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Awareness, attitude and practices of breast-feeding among mothers at a secondary care centre in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

Background: The knowledge and practice of exclusive breastfeeding is affected by various factors like demographic, social and cultural. About two-thirds of under-five deaths in India are associated with inappropriate feeding practices. Objective of this study was to assess the awareness, knowledge and practice of breastfeeding among the mothers attending the outpatient department of a secondary care institute in Hamirpur district of Himachal Pradesh.

Methods: This hospital-based, cross-sectional study included 100 mothers who had atleast one live child and attended antenatal and postnatal clinics at the secondary care hospital at Hamirpur collecting data about breastfeeding knowledge and practices using a close ended pre-formed questionnaire.

Results: The breastfeeding practices in terms of initiation, feeding colostrums, timing and frequency of feeding and inclusion of pre-lacteal feeds had room for improvement. The breastfeeding knowledge and attitude was good among women as depicted by 78% women initiating the feeding within first half hour of child birth. 70% women knew about the importance of colostrum.

Conclusions: The mothers had poor knowledge regarding adverse effects of pre-lacteal feeds and pacifiers. Most women had very little knowledge about expressed breast milk. There was a positive attitude about exclusive breastfeeding, frequency of feeding and social aspects of breastfeeding.

Keywords: awareness, breastfeeding, knowledge

Introduction

Breastfeeding is a social responsibility of every mother that has long been emphasized. In 2002, the World health assembly passed a resolution as exclusive breast feeding should be continued till the age of six months and weaning to be started after six months of age with complimentary foods for up to two years of age or beyond^[1].

Breastfeeding has many advantages, like providing for the nutritional needs of the baby as well as bioactive factors like IgA, lactoferrin, growth factors, peroxides and glutathione, which are anti-infective, anti-oxidant and growth promoting for the baby^[2]. Breast feeding is cost effective as well as easily available, despite this, two thirds of the infant deaths in our country are related to inappropriate feeding practices^[3]. Increasing awareness about breast feeding and promotion of exclusive breast feeding can lead to as much as 13% reduction in infant mortality^[4].

Exclusive breast feeding has been affected by many social. Cultural and psycho-social factors^[5]. Our study aims at assessment of breast feeding awareness among women attending our secondary care institute.

Methods

It is a hospital based cross-sectional study conducted among antenatal women with at least one live issue and post natal women within 6 months of child birth. Consecutive 100 such mothers were included in the study after informed consent. Mothers with a child with congenital anomalies like cleft lip and cleft palate, extreme low birth weight, multiple gestation, NICU admission were excluded from the study.

A pre-formed close ended questionnaire was used to collect data from the mothers. Socio-demographic variable, type and mode of delivery, knowledge, attitude and practices of breastfeeding were also included. The knowledge regarding duration of breast feeding, frequency, bottle feeding etc was assessed. Knowledge about advantages of breast feeding was also included. The mothers were educated about correct feeding practices as well.

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Open epi software was used for data analysis.

Results

The mean age of mothers included in the study was 23.4±2.8 years. All of them were educated, 41% were graduates, 45% were educated till 12th standard and 14% were educated till

higher secondary.

Majority (77%) of them belonged to middle socio economic class. 67% had female children. 86% were term deliveries and 14% were pre-term. The incidence of normal vaginal deliveries was higher (81%) compared to cesarean deliveries (19%).

Table 1: Knowledge of breast feeding practices

Breast feeding practice	Yes	No
Breast feeding initiated within first hour of delivery	78	22
Duration of feeding		
<5 minutes	45	
>5 minutes	55	
Type of feeding		
On demand	88	
Scheduled	12	
Pre lacteal feed given	68	32
Colostrum given	70	30
Top feed given within 6 months of birth	44	66

Breast feeding was mostly initiated within first hour of delivery, out of the 22% who did not feed their child within first hour were mostly the women who had undergone cesarean delivery and the ones who had some post-partum complications. The knowledge on appropriate time to feed after a cesarean birth was significantly lower among these women. The duration was mostly >5 minutes of each feed (55%), with feeding done from both breasts, either alternately or in one session. 88% women said that they fed the baby on demand only, only 12% of the women fed the baby even if it was not crying at a scheduled

time. 68% women agreed to have given their baby pre-lacteal feed, honey was most commonly used by some elder of the family. 70% women said that they were aware of the colostrum and had given their baby the same. Rest of the 30% women, said that there was either no or very little milk production on first day or the baby did not latch properly. Top feed was given to 44% of children, mostly to children of mothers who had undergone cesarean section or who reported having decreased milk production.

Table 2: Attitude about breast feeding among mothers

Characteristic	N (100)
Adequate maternal nutrition is necessary for breastfeeding	92
I have confidence and positive attitude when breast feeding	88
My family supports me towards breastfeeding	73
Using pacifier is unhealthy	34
Expressed breast milk is an option	56
Breast feeding can be done by working mothers	34
Breastfeeding is better than animal milk or formula feed	66
Breastfeeding can be done in public places	56

Women had a good attitude towards breastfeeding, 92% of them knew that adequate maternal nutrition is necessary to maintain breastfeeding and hence baby's health. Use of pacifiers was found to be widespread among these women. 66% women felt that it was not convenient for working mothers to breast feed and very few had the concept of expressed breast milk, its storage and duration for usability. Majority of women were confident about breastfeeding in public places.

Discussion

All mothers should have awareness regarding correct breastfeeding practices and right attitude for this even before giving birth. This is very important, not to miss the early initiation of breast feeding within first half an hour of birth and feeding colostrum. This also helps in decreasing the incidence of pre-lacteal feeds. In our study, the initiation of breast feeding within half an hour of child birth was 78% which is similar to the study conducted by Chinnasami *et al.* (80%) and higher than Thomas *et al.* (39%)^[6, 7]. Bashir *et al.* stated that 80.6% women were aware of the importance of colostrum which is higher than this study (70%)^[8].

In our study, 88% women were feeding on demand which is significantly higher than 39% by Kumar *et al.* and 13% by

Thomas *et al.*^[9, 7] our study also showed that majority of the women were aware of exclusive breast feeding, but an earlier study by Bashir *et al.* only reported 27% awareness. Vijaylakshmi *et al.* and Ekanem *et al.* also reported higher incidence of exclusive breast feeding^[10, 11].

Conclusion

The study states that, although the women had good knowledge of breast feeding practices, there is room for improvement, particularly for working women. The knowledge of expressed breast milk and its usage is limited even in educated women. The use of pacifiers also needs adequate education to decrease its incidence. Hence, there is need to revamp maternal awareness and educational programs about infant feeding practices, importance of early initiation of breast feeding, colostrum and curbing the practice of pre-lacteal feeds.

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