



BREASTFEEDING PRACTICES IN A RURAL AREA OF KASHMIR, INDIA: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY.

Community Medicine

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ABSTRACT

Background: Breastfeeding is considered as the most effective nutrition for children less than 2 years of age. Breastfeeding for 6 months has many benefits for infants, including protection against various systemic infections like diarrheas and other infections.

Methodology: A Cross sectional study was conducted amongst mothers having children between 0-36 months of age in the field practice area of SKIMS, Soura. Information on breastfeeding practices in the initial six months of birth of the child was collected.

Results: Majority of children were breastfed (94%). Initiation of breastfeeding within an hour was practiced by 22.7% of mothers. Only 7.1% babies were exclusively breastfed till six months.

Conclusion: Our study showed that late initiation of breast feeding, giving pre-lacteals and low exclusive breast feeding are still prevalent among the community & these should be discouraged by proper Behavior Change Communication (BCC) activities.

KEYWORDS

Pre-lacteal feeds, Colostrum, Exclusive Breastfeeding.

INTRODUCTION:

Breastfeeding is considered as the most effective nutrition for children less than 2 years of age⁽¹⁾. Breastfeeding for 6 months has many benefits for infants, including protection against various systemic infections, observed both in the developing and developed countries⁽²⁾. The risk of mortality due to diarrhea and other infections can increase in infants who are either partially breastfed or not breastfed at all. Breastfeeding maximizes the nutritional and immunological status of children and can reduce up to 8,00,000 infant deaths globally^(3,4). Breast milk contains all the nutrients an infant needs in the first six months of life. Breastfeeding protects against diarrhea and common childhood illnesses such as pneumonia, and may also have longer-term health benefits for the mother and child, such as reducing the risk of overweight and obesity in childhood and adolescence⁽⁵⁾. New evidence has been presented in the Lancet series that breastfeeding provides short term and long-term health, economic and environment advantages to children, women, and the society. The Lancet series shows how essential the protection, promotion, and support of breastfeeding is for the achievement of many of the newly launched Sustainable Development Goals⁽⁶⁾. National Family Health Survey-2015-16 (NFHS-4) in India showed that only 42.6% mothers initiate breastfeeding within one hour of birth, although 78.9% deliveries take place in health facilities. Early initiation of breastfeeding (within first hour) can prevent 20% of newborn deaths. Further only 54.9% children were exclusively breastfed during first six months of life⁽⁷⁾. Despite strong health and economic benefits from breastfeeding, only less than half of mothers of infants in India initiate breastfeeding within an hour and just about half are exclusively breastfed until 6 months as recommended by WHO; a rate that has been stagnant in the last 2 decades. A recent analysis from World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTI) on policy and programs done in 2015 revealed that India lags behind in most indicators⁽⁸⁾. Very few studies exist on breastfeeding practices from the villages of this state. Hence, an effort was made to study the breast feeding practices in rural areas of Kashmir with respect to pattern of breastfeeding in the initial 6 months of birth.

METHODOLOGY:

The present cross-sectional study was conducted amongst mothers accompanying children between 0-36 months of age attending immunization section of Community Health Centre in the field practice area of SKIMS, Soura. A total of 150 mothers had children less than 36 months of age, of which, 141 mothers ever breastfed their infants & hence data pertaining to breastfeeding practices was asked in detail from mothers of babies who were breastfed i.e. 14. Information regarding breastfeeding practices in the initial six months was taken. The study was carried out for a period of two months.

RESULTS:

Out of total 150 children, 71 (50.4%) were males and 70 (49.6%) were females. In our study 94% of the mothers had ever breastfed their infants (Table 1). 32 (22.7%) babies born were put on breast within first

hour of life, out of which 53% of babies were females & 47% were males, although the difference between the two was not statistically significant. 51.7% of the babies received breastmilk after 24 hours of birth (Table 2).

Table 1: Distribution of ever breastfed children (N=150)

Ever Breastfed	Males n(%)	Females n(%)	Total n(%)
Yes	71(50.4%)	70(49.6%)	141(94.0%)
No	6(6.7%)	3(3.3%)	9(6.0%)
Total	77(51.3%)	73(48.7%)	150(100.0%)

Table 2: Distribution according to breastfeeding initiation time (N=141)

Initiation of Breastfeeding	Males n(%)	Females n(%)	Total n(%)	P-value
<1hr	15(46.9%)	17(53.1%)	32(22.7%)	(P>0.05)
1hr-6hr	18(60.0%)	12(40.0%)	30(21.3%)	
7hr-24hr	4(66.7%)	2(33.3%)	6(4.3%)	
>24hr	40(54.8%)	33(45.2%)	73(51.7%)	
Total	71(50.4%)	70(49.6%)	141(100.0%)	

Table 3: Breastfeeding Practices of the mothers (N=141)

