

Knowledge and Attitude about Breastfeeding among Lactating Mothers of Rural Punjab

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ABSTRACT

Poor knowledge about benefits of breastfeeding can influence the initiation and duration practices. This descriptive cross-sectional study was designed to evaluate the knowledge and attitude of lactating rural mothers. 294 mothers were selected through a non-probability, convenient sampling method. A pre-designed pre-tested questionnaire was used. Mothers demonstrated good knowledge towards breast feeding. 74.8% knew that exclusive breast feeding should be continued for more than three months. 73.1% mothers agreed that breast feeding is a good method of contraception. 61.6% reported that colostrum should be given to the infant 98.3% knew that complementary food should be started after 6 months. 91.55 mothers said that breast feeding should be initiated after 1 hour of birth. According to IIFA scoring 10.2, 85.7 and 4.1% mothers showed negative, neutral and positive attitude about breast feeding respectively. They have knowledge but there is need to institute intervention aimed to promote breast feeding practices according to recommendations.

Keywords: Breast feeding, knowledge, lactating mothers, knowledge

INTRODUCTION

Breast milk is ideal food for babies. WHO recommends exclusive breast feeding for 6 months and defines exclusive breast feeding as “no other food or drink, not even water, except breast milk (including milk expressed or from a wet nurse) for 6 months of life, but allows the infant to receive ORS, drops and syrups (vitamins, minerals & medicines)¹. EBF provides proteins, fats, carbohydrates and fluids in a balanced combination and fulfills all the nutritional requirements of baby for first 6 months of life² and then breast feeding is recommended with complementary food for 2 years by UNICEF and WHO. Breast feeding provides social, economic, psychological, nutritional and immunological benefits to both mother and baby. It contains all five antibodies i.e., IgM, IgD, IgE, IgG, IgA and protects the baby against infections and allergies³. Mothers who exclusively breastfeed their children have decreased risk of breast cancer and postpartum hemorrhage.

During first two months of life, infants of developing countries who are not breastfed have six times greater risk of dying from infectious diseases than those who are breastfed⁴. Pakistan being seventh most populous country in the world, has a very high infant mortality rate. According to the UNICEF report (2006) the infant mortality of Pakistan stands at 76/1000 while the exclusive breastfeeding is only 16%². A study in rural Ghana shows that

22% of all the neonatal deaths can be prevented if all the babies are breastfed in first hour of birth⁵.

Despite of all the recommendations, the initiation and duration of breast feeding is not being followed by the mothers according to the recommended duration. Age of the mother, her education, family income, marital status, source of information and knowledge about benefits of breast milk are the factors that influence the practice of breast feeding⁶. This study was planned to assess the knowledge and attitude of mothers about breast feeding in rural areas of Punjab.

The objective of the study was to evaluate the knowledge and attitude of lactating mothers towards breastfeeding in rural population of Punjab.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A total of 294 participants were enrolled through a non-probability, convenient sampling method in a community based cross-sectional study in the rural areas of district Sahiwal Punjab from February 2017 to April 2017. Lactating mothers who delivered healthy infants between 37 and 42 gestational weeks, with and without major birth defects such as congenital heart disease, cleft lip/cleft palate and Down syndrome were included in the study. Exclusion criteria were mothers with preterm babies or multiple gestations. Mothers were interviewed by Lady Health Workers during their routine visits in community after written informed consent through a pre-designed, pre-tested questionnaire. During interviews, all questions were asked in local language

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(Urdu/Punjabi) which were later converted to English language for data analysis. Data was entered in SPSS-22 for analysis. Quantitative variables like age were presented as mean and qualitative variables like gender and questions were presented as percentages and frequencies.

RESULTS

A total of 294 mothers were included in the study. Mean age of the mothers was 27.98 years. 90.1% were housewives and 73.1% were living in joint family system. A total of 53% kids were male while 48% of them were females. Cesarean section was done in 38.4% of the cases while 95.9% of the deliveries were done at hospital. Demographic variables are shown in Table 1.

