

"Breasts United will Never be Divided" - Women Defend their Right to Breastfeed in Ecuador

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World Breastfeeding Week is commemorated in more than 120 countries each year as a reminder of women's right to breastfeed their children and as a child's first political act in defense of food sovereignty. On Saturday, families and supporters came together chanting and informing the public on breastfeeding rights.

Women at the action spoke to the greater sense of community they have achieved creating collective spaces to consult, inform and support one another. Many women expressed their concerns and unwelcoming experiences working with healthcare providers who often do not support their right to breastfeed and perpetuate doubts that convince many women to turn to commercial formulas over their own breast milk. Women told teleSUR they are told the formula encourages their child's growth and guarantees good health, but said they believe that actually a mother's breast milk is chemically composed to carry all the nutrients that respond to a child's needs.

Founder and member of the Breastfeeding and Maternity Support Group, Lucila Donoso Gomez also expressed the difficulties that mothers find balancing work and raising a child. Donoso, a mother of two, explained, "Ecuadorian laws are very good but there isn't very much consciousness nor practice. Many women stop breastfeeding after they return to work when they don't have to, and can create their own milk bank."

Currently Ecuadorian law recognizes one year maternity, leave allowing women several months at home with their children and allocated time during the workday to breastfeed as well.

Ecuadorian law also guarantees paternity leave.

Paulina Simon, a mother of two, led chants at the event. A blogwriter, Simon explained, "I am very content with today's action. Especially since for many mothers, the first several months after your child's birth is a very solitary experience since you feel you cannot relate to your ...friends all the time."

As such, Simon also advised expecting mothers, "Always try to find a group of other mothers so you can find support and family. Defend your right to breastfeed, defend your body and your family."

Discussions on breastfeeding ultimately relate to preferences about methods, strategies and beliefs about raising children. Many women expressed that their experiences in public hospitals and clinics have been demoralizing and disappointing.

Emilia Lopez, a nurse, has spent the last three years working in Quito's Metropolitan Hospital and found a creative way to respond to mother's concerns. Currently, she works independently making home visits and accompanying families during the beginning stages of their child's life.

As Lopez distributed breastfeeding tips providing insightful information and resources to mothers and passerbys, she explained that her work has become more effective as she shares skills with families directly. "Challenges and questions arise when the baby is home. I focus on breastfeeding, security, safety and childcare. I orient parents and their families through at least three home visits," she explained.

Women in Quito are working towards creating more spaces where they, along with their families, can discuss and inform one another on these issues. Donoso emphasized, "We come together and we support one another. It is difficult to raise children within a nuclear family. In these spaces mothers come together and we help one another as a community."

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