

Simmons World Challenge 2019

Infant Nutrition: The Global Challenge of Breast Feeding

Have you ever wondered why there is such controversy around breastfeeding? Why, if the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that women exclusively breastfeed their babies for a minimum of 6 months, do fewer than half of new mothers worldwide do this? Why, if breastfeeding is known to boost an infant's immune system and forges a bond between mother and child, do only 83% of mothers in the U.S. breastfeed at all and fewer than 25% exclusively breastfeed until 6 months according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)?

The theme of this year's challenge is Infant Nutrition: The Global Challenge of Breastfeeding.

The 2018-2019 Simmons World Challenge (SWC) asks students to consider the problem of low rates of breastfeeding through a public health lens, exploring the question, "What are the barriers preventing most women from exclusively breastfeeding for the WHO recommended first 6 months, and what can be done to improve these rates?"

Breastfeeding is something that women have done for millennia, but in the last century or so, commercialization of formula and other economic, sociocultural, and political factors, such as more women entering the workforce, globalization, etc., have brought opportunities but also many challenges such that it has become more difficult even for women who want to breastfeed to do so successfully. Breastfeeding rates across the world are staggeringly low for something that should be the "norm" and making progress to achieve targets has been slow. The WHO estimates that global losses of U.S. \$302 billion annually (or 0.49% of world gross national income) are attributable to low rates of breastfeeding.

SWC participants will learn about the biological, historical, economic, political, and sociocultural context surrounding the challenge of breastfeeding and work with mentors and community partners to produce actionable solutions for women and providers in the Boston area. World Challenge will then go global: In summer 2019, SWC will reconvene for about two weeks in Argentina, where participants will learn about this important global problem from a different perspective and apply their SWC problem-solving skills in collaborations with community partners to help make a meaningful difference for women in Argentina.