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Title

Implications of Lactation Room Accessibility on Mothers' Breastfeeding at UCLA

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Implications of Lactation Room Accessibility on Mothers' Breastfeeding at UCLA



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Project Introduction

Creating Space is a graduate student led initiative dedicated to improving support for breastfeeding students and working mothers at UCLA. Creating Space is documenting the experience of UCLA mothers and current campus conditions regarding lactation, and is using this research to improve services, spaces, and university policies for mothers. Creating Space was born from, and has worked in partnership with The Mothers of Color in Academia de UCLA, a student-led community advocacy group of mothers.

Study Objectives

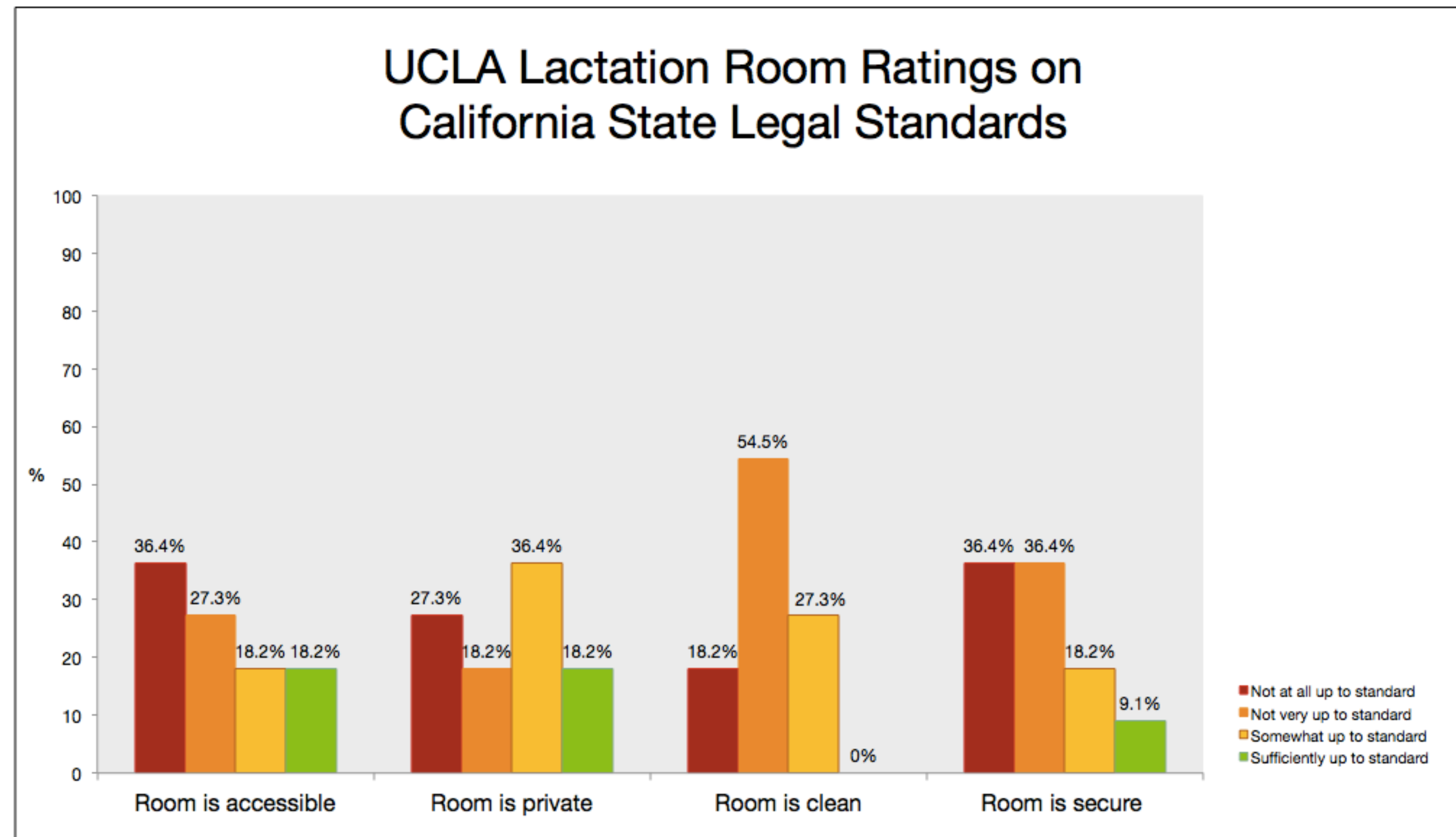
This study seeks to explore and evaluate women's experiences breastfeeding and/or pumping on the UCLA campus and the current status of lactation accommodations. We sought to capture the experiences of both student and staff mothers. This study adds to the literature on lactation support and experiences in a university setting.