Regarding attitude of mothers towards breast feeding 85.7% of our respondents showed neutral attitude, 10.2% showed negative attitude and 4.1% showed positive attitude with an average score of IIFAS 57 that lies in the range of neutral breast-feeding attitudes. Majority of mothers (82.9%) disagreed the statement that the benefits of breast milk last only as long as the baby is breast fed and formula feeding is more convenient than breast feeding (85.4%). 90.2% of our study participants agreed that breast feeding increases mother infant bonding and it is an ideal feed for baby (90.8%), cheaper than formula feed (87.1%) and more likely digested (86.3%). Nearly three fourth of participants (75.1%) disagreed that mother feed is deficient in iron fathers feel left out when mother breast feeds (65.6%). 46.3% of mothers opinioned that formula fed babies are overfed whereas breast feeding is more convenient (87.3%) and breast-fed babies are healthier than those who are not breast fed (80.6%).

60.9% of participants stated that working mothers should opt breast feeding however, 63.3% believed that women should not breast feed in public. Half of them (50%) disagreed that mothers who formula feed miss one of the great joys of motherhood and occasionally alcohol drinking mothers should not breast feed (57.9%).

Table 1: Demographic Variable

Variable	n (%)
Parity	
Primigravida	86(29.3%)
< 4 children	180(61.2%)
4-7 Children	26(8.8%)
>7 children	2(0.7%)
Educational Level	
Uneducated	66 (22.4%)
Primary	86 (29.3%)
Middle	98 (33.3%)
Matric	32 (10.9%)
Graduation	12 (4.1%)
Breast Feeding Experience	
Yes	208 (70.7%)
No	86 (29.2%)
Husband Employment Status	
Self-employed	137 (46.6%)
Government job	96 (32.7%)
Not employed	61 (20.7%)
Husband educational status	
Uneducated	59(20.1%)
Primary	75 (25.5%)
Middle	113(38.4%)
Matric	37(12.6%)
Graduation	10(3.7%)

Knowledge of mothers was assessed by asking 15 questions of which question 1,4,7,9,11,14 and 15 were negatively structured.

Table 2: Knowledge of mothers about breast feeding

Knowledge of Breast Feeding	Yes	No	Don't know
Only three months of exclusive breast feeding is recommended	74(25.2%)	220(74.8%)	0
Breast feeding is a good contraceptive method.	215(73.1%)	68(23.1%)	11(3.7%)
Breast feeding decrease diarrhea, allergy and ear infection in infant.	275(93.5%)	19(6.5%)	0
Colostrum should not be given to infant.	104(35.4%)	181(61.6%)	9(3.1%)
Complementary feed should be started after 6 months.	289(98.3%)	3(1.0%)	2(.7%)
Breast milk is more easily digested than formulated.	273(92.9%)	18(6.1%)	3(1.0%)
Breast feeding should be initiated after 1 hour of birth.	269(91.5%)	22(7.5%)	3(1.0%)
Water is not required in first 6 months.	251(85.4%)	39(13.3%)	4(1.4%)
Breast feeding should not be continued for more than 18 months.	56(19.0%)	226(76.9%)	12(4.1%)
Breast feeding may protect your child from obesity.	250(85.0%)	35(11.9%)	9(3.1%)
Pre-lacteal feed is good for child health.	190(64.6%)	95(32.3%)	9(3.1%)
Breast fed babies are rarely constipated.	277(94.2%)	13(4.4%)	4(1.4%)
Colostrum is important to the infant to maintain immunity.	256(87.1%)	22(7.5%)	16(5.4%)
Infant formula and breast milk have same health benefits.	24(8.2%)	262(89.1%)	8(2.7%)
Breast feeding is reason of breast cancer.	28(9.5%)	255(86.7%)	11(3.7%)

DISCUSSION

The study evaluated the knowledge of lactating mothers having child of less than two years of age and it showed that 74.8 % of women were aware that exclusive breast feeding should be continued for more than three months. A study in Ambo Ethiopia found 90.8% of mothers were knowledgeable about EBF⁷. This difference might be due to the difference in economic and educational status and type of employment. In our study 73.1% mothers agreed that breast feeding is a good method of contraception. In the study in Ethiopia 32% of mothers reported that EBF prevents further pregnancy⁷. In this study 93.5% of mothers were aware of the fact that breast feeding decreases incidence of diarrhea, allergies and ear infections. In a study in Dhaka exclusive breastfeeding in the first few months of life in comparison with partial or no breastfeeding was associated with a 2.23-fold higher risk of infant deaths resulting from all causes and 2.40- and 3.94-fold higher risk of deaths attributable to ARI and diarrhea, respectively⁸.

