



**KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE AND BREASTFEEDING PRACTICES AMONG POSTNATAL  
MOTHERS IN A SECONDARY CARE CENTRE: A CROSS SECTIONAL STUDY**

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Article Received on 19/12/2022

Article Revised on 08/01/2023

Article Accepted on 29/01/2023

**ABSTRACT**

**Background:** Breast feeding is physiological and ideal way of feeding the infant. It offers complete nutrition, early protection against illness, and promotes growth and development of the infant. This study aims at assessing the basic knowledge and attitude toward breastfeeding in postnatal mothers in a secondary care centre. **Methods:** This study was conducted over a period of 3 months from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2021 till 31<sup>st</sup> June, 2021 at civil hospital, Palampur, Himachal Pradesh. The knowledge and attitude of mothers was assessed using a structured questionnaire. Sociodemographic profile, mode of delivery and breastfeeding practices were recorded. **Results:** A total of 300 lactating females were included in the study. Majority of mothers (68%) were in the age group of 21-25 years. 30% of the females were illiterate, 72% were homemakers, 54% belonged to nuclear family and only 22% belonged to urban population. Out of 300 mothers 80% females had knowledge regarding timing of initiation of breastfeeding, 72% had knowledge regarding colostrum feed and 40% had knowledge regarding exclusive breastfeeding. **Conclusions:** In a developing country like India where vast majority of population do not have enough resources breastfeeding is a pivotal factor between life and death of infants. Mothers had an average knowledge regarding breastfeeding and there is a need for individual “breastfeeding counselling, training and health education on nutrition” to the mother by health workers which should be started from the antenatal period itself.

**KEYWORDS:** breastfeeding, attitude, knowledge, mothers.

**INTRODUCTION**

Breastfeeding is a basic human activity, vital to infant and maternal health and of immense economic value to households and societies.<sup>[1]</sup> Early initiation of breastfeeding; immediately after birth, preferably within one hour, exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) for the first six months of life i.e. 180 days, timely introduction of complementary foods (solid, semisolid after the age of six months, continued breastfeeding for 2 years or beyond, age appropriate complementary feeding for children 6-23 months, while continuing breastfeeding, active feeding for children during and after illness are recommended.<sup>[2]</sup> EBF for six months is important for health of both the mother as well as the growing infant. The risk of mortality due to diarrhoea and other infection (like pneumonia) can increase many fold in infants who are either partially breastfed or not breastfed at all.<sup>[3]</sup> Breastfeeding practices have declined worldwide in recent years as a result of urbanization, socio-economic reasons, changes in living patterns, advertisements, marketing of infant milk formulae, and maternal employment outside the home.<sup>[4]</sup> In India, breastfeeding practices are influenced by rural/urban residence,

cultural, socio-economic factors, psychological status, religious value and literacy level, and mother’s employment status.<sup>[5]</sup> The main source of information to mothers is through family and friends, which is often inadequate.<sup>[6]</sup> Hence, it is necessary that lactating mothers should have a positive attitude, adequate knowledge and appropriate practices of breastfeeding that can help in optimising both maternal and child health.<sup>[7]</sup>

**AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the study were to study the knowledge, attitude and practice of breastfeeding among postnatal mothers and to study the demographic and socio-economic factors associated with breastfeeding practices.

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

A cross sectional study was conducted for a period of 3 months from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2021 till 31<sup>st</sup> June, 2021 in the postnatal ward of Civil Hospital, Palampur, Himachal Pradesh. Sample size was 300, calculated using the formula  $n = z^2 pq/d^2$ , where  $z=1.96$ ,  $p$  is the number of deliveries conducted at the hospital,  $q=1-p$  and  $d=95\%$

confidence interval. After obtaining informed consent required information was collected by using a pre-tested semi-structured questionnaire. Scoring of the responses to questions was done. Score of 1 was given for the correct response and 0 for a wrong response. The total score was calculated for each mother. If any mother was found to have a lack of knowledge, negative attitude, and abnormal practice of breastfeeding, they were educated regarding breastfeeding. Data was entered into Microsoft Excel and analysed by SPSS version 20.0.

## RESULTS

A total of 300 postnatal mothers were included in the study. Among the socio demographic factors studied majority of the mothers belonged to rural background (78%), were in the age group of 20-25 years (68%), had only primary education (35%), were homemakers (72%) and lived in a nuclear family (54%) (Table 1). There were 80% of the mothers with vaginal delivery and 70% of the mothers with caesarean section who had knowledge regarding initiation of breastfeeding. Among the demographic factors studied, statistically significant correlation was observed between literacy rate, family type and breastfeeding knowledge ( $p < 0.005$ ). A total of 72% mothers had knowledge regarding colostrum feeds, 40% regarding duration of EBF and 50% had knowledge on technique of expressed breastfeeding. A significant correlation also existed between literacy rate and initiation of breastfeeding, feeding of colostrum, and avoidance of pre-lacteal feeds (Table 3). A total of 25% of mothers initiated breastfeeding within 1 hour. There were only 18% of mothers who gave colostrum to their babies, which may be attributed to poor attitude and practices among postnatal mothers (Table 2). There were a total of 66 mothers who had lower segment caesarean section (LSCS) amongst whom only 5 mothers (7.6%) started breastfeeding within 1 hour of life, 22 started breastfeeding within 1-4 hour and 39 mothers started breastfeeding after 4 hours of life. This is in contrast to patients who had normal vaginal delivery wherein 70 females (29.9%) started breastfeeding within 1 hour of life.

