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KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE AND PRACTICE OF BREASTFEEDING AMONG MOTHERS VISITING A TERTIARY CARE CENTER IN SOUTH KERALA.

Community Medicine

Dr. NESAMONY MANEKSH KUMAR ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, COMMUNITY MEDICINE, Dr. SOMERVELL MEMORIAL CSI MEDICAL COLLEGE, KARAKONAM, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM- 695504

Dr. DELINDA LINU SWORNILA Associate Professor, Physiology, Dr. Somervell Memorial CSI Medical College, Karakonam, Thiruvananthapuram- 695504

Miss. SHRUTHI.P, 2013 Batch, MBBS student, Dr. Somervell Memorial CSI Medical College, Karakonam, Thiruvananthapuram- 695504

ABSTRACT

Background: Breastfeeding is the ideal feeding practice for infants promoted worldwide by health professionals. Both infants and mothers are benefited by breast feeding. However, its prevalence has remained low worldwide. This study was designed to describe the knowledge, attitude and practice of breastfeeding among postnatal mothers visiting a tertiary care centre, South Kerala.

Materials and Methods: A hospital based cross-sectional study held in Dr. Somervell Memorial CSI Medical College enrolled 100 mothers with babies of age 4 or less, attending the outpatient department. Convenient sampling was done & consent obtained. One to one interview was done with a pre-tested, semi-structured questionnaire to assess the knowledge, attitude and practice on breastfeeding among mothers.

Results: The postnatal mothers were knowledgeable about breastfeeding and that they had positive attitude towards breastfeeding. Also, the findings indicated that most of the mothers had received help from hospital staff regarding breastfeeding practice and 69% mothers had breastfed their baby just after birth or in less than one hour after birth. 92% of the mothers were aware of exclusive breast feeding (EBF), but only 76% were exclusive breast feeders. 54% mothers did not support formula feeds which is a strong evidence of good knowledge.

Conclusion: The mothers have a very good knowledge and positive attitudes toward breast feeding. This study also shows that the level of exclusive breastfeeding is low among Indian mothers and the practice of breastfeeding is not as much as what is expected out of the high percentage of knowledge. Thus there is a need for improvement.

KEYWORDS:

Knowledge, attitude, practice, breast feeding, mothers

INTRODUCTION

Breastfeeding is a basic human activity, vital to infant and maternal health and of immense economic value to households and societies. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that for the first six months of life, infants should be exclusively breastfed to achieve optimal growth, development, and health (Park,2015). Exclusive Breast Feeding (EBF) is defined as infant feeding with human milk without the addition of any other liquids or solids. The benefits of breast-feeding, to both mother and baby, have long been recognized. WHO Global data bank (2009) says that its prevalence has remained low worldwide and it is estimated that only about one-third of infants are exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life. In India, there are social, cultural, and economic factors which influences breastfeeding.

In 1991, Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI) was born to protect, promote and support breastfeeding, Park (2015). Exclusive breastfeeding, are especially important in developing countries with high levels of poverty, and which are characterized by a high burden of disease and low access to clean water and adequate sanitation.

Early initiation of breastfeeding is not seen in over 75% of the nation's children and over 50% of children are not exclusively breastfed, WHO (2011). Hence, the low figures for early initiation of breastfeeding in India are a matter of urgent concern. Maternal positive attitudes towards breast feeding are associated with continuing to be breastfeeding longer. On contrary, negative attitudes of women toward breastfeeding is considered to be a major barrier to initiate and continue breastfeeding, NFHS-3 (2005-2006). A study by Maheswari et al (2010) found that majority of the Indian mothers (78%) have positive attitudes towards breastfeeding and 65% had breastfed their infants within an hour after birth.

Thus the present study was developed to examine the infant feeding practices, knowledge and attitude towards breast feeding among postnatal mothers in a rural area of South Kerala. The objectives are to assess the knowledge, attitude and practice of breastfeeding among lactating mothers and to assess the influence of breastfeeding promotion programmes among breastfeeding mothers.