61.6% mothers thought that colostrum should be given to child and 35.4 % believed that colostrum should not be given to the newborn, results are far better than a study conducted in Nepal where only 25% of subjects responded that colostrum should be given to the child⁹. 98.3% of mothers knew that complementary food should be started at 6 months of age compared to 44.6% as reported by Kishore (2008)¹⁰. 92.9% of mothers reported that Breast milk is more easily digested than formulated. Formula fed infants face more problems of gastrointestinal tract.¹¹

The study showed that 91.5% of mothers did not know about the initiation time of breast feeding and they reported that it should be started after one hour of life whereas the delay in initiation leads to the delay in the development of oxytocin reflexes, which are very important for the contraction of the uterus and the breast milk reflex. In a study conducted in India almost all the mothers initiated breastfeeding within 1 hour of childbirth¹². It is shown in studies that even in hot and dry climates exclusively breastfed babies remain healthy and don't need water or supplements. In our study 85.4% mothers agreed that water is not required before 6 months of age. In circumstances where boiled water is not available, risk of diarrheal illness to newborn increases with use of water¹². 19% of mothers thought breast feeding should not be continued beyond 18 months of age. In a study conducted at Nigeria 75.6% of respondents continued breast feeding till 18-24 months of age¹³.

85% of mothers knew that breast feeding prevents obesity. A meta-analysis concludes that having been breast-fed reduces odds for overweight

or obesity in childhood and later in life by 13-22%¹⁴. 64.6% women reported that prelacteal food should be used. In a study in India 19% mothers used prelacteal feed¹². 94.2% mothers agreed that breastfed babies are rarely constipated. Risk of constipation is significantly higher in formula fed infants¹¹.

93.5% of mothers were aware that colostrum enhances the child's immunity, studies have proved that colostrum provides passive and long lasting active immunity against infections and allergies as it is rich in vitamins, minerals and immunoglobulins^{3,15}. 8.2% mothers thought that breast milk and infant formulas have same health benefits. Feeding problems are more common with formula feeding^{11,16}. 86.7% of mother reported that breast cancer is not caused by breast feeding. Studies also prove that breast feeding for more than a year significantly reduces the risk of breast cancer¹⁷.

Studies have shown that IIFAS is a reliable tool to measure the breastfeeding attitudes among population of mothers. In our study attitude scores ranged from 36 -79 with an average score of 57 and (85.7%) of respondents showing neutral attitude. 85.4% of them agreed that breast feeding is more convenient than formula feeding and it increases mother child bonding (90.2%). These results are comparable to a study conducted in India in 2015¹⁸. 82.9% of them were aware of the long-term benefits of breast feeding that is a higher percentage than a study of middle east¹⁹.

In line with the study from India majority of our study participants stated that breast feed is an ideal feed for baby (90.8%) , its cost free (87.1%) and more likely to be digested (86.3%)¹⁸. 75.1% of mothers opined that breast feed is not deficient in iron and working mothers should continue breast feeding (60.9%).

CONCLUSION

In this study, rural mothers of Punjab showed good knowledge about EBF. 74.8 % knew that EBF should be continued for >3 months. 92.9% reported that breast milk is more easily digested than formula milk. 98.3% said that complementary food should be started after 6 months, 87.1% mothers believed that colostrum enhances immunity and 86.7% knew that breast feeding decreases the risk of breast cancer. IIFA scores ranged from 36-79 and 85.7% of participants showed neutral breast-feeding attitude.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is need to establish health care system and educate our mothers to practice breast feeding according to recommendations.

Limitation: The limitation of this study was that the study subjects were approached from a small sect of rural population hence the findings cannot be generalized to the whole rural population.

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