	Males n(%)	Females n(%)	Total n(%)	P-value
Frequency				P=0.587
On demand	62(52.9%)	55(47.1)	117(82.9%)	
At regular intervals	9(37.5%)	15(62.5)	24(17.1%)	
Duration of each breastfeed				P=0.142
<10mins	21(41.2%)	30(58.8)	51(36.2%)	
Till the baby sleeps/leaves on its own	50(55.6%)	40(44.4)	90(63.8%)	
Mode of feeding				P=0.493
from one side	4(40.0%)	6(60.0%)	10(7.1%)	
from both sides	67(51.1%)	64(48.9)	131(92.9%)	
Exclusive Breastfeeding				P=0.760
Yes	6(60.0%)	4(40.0%)	10(7.1%)	
No	65(49.6%)	66(50.4)	131(92.9%)	
Colostrum				P=0.583
Fed	64(51.6%)	60(48.4)	124(87.9%)	
Discarded	7(41.2%)	10(58.8)	17(12.1%)	
Pre lacteal feed				P=0.964
Given	56(50.9%)	54(49.1)	110(78.0%)	
Not Given	15(48.4%)	16(51.6)	31(22.0%)	

In our study almost 83% babies were breastfed on demand. 64% of the mothers used to feed their babies till the baby slept or left the breast on its own. Majority of the newborns (92.9%) were fed from both breasts at a single feed. In the present study more than two-third (87.9%) of the

mothers had given colostrum to their newborn baby. 78% of the newborns received pre-lacteal feed. In our study only 7.1% received exclusive breastfeeding which is far beyond the WHO recommendation. Breast feeding practices of mothers of male children were better than those with female children but the difference was not found to be statistically significant (p -value > 0.05) (Table 3).

DISCUSSION:

According to NFHS-4(India)⁽⁹⁾, percentage of children who were ever breastfed is almost universal in every state, with a slightly lower percentage in Northern states (90%) which matches well with our study in which 94% children breastfed. Similar findings were reported by Kumar et al⁽¹⁰⁾ & Vyas S et al⁽¹¹⁾ where 93.40% and 93.6% infants respectively were given breast milk as their first food. According to IYCF(2006) guidelines⁽¹²⁾ initiation of breastfeeding should begin immediately after birth, preferably within one hour. Late initiation of breastfeeding may be due to mother's illiteracy, low socioeconomic class and home deliveries. Other reasons could be wrong customs & beliefs, less milk secretion, mothers being too tired to feed. This reflects that the mothers were not motivated adequately for early initiation of breastfeeding. In contrast to other studies, this study shows that delayed breast-feeding (> 1 hr) is still practiced in the rural areas of Kashmir. In our study, although the first hour feeding rates were less but almost half of the babies (47.3%) were breastfed with in the first 24hrs, which compares well with the findings of Takalkar et al⁽¹³⁾, Kar et al⁽¹⁴⁾ & Vyas S et al⁽¹¹⁾. In our study, 88% babies were fed colostrum which matches well with the findings of Thakur et al⁽¹⁵⁾, Takalkar et al⁽¹³⁾, Parmar et al⁽¹⁶⁾ & Vyas S et al⁽¹¹⁾. In contrast to our findings, Taja et al⁽¹⁷⁾ in a district of MP found that only 22.7% of mothers had fed their baby with colostrum. This variation was mainly due to different customs prevalent in India and presence of greater awareness regarding colostrum among our study subjects which may be due to greater awareness among health workers in our area. In our study, the prevalence of prelacteal feeding was higher (78%) which was in accordance with a study conducted by Vyas S et al⁽¹¹⁾ in Meerut (66.03%). Honey and dates were the most popular pre-lacteal feeds used. Exclusive breastfeeding was practiced only by 7.1% mothers in this study. Similar findings were reported by Pathi S et al⁽¹⁸⁾ & Vyas S et al⁽¹¹⁾ where only 8.6% and 5.1% mothers respectively practiced exclusive breast feeding. Contrary to this, Benjamin et al at Punjab⁽¹⁹⁾ & Aggarwal et al at Delhi⁽²⁰⁾ reported that 57.7% & 63.50% mothers respectively practiced exclusive breastfeeding. Findings indicate that the practice of exclusively breastfeeding as recommended by the international organizations was rare & more efforts need to be made for increasing exclusive breast feeding rates in the rural areas of Kashmir. Feeding on demand was found in majority (82.9%) of mothers. Similarly it was found to be 84.1% in a study in Bengal⁽²¹⁾. In yet another study at Kanpur⁽²²⁾ it was found to be only 38%. Demand feeding has earlier been reported to be a common practice in India, a factor, which has a positive influence on breast-feeding. This is also recognized as one of the ten steps to successful breast-feeding as recommended by WHO/UNICEF.

CONCLUSION:

It can be concluded that breast feeding is popular in rural women though their knowledge about the same needs to be improved. Since their perceptions regarding the feeding practices directly influence the health of the child therefore false beliefs & myths attached to child's feeding deeply rooted in all strata of community need to be replaced by sound & scientific messages.

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