



A STUDY ON KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE AND PRACTICES OF EXCLUSIVE BREASTFEEDING AMONG MOTHERS OF CHILDREN UNDER 6 MONTHS OF AGE

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ABSTRACT **Background:** Poor practices and attitudes toward exclusive breastfeeding have been reported to be major reasons for poor health among children, especially in developing countries. This study aimed to assess the knowledge, attitude and practices of breastfeeding in mothers of children up to 6 months of age. **Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted from April 2023 to March 2024, examining 196 neonates within 6 months of birth. Data on knowledge, attitude and practices from mothers of infants up to 6 months were collected. **Results:** Mean age of mothers was between 20 and 30 years (59.69 %) out of which more were undergraduates (48.93%). 2% were from joint family. 2 out of 5 gave colostrum to baby. 10% demand fed the baby and 86% knew meaning of exclusive breastfeeding. **Conclusion:** The findings suggest level of awareness is still low among mothers regarding proper breastfeeding practices. The study provides baseline data on knowledge, attitude and practices of exclusive breastfeeding from a limited geographical area. Further analysis is needed to establish the factors adversely influencing exclusive breastfeeding.

KEYWORDS : knowledge, attitude, practices, exclusive breastfeeding

INTRODUCTION

Breastfeeding is a natural act, it is also a learned behaviour (1). Exclusive breastfeeding is defined as giving no other food or drink not even water except breast milk till 6 months of age.

The WHO recommends that for the first six months of life, infants should be exclusively breastfed.

Poor practices and attitudes toward exclusive breastfeeding have been reported to be among major reasons for poor health outcomes among children, particularly in developing countries. (2)

There has been considerable improvement in percentage of children breastfed under 6 months of age - from 55% to 64%. But the percentage still remains significantly low. (3)

Although, the practice of breastfeeding is influenced by various social, cultural and religious beliefs, maternal infant feeding attitude has been shown to be a stronger independent predictor of breastfeeding initiation. (4)

All these factors have been studied by various authors in European demographics but there is paucity of literature in Indian demographic profile, especially in North India.

The present study aims to bridge this gap and provide insight into the existing prevalence and measures to improve it.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

MATERIALS

A) Source of Data The study sample of 196 mothers of infants upto 6 months of age were selected by simple random sampling technique at Tirath Ram Shah Hospital, Delhi.

Inclusion Criteria:

Mothers of healthy infants aged less than 6 months

Exclusion Criteria:

-Mothers of preterm babies, and multiple gestations were excluded.
-Those not willing to be part of the study
-Mothers of babies requiring long term NICU stay or with other significant birth defects.

METHOD OF COLLECTION OF DATA

All patients who meet the inclusion criteria and who are willing to participate were recruited and a written informed consent was taken. Followed by the same, data was collected in mothers of children meeting the inclusion criteria with the help of self-administered structural questionnaire on knowledge, attitude and practice of exclusive breast feeding.

A four part structured questionnaire were developed to cover the entire

aspects of study. The questions are adapted from "Guidelines for assessing nutrition-related Knowledge, Attitude and Practices by FAO (Food and Agricultural organization of the UN)." (5)

- Part I: This part included demographic characteristics of the participants: Age, marital status, religion, education, monthly income and, gender of the child.
- Part II: This part included the questionnaire on knowledge of study participants towards exclusive breast feeding.
- Part III: This part included the questionnaire on attitude of study participants towards exclusive breast feeding.
- Part IV: This part included the questionnaire on practice of study participants towards exclusive breast feeding.

The study has recruited 196 women to assess their knowledge, attitude and practices on exclusive breastfeeding. The said sample of women will be included in the study over a period of 1.5 years (2023-2024) from the Pediatrics Department at the Tirath Ram Shah Hospital, Delhi.

The results of this study was expressed as mean with standard deviation or median with range, as required. The categorical data is expressed as rates, and ratios, and the continuous data expressed as mean $\pm$ standard deviation. The comparison of categorical data is performed using Chi square test and Fisher's exact test, and the comparison of continuous data is done using independent sample t test. A p-value of ≤ 0.05 at 95% confidence interval will be considered as statistically significant.