Materials and Methods

A hospital based cross sectional study conducted in Dr. Somervell Memorial CSI Medical College, a tertiary care centre, South Kerala. Study participants are mothers of children aged 4 or less, attending the outpatient department. Mothers of children with chronic diseases and those unwilling to participate in the study are excluded. Sample size was calculated as 100 and enrolled by convenient sampling. After obtaining consent data was collected by one to one interview method was carried out by the investigator using a pre-tested, semi-structured questionnaire to assess the knowledge, attitude and practice on breastfeeding among mothers. A standardised grading system was used to analyse the collected data. The questionnaire had demographic form to elicit information on participants' background such as age of the mother and child, gender of the child, education of the mother and employment status. It also had structured questionnaire to assess knowledge, attitude and practice towards breastfeeding among postnatal mothers. The questionnaire had three sections: Section A: This part of questionnaire had 9 questions to measure knowledge of the participants towards breastfeeding. Each question in the knowledge section of the questionnaire had 4 possible responses. Section B: This section consisted of 5 questions to assess the mothers' attitude towards breastfeeding. Each question in this section had 2 possible responses (true/false). Section C: This section consisted of 6 questions aimed at assessing the practice of breastfeeding by the mothers. The questions were designed in a manner that they are related to the questions in section A, so that knowledge and practice can be compared. The collected data was entered into Microsoft excel and imported into a standard statistical software for analysis

and results presented in the form of tables and charts. Written consent was obtained from the participants and they were given freedom to quit the study.

RESULTS Table 1. Socio demographic characteristics of the study participants

Demographic variables	Group	Percentage
1. Age (years)	18-25	57%
	25-30	33%
	>30	10%
2. Education	Lower primary	0%
	Upper primary	2%
	High school	19%
	Graduation	40%
	Post - graduation	19%
	Professional degree	20%
3. Employment status	Employed	30%
	Home maker	70%
4 Income	<5,000	25%
	5,000-10,000	45%
	>10,000	30%

Ttable 1, shows the socio demographic details . The study participants were mothers (N=100) of whom 57% belonged to 18-25 years age group and 45% of them were with monthly income in between 5,000-10,000 rupees. About three fourth of the participants (70%) were homemakers. Nearly half of the participants were graduates (40%). Almost all the mothers were breastfeeding their infants and the vast majority of the mothers have exclusively beast fed their infants upto 6 months of age. Surprisingly, mothers with lower primary education were 0% and upper primary was 2%. On the contrast, 40% mothers were graduated and 98% mothers were educated. This might be the due to the high literacy rate in Kerala.

Table 2: Mother's knowledge regarding breastfeeding

Variables	Response	Percentage
Ideal initiation of breastfeeding within	Half an hour	85%
	2 hours	14%
	24 hours	1%
	48 hours	0%
Knowledge of breastfeeding given by	Mother	60%
	Doctor	25%
	Nurse	13%
	Others	2%
Instructions on how to breastfeed, from hospital	Received	96%
	Not received	4%
Ideal EBF period	4 months	6%
	6 months	92%
	8 months	2%
	1 year	0%
Ideal age to start complementary feeds	4 months	4%
	6 months	96%
	8 months	0%
	1 year	0%
Ideal no. of feeds during EBF	6-7	28%
	8-12	68%
	2-3	2%
	3-5	2%
To be breastfed compulsorily upto	2 yrs	89%
	3 yrs	10%
	1 yr	1%
	4 yrs	0%
Influence of media on breastfeeding	Positive	88%
	Negative	12%
Infant formula	Promote weight gain	12%
	Makes infant healthier	21%
	Easy to give	6%
	Other reasons to support	7%
	Do not support	54%

