The present research is included in the fields of public health, social sciences and gender studies. Its objective is to provide insight into the nursing behaviour of two groups of mothers, their domestic and extradomestic child care arrangements and their attitudes towards breast-feeding. Thirty five mothers were selected in Malinalco, Mexico, and 35 in the Sierra de Juárez, Oaxaca. Each mother had at least two children and one of them under three years of age. The study was exploratory in its initial phase, subsequently cross-sectional, comparative and prospective. It constitutes a foundation for longitudinal case studies. A pre-coded questionnaire, including the following issues, was administered: family composition; maternal schooling; maternal employment; nursing behaviour with the last child; child care and attitudes towards breast-feeding. The main information regarding 33 mothers in Malinalco and 31 in Oaxaca revealed that in both areas mothers decided how to feed their children during the first days; during the first month, 55 per cent of mothers in Malinalco breast-fed their child, while approximately 90 per cent did so in Oaxaca. The majority of women worked outside home and resorted to extradomestic arrangements for child care. No relation was found between the feeding method chosen with the last child and maternal employment. About 90 per cent of women in both areas were “happy” to have been born females and breast-feeding was considered a “must”. Seventy five per cent of mothers would not allow other women to breast feed their child, even though they were aware that maternal milk is the best. Conclusions indicate that breast-feeding is a declining practice in both areas after the first three months. Mothers and their closest female relatives are mainly responsible for decisions taken regarding the nursing of children. Mothers have a very high sense of responsability towards their womanhood and motherhood, so that nursing constitutes an "obligation" rather than a pleasurable activity. The need to undertake anthropological research through case studies is outlined.

Keywords
breast-feeding, women, work, perception, maternity, Mexico