Data was first recorded in Excel Sheets in a systemized and structured pro forma. All statistical analysis was carried out using STATA V.21.0.

$$N = \frac{\left(\frac{Z\alpha}{2}\right)^2 p(1-p)}{(d)^2}$$

N= sample size for study group

p = Prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding in children under age 6 months

$Z\alpha/2$ = Z-value at 95% confidence level

d = Margin of error at 5%

RESULT

Most of participants i.e. mothers in the study belong to the age group of 20-30 years (59.69%). The study sample consisted of a higher percentage (48.98%) of undergraduate educated and lower percentage (45.92%) of working mothers. Nearly two out of hundred (2%) of the mothers belonged to a joint family type of set up. All the participants had institutional delivery.

Two out of every five mothers gave colostrum to their new born baby in this study. 56.1% mothers stated that they didn't give colostrum to the baby 37.2% mothers stated that they gave pre-lacteal feeding to the baby.

The prevalence of Exclusive Breast Feeding (EBF) of the newborn infant for various ages is 62.24. Non-exclusive breast-feeding mothers prevalence was 37.76%.

Less mothers were acquainted with demand feeding of the child (10.7 %), while some practiced feeding the child at regular interval (59.1%). Few (43.8%) of the mothers were planning to start complementary feeding before 6 months of the age of the infant. The p value of all the factors which has been attempted to be analyzed by chi-square regarding EBF is above 0.05 (showing no statistical association). 86.73% of mothers knew that exclusive breastfeeding is feeding nothing other than breastmilk and 93.88% mothers knew that exclusively breast feeding of the baby should be done till 6 months.

Nearly 92% mothers have answered correctly above the median of knowledge score of the mothers which is more than the prevalence of stated practice of exclusive breast feeding of the child showing the huge gap in practice and knowledge of the mothers. Nearly 96% of the mothers answered that initiation of breast milk feeding to the new born baby after the birth should be as soon as possible while the prevalence of early initiation of breast milk in 1 hour was showed in the study to be 4.59%.

DISCUSSION

The current study was conducted among mothers who had term babies, till 6 months of age. Total of 196 mothers were enrolled.

Most of participants i.e. mothers in the study belong to the age group of 20-30 years (59.69%). The study sample consisted of a higher percentage (48.98%) of undergraduate educated and lower percentage (45.92%) of working mothers. Nearly two out of hundred (2%) of the mothers belonged to a joint family type of set up. All the participants had institutional delivery. The institutional birth according to NFHS-4 is 91.9% which is less as compared to this study. Nearly two out of five (46.4%) mothers had caesarean section.

Two out of every five mothers gave colostrum to their new born baby in this study. 56.1% mothers stated that they didn't give colostrum to the baby which is much higher compared with 25% mothers who felt colostrum is bad according to the study held in 2015 in Tamil Nadu state. 37.2% mothers stated that they gave pre-lacteal feeding which is similar to the study held in Tamil Nadu state in 2015.(6) Thus, the importance of colostrum as well as the practices of prelacteal feeding are issues which still have to be looked into.

The prevalence of Exclusive Breast Feeding (EBF) of the newborn infant for various ages is 62.24% which is more compared to NFHS-4 data at country level which is 54.9%. Non-exclusive breast-feeding mothers prevalence was 37.76% owing to 'other feeding' element or 'substitutions of milk' they used to feed the baby till 6 months age.

Less mothers were acquainted with demand feeding of the child (10.7 %), while some practiced feeding the child at regular interval (59.1%).

Analyzing our study data, we had no association between gender of the baby and EBF. The association of gender with Breast feeding has not been sufficiently explained in studies.

All these studies including our study highlights the need for improvement in EBF.

CONCLUSION

Breastfeeding is an unequalled way of providing ideal food for infants. The level of awareness is still low among the mothers about proper breast-feeding practices. From the qualitative part of the study both facilitating and barrier factors for EBF have come to focus. Facilitating factors such as, sufficient amount of breast milk formation during the first 6 months of the child birth, mothers taking good diet or medicine for adequate formation of breast milk, concern for new born baby's adverse health condition resilience attitude and increased satisfaction level of the mother where the mother is kept adamant to exclusively breast feed the child in opposition to family's wishes are directly linked to the mother. External factors which encourage EBF are institutional delivery, counselling of the mother during ANC, PNC, during the stay in hospital, by doctors etc thus impressing upon the mothers the perceived benefits of EBF for the child along with family members who are supportive of housework thus reducing work load of mothers. Almost 97% women in the study have gone for ANC and PNC yet just 44.70% of the respondents did Exclusive Breast Feeding. In many

cases, practice of prelacteal feeding of honey immediately after birth was found to be the reason for the baby to be categorized in the NEBF category.

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