Table 2 shows that 85% of the mothers know that the infants should be ideally be breast fed within half an hour after birth. About 60% of the women were educated on the importance of breastfeeding by their mothers and the others received the knowledge from doctors, nurses and other family members/ friends. The vast majority (96%) were taught how to breast feed from the hospitals where they delivered. 92% of the mothers know that the infants should be exclusively breast fed upto 6 months of age and a higher percentage (96%) are aware of the fact that complementary feeding should be started at 6 months. But, only 68% of the mothers are aware of the fact that infants should be fed about 8-12 times in a day during the period of exclusive breastfeeding. A relatively high percentage (89%) of mothers knows that infants should be breast fed up to the age of 2years for their proper nourishment. Media activities in the promotion of breastfeeding were found to have a positive influence on the majority (88%). The majority (54%) do not support the use of infant formula which is yet another sign of a good knowledge level about infant feeding practices, but others support the use of the same if the mother is working. It was found that 85% mothers were aware that initiation should be done within half an hour and 14% commented to be within 2 hours. This finding also favours the good knowledge level of mothers.

Table 3: Mother's attitude towards breastfeeding

Variables	Response	Percentage
Benefits of breastfeeding is limited to a short period	True	15%
	False	85%
Breastmilk and infant formula have equal benefit	True	8%
	False	92%
Breastmilk has all the essential components for baby's growth	True	94%
	False	6%
Breastfeeding makes infants more healthier	True	98%
	False	2%
Use of infant formula over breastmilk is a healthy practice	True	5%
	False	95%

Table 3 shows the attitude of mothers towards breastfeeding. The results make it clear that over 85% of the mothers surveyed had a positive attitude towards breastfeeding. 98% of the mothers agree that breastfeeding makes infants healthier. It also shows that 85% mothers agreed that breast feeding has long term benefits which are evident of mother's positive attitude.

Table 4: Mother's practice of breastfeeding

Variables	Response	Percentage
Baby was breastfed within	Half an hour	69%
	2 hours	29%
	24 hours	2%
	48 hours	0%
Exclusively breastfed upto	<6 months	24%
	6 months	76%
	>6 months	0%
Complementary feeding started at	<6 months	24%
	6 months	76%
	>6 months	0%
Frequency of breastfeeding during EBF	6-7 times	32%
	8-12 times	60%
	2-3 times	0%
	3-5 times	2%
Breastfeeding continued upto	1 year	20%
	2 years	78%
	2.5 years	2%
	3 years	0%
Used infant formula	Yes	55%
	No	45%

Table 4 shows the practice of breastfeeding by the mothers. Since the questions for assessing knowledge were designed similar to the ones used for assessing practice, a comparison can be made between the

two. Though 85% of the mothers had the knowledge that babies should be breast fed within half an hour after birth, only 69% have practiced the same, though there may be valid reasons for the delay. The knowledge about exclusive breastfeeding and the age at which complementary feeding should be started, was high (92%) but is brought into practice by only 75%. Out of 68% of the mothers with the knowledge that babies should be breast fed 8-12 times in a day during the period of exclusive breastfeeding, 60% have practiced the same. Though 89% of the mothers had the knowledge that babies should be breast fed up to 2 years of age, only 78% have practiced the same. This may be because of lack of enough milk to feed the baby.