**Table 1: socio-demographic characters.**

Demographic variable	group	Number (%)
Age in years	<19 years	21(7%)
	20-25	204(68%)
	26-30	45(15%)
	>31	30(10%)
Education	Illiterate	90(30%)
	Primary	105(35%)
	Secondary	60(20%)
	Graduation and above	45(15%)
Working status	working	84(28%)
	Non-working	216(72%)
Background	Rural	234(78%)
	Urban	66(22%)
Family type	Joint	138(46%)

	Nuclear	162(54%)
Mode of delivery	Normal	234(78%)
	Caesarean	66(22%)

**Table 2: Indicators of breastfeeding.**

Breastfeeding indicator	Group	Number (%)
Timing of initiation (hour)	<1hr	75(25%)
	1-4hr	105(35%)
	>4hr	120(40%)
Pre-lacteal feeds	Given	75(25%)
	Not given	225(75%)
Colostrum	Given	54(18%)
	Not given	246(82%)
Timing of starting complementary feeds (months)	<4	54(18%)
	4-6	116(38.7%)
	> 6	130(43.3%)

**Table 3: Knowledge and attitude of mothers on breastfeeding.**

Factors	% of correct responses
Time of initiation of breastfeeding	
After normal vaginal delivery	80%
After LSCS	70%
Knowledge about pre-lacteal feeds	71%
Water given during first 6 months of life	75%
Knowledge about demand feeds	43%
Knowledge about duration of breastfeeding	40%
Knowledge about colostrum	72%
Knowledge about expressed breast milk	50%
Proper technique of breastfeeding	55%
Knows benefits of breastfeeding	
For mother	55%
For baby	83%

## DISCUSSION

Breast feeding is a fundamental factor influencing long term health of new born babies and infants. Global movements towards protecting, encouraging and supporting breast milk as a part of optimal feeding practices among infants has been emphasized since many years however there is incongruence between what is recommended and what is practiced in reality. In the present study, 68% of the study population were between 20 and 25 years, which were similar to the study done by Divyarani and Patil (67%)<sup>[8]</sup> and that observed by Rudrappa et al. (60%).<sup>[9]</sup> Only 25% of the babies in the present study were breastfed within 1 hour which was comparable to the study done by Rudrappa et al (28.5%).<sup>[9]</sup> but less when compared to study done by Shommo and Al-Shubrumi (70%).<sup>[10]</sup> A total of 25% of the babies in the present study were given pre-lacteal feeds by the mother which was comparable to study done

by Tadele et al. (22.6%).<sup>[11]</sup> In the present study, only 18% of the babies were fed with colostrum, which was similar to study done by Rudrappa et al (18%).<sup>[9]</sup> Knowledge about importance of colostrum was known by 72% of the mothers which was similar to study by Chinnasami et al (75%)<sup>[12]</sup> and Al-Mutairi et al. (81.5%).<sup>[13]</sup> A total of 71% mothers knew that pre-lacteal feeds should not be given to babies, and similar results were observed in the study done by Alamirew et al. (76%).<sup>[14]</sup> and Rudrappa et al (74%).<sup>[9]</sup> There were 40% of the mothers who had knowledge regarding duration of EBF which was less when compared to study done by Al-Mutairi et al. (55.6%).<sup>[13]</sup> Only 35% of mothers knew about correct duration of breastfeeding which indicates the need to strengthen the health education system and breastfeeding practices at our centre. A total of 43% of the mothers had knowledge regarding breastfeeding on demand in the present study which was similar to study done by Al-Mutairi et al. (49.2%)<sup>[13]</sup>, Rudrappa et al (45%).<sup>[9]</sup> In the present study, 55% of the mothers had knowledge regarding benefits of breastfeeding to themselves and 83% to the babies, which was in accordance to the studies done by Divyarani and Patil (50% and 100%).<sup>[8]</sup> There were 55% mothers in the present study who knew about proper technique of breastfeeding, whereas only 56% of the mothers knew the technique in the study done by Patel and Prajapti.<sup>[15]</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It is evident from the present study that the participants have good knowledge and attitude regarding feeding, however the breast feeding practices are not in tune with their satisfactorily knowledge which points towards the gap in the education and counselling of women regarding breast feeding. Healthcare professionals should go beyond the mere dissemination of information and encourage and help mothers to overcome barriers of practicing EBF. Informing all pregnant women about the breastfeeding can be considered as a priority during antenatal visits. Educating both mother and father is necessary so that good support and encouragement from the family brings out a positive attitude among the lactating mother.

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