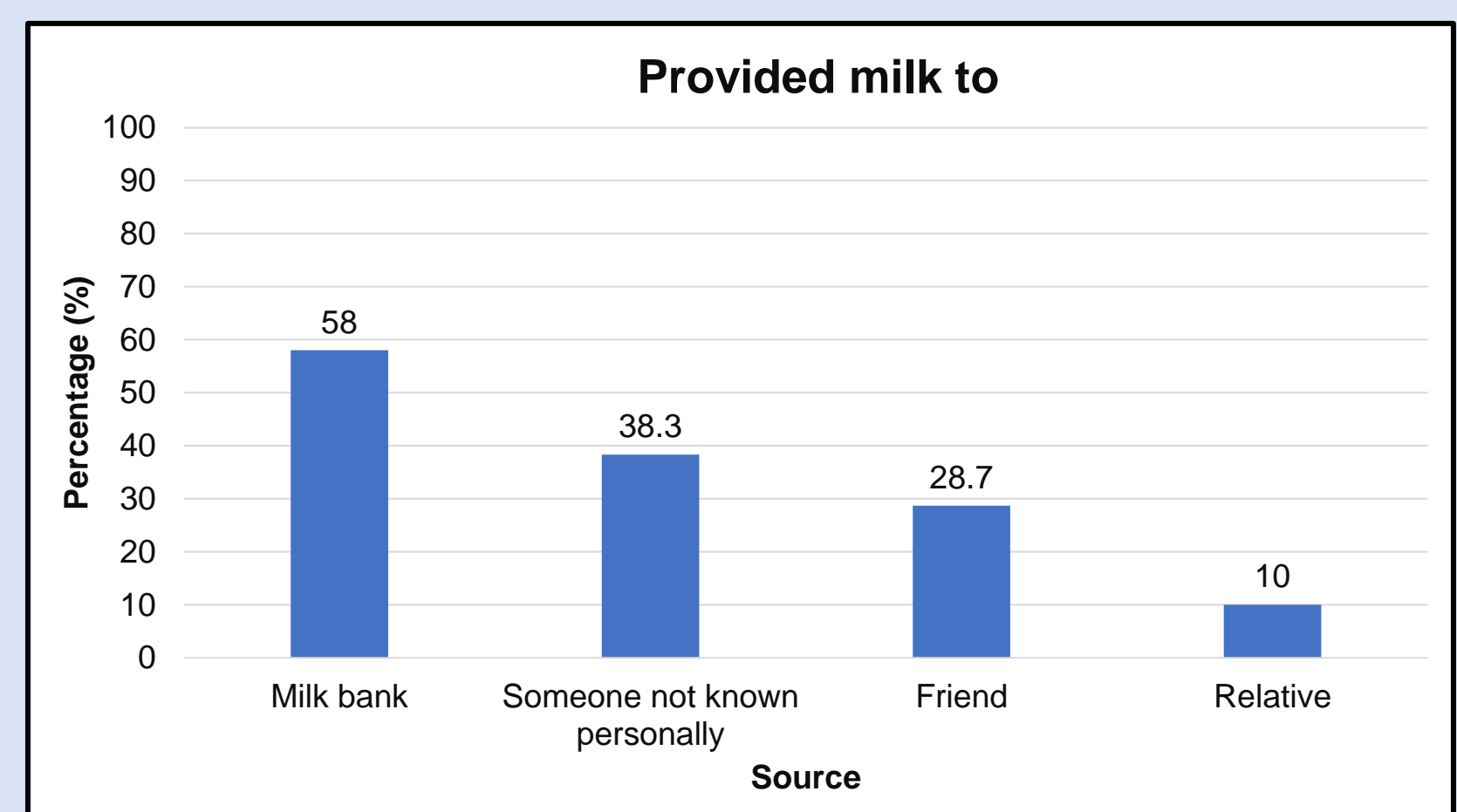


Figure 4: Participants who did provide milk (n=79) gave to.

5. Discussion

- Qualitative analysis indicates obstacles preventing mothers from feeding at the breast from day 0. Other studies previously found poor milk supply, pain, and medical interventions can delay breastfeeding, and each hour that passes after birth before the initiation of breastfeeding increases the likelihood of challenges.
- Although many participants express fed, past studies show expressed breastmilk could be less beneficial health outcomes than feeding at the breast due to loss of contact between the infant's saliva and the mother's breast as well as the process of storing, defrosting and reheating expressed milk.
- The awareness and prevalence of milk-sharing behaviours of a representative sample of Ireland have not yet been investigated.
- This lays the groundwork for future research into this topic. A cross-sectional study could be carried out to obtain a true prevalence of milk sharing within the Irish nation. A longitudinal follow-up study could also be carried out to assess health outcomes associated with milk sharing.
- These studies would allow for evidence-based advice surrounding the practice of milk sharing.

6. Conclusion

- Many participants used a blended feeding approach, breastmilk and expressed breast milk with some also using formula.
- A high prevalence of milk expression among participants.
- An awareness of the concept of milk sharing with some participants engaging in either providing or receiving shared breastmilk.
- As women are informally sharing milk, evidence-based advice could be created to minimise the associated risk.
- Current feeding behaviours are more complex than what we are currently measuring. Healthcare workers need to be aware that there are multiple modes of feeding a child breast milk; directly from the breast, expressing or milk from another mother.
- The possibility of breastmilk expression and breastmilk-sharing needs to be considered when asking questions surrounding infant feeding behaviours to get a true prevalence of children who have consumed breast milk.