DISCUSSION

In the present study, almost all the mothers were breast feeding their infants. 92% of the mothers were aware of EBF, but only 76% were exclusive breast feeders. This percentage of EBF is much higher compared to studies conducted from India (7.8% and 16.5%), New Guinea (17%) etc as recorded in WHO Global data bank (2009). Further, studies indicate the prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding at six months is generally low in low resource countries and varies from 9%to 40%.The majority of the mothers started supplementary feed at 4-6 months of age and the reasons given by them were; insufficient milk, to calm down the baby and believed that breast milk alone is insufficient for a growing baby. Published reports indicate that insufficient milk supply was the most common reason cited by the women for early weaning. In a recent evaluation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) for six months was considered as one of the most effective interventions to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDG-4), Park (2015). However, breastfeeding promotion interventions in developing countries have been shown to result in a six fold increase in exclusive breastfeeding rates at six months. According to Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF, 2006) guidelines, Government of India recommends that initiation of breastfeeding should begin immediately after birth, preferably within one hour. But, only 69% of the mothers stated that they had initiated breastfeeding within an hour . Most common reasons for delay in initiation of breastfeeding as cited by the mothers were; delay in shifting the mothers from labor room, babies were in neonatal ICU, Caesarean section and family restriction. This is higher than the studies conducted from different parts of the world ranging from 6.3% to 31%. However, NFHS 3(2005-06) reveals that initiation rates from various studies in India varies from 16 to 54.5%. These findings indicate health professionals to be made aware about the importance of initiating early breastfeeding as an urgent concern. In the present study, 92% of the mothers were aware of EBF. This finding is consistent with previous results that lactating mothers from developing countries have good knowledge of EBF. Similarly, 89% mothers in the current study felt that they should continue breastfeeding till the age of 2 years. A number of studies also enlightened that there are psychological benefits for both mother and infant as the act of breastfeeding is a time of physical contact and closeness which nurtures the bond between the two. Maternal education has been described as one of the strongest determinants of the practice of EBF.. The mothers in the present study had adequate knowledge and positive attitudes toward breast feeding.

CONCLUSION

The present study concludes that the mothers have a very good knowledge and positive attitudes toward breast feeding. Our findings also show that the level of exclusive breastfeeding was low among Indian mothers and the practice of breastfeeding is not as much as what is expected out of the high percentage of knowledge. Thus there is a need for improvement. The recommendations of this study are as follows: It is important to provide prenatal education to mothers and on breastfeeding; strengthening the public health education campaigns to promote breast feeding; motivating mothers to practice breastfeeding according to the right knowledge they have received from various sources and strengthening programmes to promote EBF and to choose breast feeding over formula feeding.

ANNEXURE

QUESTIONNAIRE

I. DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

a) Age of the mother 18-25yrs 25-30yrs >30yrs

b) Education

Lower primary upper primary high school

Graduation Post graduation professional degree

c) Employment status

E mployed homemaker

d) Income

<5000 5000-1000 >10000

II. KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT

a) Breast feeding should be initiated within

Half an hour 2 hours 24 hours 48 hours

b) Knowledge of breastfeeding given by

Mother doctor nurse others

c) Did you receive instructions on how to breastfeed from the hospital

Yes/no

d) Ideal exclusive breastfeeding period

4 months 6 months 8 months 1 year

e) Ideal age to start complementary feeds

4 months 6 months 8 months 1 year

f) Ideal no. of feeds during exclusive breastfeeding

6-7 8-12 2-3 3-5

g)To be breastfed compulsorily upto

2 yrs 3 yrs 1 yr 4 yrs

h) Influence of media on breastfeeding

Positive/negative

g) Infant formula

Support/do not support

If supporting reason,

1. Promotes weight gain
2. Makes infant healthier
3. Easy to give
4. Other reasons to support

III. ASSESSMENT OF ATTITUDE

a) Benefits of breastfeeding is limited to a short period True/false

b) Breast milk and infant formula have equal benefit True/false

c) Breast milk has all essential components for baby's growthTrue/false

d) Breastfeeding makes infants healthier True/false

e) Use of infant formula over breastmilk is healthy True/false

IV. ASSESSMENT OF PRACTICE

a) Baby was breastfed within Half an hour 2 hrs 24hrs 48hrs

b) Exclusively breastfed upto

<6months 6months >6months

c) Complementary feeding started at

<6months 6 months >6months

d) Frequency of breastfeeding during exclusive breast feeding

6-7 8-12 2-3 3-5

e) Breastfeeding continued upto

1 year 2 years 2.5 years 3 years

f) Used infant formula

Yes/no

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