

# Breast feeding practices, knowledge and attitude among mothers- An institutional study

Srinivas Subudhi

Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics, Dr. Patnam Mahender Reddy Institute of Medical Sciences. Chevellam, Ranga Reddy Dist., Telangana - 501 503, INDIA.

Email: [nageshmsc@gmail.com](mailto:nageshmsc@gmail.com)

## Abstract

Breast feeding is the ideal food which gives all the essential nutrients need for healthy development for new born and infants and has several benefits for both the infants and mothers. Breast milk is readily available, economical and safe. The present study was to gather information about the breast feeding practices, knowledge and attitude among lactating mothers. A cross sectional questionnaire based descriptive study design at Department of Pediatrics, Dr. Patnam Mahender Reddy Institute of Medical Sciences, from January to February 2018 employing total of 125 mothers satisfying the inclusion criteria were selected in the present study, An interviewer administered, pre-tested modified questionnaire was used in the present study to collect data. Results from the present study shows that, most of the subjects were in the age group of 21-30 and majority of the subjects had secondary education. The attitude towards exclusive breastfeeding was assessed among participants. Whereas, the percentage of mothers with knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding was 69.6%. Complementary feeding knowledge was seen in 74.60% mothers. The observations from the present study results clearly shows lack of knowledge about breast feeding, so exclusive breastfeeding counseling should be given at the ante natal clinic with more emphasis on its advantages.

**Key Words:** Knowledge, attitude, practice, exclusive breastfeeding, Infant mortality rate.

## \*Address for Correspondence:

Dr. Srinivas Subudhi, Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics, Dr. Patnam Mahender Reddy Institute of Medical Sciences. Chevellam, Ranga Reddy Dist., Telangana - 501 503, INDIA.

Email: [nageshmsc@gmail.com](mailto:nageshmsc@gmail.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

Infant and young child feeding are a cornerstone of care for childhood development. Worldwide about 30 % of children under five are stunted as a consequence of poor feeding and repeated infections (WHO, 2003). Breastfeeding, especially exclusive breastfeeding is the simplest, healthiest and least expensive feeding method that fulfills the infants' need<sup>1</sup>. Breastfeeding has been accepted as the most vital intervention with a protective effect against both morbidity and mortality ensuring optimal growth and development of children<sup>2</sup>. Exclusive breastfeeding includes initiating breastfeeding of the child

within an hour of birth and continue till six months of age without supplemental bottle-feeding. The National Family health Survey-3, in India, had revealed that only 46% of children are exclusively breastfed in the 0-1 month age group. In India about 2.4 million children die each year of which two-thirds are associated with infant feeding practices which are inappropriate. The beneficial effects of breastfeeding are to protect child against infections including infant diarrhea, and prolongs lactation amenorrhea, thereby increasing birth spacing<sup>3</sup>. There is a wealth of information on the benefits of breastfeeding, especially EBF, for mother and baby. "The Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) is a global United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization (WHO) sponsored effort to promote breastfeeding" the initiative has proven impact, increasing the likelihood of babies being exclusively breastfed for six months (WHO 2007). Majority of malnourished children are so because of faulty feeding practices of their mothers or other care givers. Malnutrition begins mostly in infancy at the time of weaning because complementary feeds are started too early or too late and is most often nutritionally inadequate and unhygienic. Several studies

suggest that the personal and professional breastfeeding training experience of professionals with breast feeding, significantly influences their professional behavior<sup>4</sup>. The knowledge attitude and practice of exclusive breastfeeding has been prejudiced by cultural, demographic, social, biophysical and psychosocial factors. Although several studies have been reported, these studies however did not assess the knowledge and attitude of the mothers with regards to exclusive breastfeeding<sup>5</sup>. The objective of this study was to gather information about the breast feeding practices, knowledge and attitude among lactating mothers.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

A cross sectional questionnaire based descriptive study design was conducted at Department of Pediatrics, Dr. Patnam Mahender Reddy Institute of Medical Sciences, from January to February 2018 by employing quantitative research methods. The present study was conducted after approval of institutional ethical committee. Inclusion criterion includes, women of child bearing age who were currently breastfeeding at the time of the study or who had stopped breastfeeding not later than two years before. While exclusion criteria includes, mothers who never breastfed or were temporary visitors to the town were excluded from the study. A total of 125 mothers satisfying the inclusion criteria were selected in the present study, an interviewer-administered, pre-tested modified questionnaire was used in the present study to collect data. The questions were direct, easy to answer, in which options of the possible answers were provided which consists of questions on demographic variables, importance of breast feeding, diet during breast feeding, duration of exclusive breastfeeding, mother's and baby's position during breastfeeding, indicators of baby's satisfaction and the actual practice of correct breastfeeding practices. The data collection procedure was carried out for a period of 2 months. The study was carried out after obtaining permission from the ethics committee of the hospital.

## RESULTS

**Table 1:** Socio-demographic characteristics of mothers in the study (n=125)

Age of the mothers (yrs)	Frequency	Percentage
<20	24	19.2
21-30	64	51.2
31 and above	37	29.6
Education level		
No School	14	11.2
Primary	39	31.2
Secondary	56	44.8
Graduates and above	16	12.8

In the present study, 125 participants were within the age range of 18 to 45 years. Most of the subjects (51.2%) were in the age group of 21-30 as shown in the table 1 above. Majority (44.8%) of the subjects had secondary education while 12.8% were graduates and 39% had primary school education, whereas 14% had no school education shown in table 1 above

**Table 2:** Distribution of the study participants by marital status

Marital status	Frequency (%)
Single	0
Married	118 (94.4)
Widowed	5 (4)
Divorced	2 (1.6)
<b>Total</b>	

In the present study, majority (94.4%) the respondent were married, 4% were divorced and 1.6% were widowed as shown in table 2 above.

