A DESCRIPTIVE CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY OF BREAST FEEDING PRACTICE

Dr. Anubha Nema¹, Dr. Sunil Kumar Mittal²
¹ MD Paediatric, ² DM Cardiology
SMS Medical College, Jaipur

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Address for Correspondence: Dr. Sunil Kumar Mittal
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Abstract
Background: Breastfeeding practices play an important role in reducing child mortality and morbidity.

Methods: The cross sectional study was conducted on mothers with infants less than 1 year who came to immunization center for vaccination was included in the study. Total 500 mothers include in this study.

RESULTS: Only 36% of the mothers did the exclusive breastfeeding until 6 months and started weaning after 6 months. A total 59%of mothers in our study prematurely started weaning.

Conclusions: The study emphasizes the need for breastfeeding intervention programs especially for the mothers during antenatal and postnatal check-ups. The information regarding the advantage and duration of breastfeeding need to be provided for the community as a whole.

Keywords: Immunization, Infants, Mothers.

Introduction
Breastfeeding is one of the most important determinants of child survival, birth spacing, and prevention of childhood infections. The importance of breastfeeding has been emphasized in various studies. The importance of immunological and nutritional value of breast milk has been demonstrated.

The beneficial effects of breastfeeding depend on breastfeeding initiation, its duration. Breastfeeding practices vary among different regions and communities in India, breastfeeding in rural areas appear to be shaped by the belief of a community, which are further influenced by social, cultural and economic factors.

Materials and methods
The cross sectional study was conducted on mothers with infants less than 1 year who came to immunization center for vaccination were included in the study. Total 500 mothers include in this study. Verbal consent was obtained. Those who are not willing to participated were excluded.

The pre-tested questionnaire included various factors that had a potential effect on the initiation and duration of breastfeeding practice. The questionnaire included socio-economic and demographical data, details on the initiation and duration of breastfeeding. A pre-test run was done to validate questionnaire for socio-economic status, a standard of living index was used that can be used for both urban and rural backgrounds.

Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio demographic profile</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mothers age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;21 years</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25 years</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30 years</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;30 years</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary to secondary</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mothers employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>working</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not working</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In our study, the majority of the mothers were between the ages of 21 and 25 years old (58%). About 36% of mothers were illiterate and 44% belonged to low socio-economic class.

Initiation of breast feeding

Most of the mothers initiates breast feeding (98%) and the others (2%) were not able to initiates due to separation from mother or due to advice from the mother-in-law.

A total of 32% mothers initiates breastfeeding within 30 minutes with normal delivery and 48% mothers delay of 2 to 3 hours in our study. A total of 20% of the mothers in our study did not breast feed even after 24 hours after the delivery. They were given pre lacteal feed and discarded colostrums. Sugar water, honey and ghee are commonly used pre lacteal feed.

Table 2: Duration of breastfeeding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;6 months</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>59.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;6 months and started weaning</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>36.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;6 months and not yet started weaning</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 36% of the mothers did the exclusive breastfeeding until 6 months and started weaning after 6 months. A total 59% of mothers in our study prematurely started weaning.

Only 6% mothers continued to breastfeed the baby even at 9 months. A total of 76% of the mothers followed on demand feeding practice and rooming in. Cow milk (30%) was most common food used for infants who were breastfeed less than 6 months followed by mix milk and water. Only 16% mothers used commercial infants formula.

Among the mothers who started weaning exclusive breastfeeding after 6 months (57%), cow milk was most common weaning food (36%).

Discussion

Women have a very positive attitude towards initiation of breastfeeding. In this study almost all the women had initiated breastfeeding and continued to breastfeed beyond 6 months.

Benakappa DG et al.7 and Chandrashekhar TS et al.8 also show similar pattern.

Breast milk should be initiated within half hour of delivery.9 The delay in initiation will lead to a delay in the development of oxytocin reflexes, which are very important for the contraction of the uterus and the breast milk reflex. In our study, initiated breastfeeding within 30 minutes of childbirth, which is a good practice.

Pre lacteal feeds should not be given but still the majority of mothers gives either sugar water or honey. Discarding the colostrums is still practiced widely. The colostrums is rich in vitamins, minerals, and immunoglobulins that protects the child from infections.10 Discarding the colostrums and feeding the child with honey or sugar water makes the child vulnerable to infection. Sharma M et al have also found similar practices in the community and it is largely influenced by the relatives and the primary care providers during childbirth.11

Exclusive breastfeeding should be continued for 6 months.12 It protects the child from malnutrition, infection and helps the overall development of child. The prematurely start weaning the child, which may lead to development of infection and may have a long term effect on the physical growth of the child. The main reason given for the mother to start early weaning was insufficient milk, which may be due to the early age marriage (those who were younger than 19 years old) and early child birth. Studies indicate that adolescents breastfeed less often than adults and they hold positive and negative attitude toward breastfeeding that influence decision making and breastfeeding.13-14

Most of the mothers received information regarding breastfeeding from health workers and doctors. The development of counselling skills among doctors helps in conveying the right message to mothers about breastfeeding and weaning practices.15

The influence of the mother-in-law and self assumption about lack of milk for the baby are sited as major reasons for early and late weaning.

Conclusions

The study emphasizes the need for breastfeeding intervention programs especially for the mothers during antenatal and postnatal check-ups. The information regarding the advantage and duration of breastfeeding need to be provided for the community.
as a whole. Practices such as discarding the colostrum and early or late weaning should be discouraged and community based health education programs is needed.

References

9. WHO and UNICEF. Ten steps to promote successful breastfeeding. Mother and child health division Geneva: 1989