

Infant Feeding in Emergencies: A Mixed-Methods Study of Preparedness and Policy in Ireland

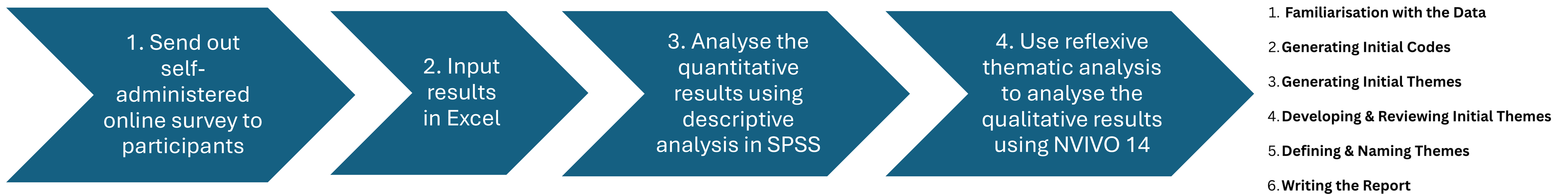
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Introduction:

- Infants are one of the most vulnerable groups in our population due to their developing immune systems.^{1,2}
- This puts them at an increased risk of developing diseases, leading to malnourishment.³
- During emergencies, breastfeeding provides the most beneficial source of nutrition for infants and young children due to the immune-supporting substances it offers and its sterility.³
- Ireland currently has no IYCF-E preparedness plan in place despite recommendations from the WHO.⁴
- Having an IYCF-E plan can prevent infants and young children from contracting diseases that lead to malnourishment.
- This study aims to explore healthcare and policy professionals’ experiences and perceptions of Ireland’s preparedness for IYCF-E, identifying key gaps and opportunities for policy/practice improvement.

Methodology:



Results:

Table1: Characteristics of Participants (n=125)

Gender (n=125)	(n)	(%)
Female	119	95.2
Male	3	2.4
Other/Prefer not to say	3	2.4
Previous experience in IYCF-E (n=121)		
Yes	64	52.9
No	53	43.8
Not applicable	4	3.3
Level of expertise in IYCF (n=120)		
7-9 years	92	76.6
4-6 years	21	17.5
1-3 years	7	5.8
Job Description (n=124)		
Community role	44	35.5
Acute hospital role	40	32.3
Private practice	10	8.1
Charity/NGO	8	6.5
Education Institute	7	5.6
Government Department	6	4.8
Other/Prefer not to say	9	7.3

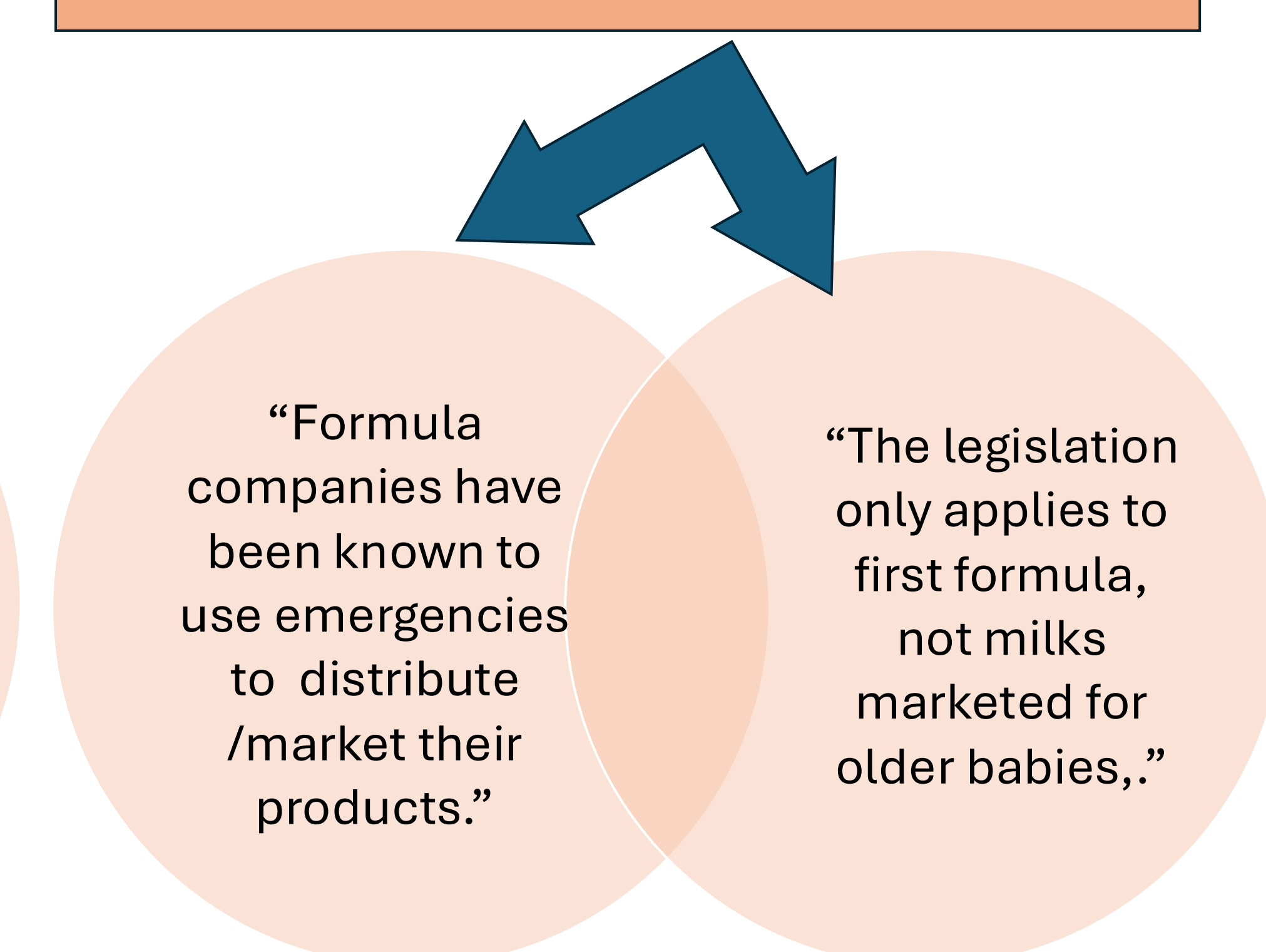
Participants’ views on who is in charge of IYCF-E?

Currently, there are no organisations in charge of IYCF-E in Ireland. Participants reported the following:



Perceptions & views of participants regarding CMF distribution in an emergency:

There is unregulated CMF advertisement & CMF distribution during an emergency. Participants reported the following:



Discussion & Conclusion:

- Limited awareness, coordination and preparedness for IYCF-E were identified across health and community sectors
- Participants highlighted concerns regarding unregulated CMF distribution and marketing during emergencies
- Limited access to lactation support and unclear governance structures were identified as barriers to effective preparedness
- Findings indicate that Ireland currently lacks a coordinated national IYCF-E framework
- A government led preparedness plan is urgently required to support infant nutrition and protect vulnerable populations during emergencies
- Priority areas for action include defined leadership, workforce training, regulatory oversight and cross sector collaboration

References:

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