**Table 3:** Reasons for late Initiation of breastfeeding in study participants

Reasons	No. (%)
Colostrum dirty	106 (84.8)
No breast milk	9 (7.2)
Mother sick	5 (4)
Child sick	4 (3.2)
No reasons	1 (0.8)
<b>Total</b>	<b>125 (100)</b>

In the present study, reasons adduced for delayed initiation of breastfeeding among 106 mothers include colostrum being dirty and thought to be harmful to the child, lack of breast milk and mother or child illness was observed in 19 mothers as shown in Table 3.

**Table 4:** Distribution of study participant's attitudes towards Exclusive Breastfeeding

Parameter	Agreed (%)	Not Agreed (%)
Breast milk alone is sufficient for the baby during the first six month of life	118 (94.5)	7 (4.5)
EBF has benefits to the baby	102 (81.6)	23 (18.4)
EBF has benefits to the mother	109 (87.2)	16 (12.6)
Colostrum provides nutrition and protection to the baby	114 (91.2)	11 (8.8)

In the present study various parameters were assessed to study the attitudes towards exclusive breastfeeding, Majority (94.5%) of the study participants agreed that breast milk alone is sufficient to the baby during the first six months of life and almost all (81.6%) the respondents agreed that exclusive breastfeeding has benefits to the baby while 87.2% also agreed that exclusive breastfeeding equally benefits the mother. Furthermore, 91.2% of the respondents agreed that colostrum provides nutrition and protection to their babies (Table 4).

**Table 5:** Distribution of study participant's knowledge on exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) and duration

	Known EBF	Unknown EBF	Know duration of EBF	Don't know duration of EBF
No. of subjects	87	38	106	19
Percentage	69.6	30.4	84.8	15.2

In the present study the percentage of mothers with knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding was found to be 69.6%, whereas rests of the study population (30.4%) were not aware of exclusive breastfeeding. The duration of breast feeding was also assessed, 84.8% of the study individuals claimed to know about exclusive breastfeeding is, only 15.2% defined no knowledge about exclusive breastfeeding (Table 5).

**Table 6:** Distribution of study participant's knowledge about complementary feeding

Participants	complementary feeding	
	known	unknown
No of Subjects	94	31
Percentage	74.6	24.8

Complementary feeding knowledge was seen in as many as 94 (74.60%) mothers before the infant was 6 months old. Whereas, 31(24.8%) of mothers had no knowledge about the initiation of complementary feeding to beyond 6 months of age.

## DISCUSSION

“Breast is best” is a common phrase that summarizes general opinions about breast milk in comparison to any other form of feed available for infants. An appropriate diet is a critical component for proper growth and development of children. Breastfeeding has a major role in determining the nutritional status of the infant. Breast milk is a natural resource that has a major impact on a child's health, growth and development and therefore, WHO and UNICEF recommended that infants should be breastfed exclusively for 6 months and thereafter until 24 months<sup>6</sup>. The prevalence of malnutrition among children in rural areas throws light upon the fact that those mothers need to be addressed on their knowledge attitude and practices about breastfeeding<sup>7</sup>. In the present study, a total of 125 subjects were participated and the age distribution of the respondents was between 18-45 years. The study revealed that, majority of the subjects participated in the present study had secondary education while 12.8% were graduates and 39% had primary school education, whereas 14% had no school education. In our study, 69.6% of the mothers had adequate knowledge of EBF which is higher than the other studies<sup>8,9</sup>. However, some studies have shown higher EBF knowledge<sup>10</sup> this may be due to variations in sampling technique, socio

cultural status of study participants, health care delivery systems, and economic status of study participants. In this study, In the present study, reasons adduced for delayed initiation of breastfeeding among 84.8% mothers include colostrum being dirty and thought to be harmful to the child, lack of breast milk and mother or child illness was observed in 19 mothers, this finding was similar to the results found in the study done by Tiwari and co-workers<sup>11</sup> WHO strongly recommends 6 months of exclusive breastfeeding for infants. But, in our study only (64%) knew that exclusive breastfeeding should be given for 6 month. These findings well match with the study done by Maheswari and co-workers<sup>12</sup>. Lack of knowledge is the main reason for this practice than poverty. This inadequate practice can make the child prone for diarrhoea and other diseases. (94.5%) believe that exclusive breastfeeding to be more than six months, and this is a major reason for malnutrition among children (13). So the importance of timely and adequate introduction of supplementary feeds needs to be stressed among mothers. Similarly, 24.8% mothers in the current study felt that they should continue breastfeeding till the age of 2 years. The observations from the present study results clearly shows that there many of the participants doesn't have appropriate and adequate knowledge about breast feeding. Poor knowledge of mothers about exclusive breastfeeding is a matter of great concern, because these practices substantially going to affect the health of the child. So there is a need for the urgent intervention to implement local educational programs for women of child-bearing age. And also recommend involvement of the nursing and social workers in the postnatal ward to encourage and counsel the mothers regarding initiation and maintenance of breast feeding.

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