Methods

Using a mixed methods approach, we explored the experiences of mothers and evaluated lactation room accessibility. To evaluate lactation rooms, we conducted lactation room assessments (census sample, n=11) using standards released by the American Institute of Architects and California legal standards. Rooms were assessed using a mystery client approach to simulate real-world accessibility. To evaluate the experience of mothers, we released an online survey to student, staff, and faculty mothers (n=65) and conducted two focus groups with a total of 15 student and staff mothers.

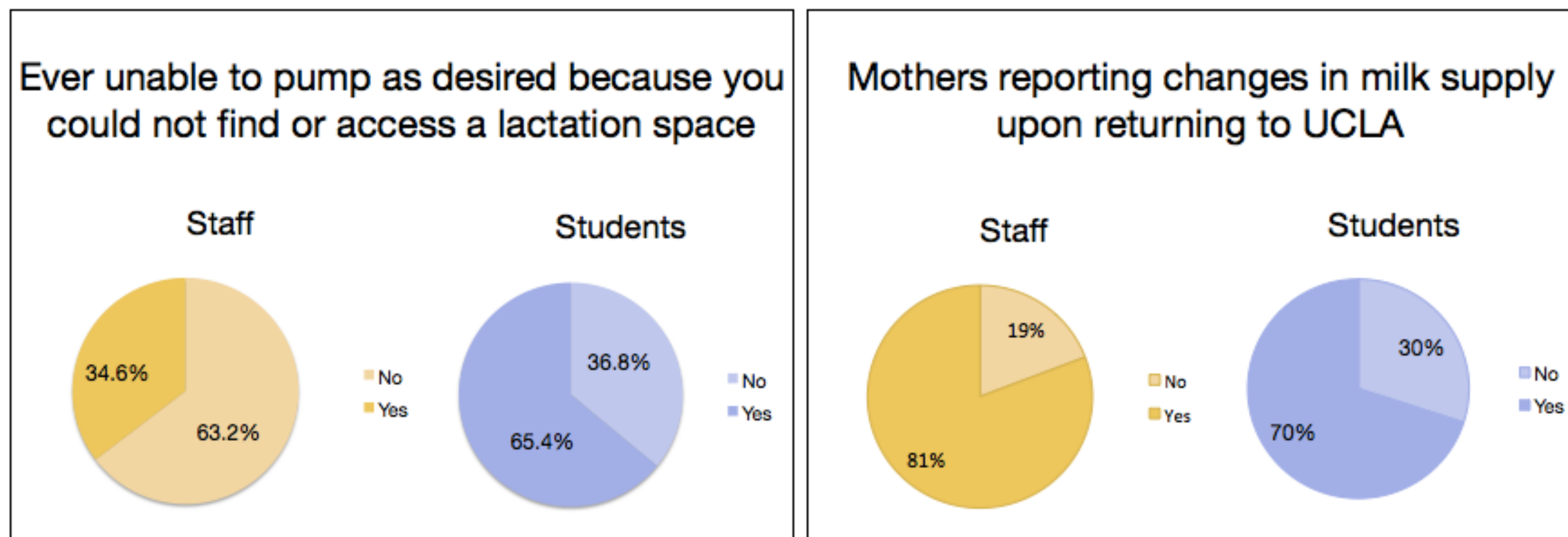
Results

Results from the lactation room assessments indicate that most campus lactation rooms did not meet California legal standards



In focus groups mothers explained that it was difficult for them to find and access appropriate lactation spaces. Mothers in both the survey and focus groups reported that lack of access to rooms and the poor condition of existing rooms impacted their milk supply.

“My milk supply is drying up right and I think that a lot of it is...because of the lack of access to a safe place to pump [on campus].”



Discussion

Study findings reveal that UCLA's lactation rooms are not up to California legal standards and do not meet the needs expressed by breastfeeding mothers. Accessibility was not sufficiently up to standard for 63.7% of rooms on the lactation room assessments. Insufficient lactation accommodations have serious implications on a mother's ability to regularly pump and express milk. In our survey over 56.5% of respondents who were unable to pump as desired reported doing so because of limited access to an appropriate lactation space on campus. Findings support that inadequate access to appropriate lactation spaces can interfere with a mother's pumping schedule and may lead to a decrease in her milk supply. Focus group participants described how the stress of work and school and lack of access to safe, appropriate spaces to pump made it difficult to produce enough milk to sustain breastfeeding.

Conclusion

Access to appropriate lactation space is critical for all breastfeeding mothers to maintain adequate milk supply. Universities have the legal and ethical responsibility to provide critical, structural supports that mothers need to reach their desired breastfeeding outcomes.

Next Steps

With these findings, Creating Space is advocating for the provision of additional lactation rooms on campus, improved policies regarding lactation room access, more lactation accommodations, and further research on how to improve mothers' breastfeeding experience on campus.

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