

Knowledge, Attitude and Practice of Employed Mothers About Breastfeeding

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Children are our future and our most precious resource. After birth the health of the baby depends upon the nurturing practice adopted by the family. The ideal food for the young infant is human milk, which has the specific characteristics that match the growing infants' nutritional requirements. It has a diverse and compelling advantage to infants, mothers, families and society. These include health, nutritional, immunological, developmental, psychological, social, economic and environmental benefits.

Breastfeeding should be initiated within the first half an hour after birth. The first milk is the most suitable food for the newborn. It is thick and yellow coloured, the shastras call it "Peeyusha" (equal to amrit, the 'liquor of life') and western science uses the word colostrums. It is the infant's first immunization. For most of the children breastfeeding makes the difference between life and death and it is the infants' 'passport to life'. Customs, superstition, traditions and ignorance sometimes deprive the child from getting this benefit.

Women with infants are the fastest growing segment of today's labour force. 50% of women who are employed when they become pregnant return to the work by the time their children are three months old. The studies indicate that the women who continued to breastfeed while working, missed less hours of work because of less baby related illness, compared with women who do not breastfeed.

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Breastfeeding requires a commitment on the part of health care institutions, decision makers, governments and individuals in the community to ensure a total baby friendly environment. The variables that may be modifiable include knowledge and attitude of the mothers and these are the important determinant of infant feeding method.

Objectives of the study

- ◆ Determine knowledge, attitude and practice of employed mothers regarding breastfeeding.
- ◆ Find association of knowledge, attitude and practice of employed mothers regarding breastfeeding with demographic variables.

Assumptions

- ◆ Employed mothers will have some knowledge regarding breastfeeding.
- ◆ Employed mothers may have either positive or negative attitude towards breastfeeding.
- ◆ Employed mothers might be practicing breastfeeding.

Methodology

Descriptive survey approach was adopted. The study was undertaken in 14 colleges in and around Mangalore city. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 60 mothers, working in selected colleges having a child within two years of age. A structured interview schedule was prepared to determine the knowledge and attitude and a semi-structured interview schedule was prepared to determine the practice of breastfeeding.

The interview schedule was constructed in two parts, with a total number of 51 items. Part I: demographic variables (11 items). Part II is divided into three sections. Section A: Related to knowledge (19 items), Section B: 10 statements to identify the attitude (Five point Likert scale). Section C: Related to the practice (11 items) on breastfeeding.

Validity of the tool was established in consultation with guides and experts from the field of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Pediatrics. The split half method was used to test the reliability of the tool. ($r = 0.92$)

Findings of the study

The sample belongs to the age group 25-40 years, majority (77%) of the sample were from nuclear family, most (82%) of the subjects were in the urban area, highest percentage (55%) of the sample were primipara. The sample belongs only two religions, Hindu (78%) and Christian (22%). Educational status of mothers reveals that all had minimum of high school education. Majority (76%) of the respondents were employed as teachers. Only 5% of the subjects gained information from nurses.

Analysis of level of knowledge shows that 28% of the sample had poor knowledge, 57% of the mothers had average knowledge and only 15% of them had good knowledge regarding breastfeeding.

Analysis shows that mothers had highest mean percentage (73%) of knowledge score in the area of 'benefits of breastfeeding', which had a mean and SD of 2.20 ± 0.57 . The least mean percentage (24%) was found in the area of 'express-

sion and storage of breast milk', which had a mean knowledge score of 0.48 ± 0.29 . However the total mean score was 2.14 ± 1.65 which was 49.3% of the total score.

Analysis reveals that all mothers responded correctly to the item that 'breast milk is an ideal food' majority (86.66%) of the respondents knew that colostrum protects the child from infection. Only 46.67% of the subjects had knowledge that breastfeeding should be initiated within 30 minutes after birth. 36.67% of the subjects had expressed that breastfeeding should be on demand.

46.66% of the sample knew that, the working mother can continue breastfeeding by giving expressed breast milk to her baby; whereas only 1.66% of the subjects had knowledge that expressed breast milk can be stored at room temperature for a period of six to eight hours.

The finding reveals that all (100%) mothers had positive attitude towards the item that 'breastfeeding is convenient.' 48.33% of the subjects believed that 'you will spoil your baby if you pick them up and feed every time they cry'. 20.27% of the sample believed that 'eating extra food during lactation will spoil your figure, 60% of the subjects expressed that "Feeding with expressed breast milk is harmful for the health of the baby".

Only 46.6% of the subjects had given breast milk as first feed. Twenty-six mothers started breastfeeding within 30 minutes after birth; all sixty respondents fed colostrum to their baby. 36.67% of the respondents had practiced demand feeding. Analysis regarding the practice on expression and storage of breast milk reveals that none of the mother practiced expressed breast milk feeding to their baby.

A highly significant association was found between type of em-

ployment, knowledge scores and significant association between educational status with knowledge score. A significant association was found with educational status, type of employment, and source of information with attitude score. A highly significant association was found between type of employment and practice scores and between educational status, and parity with practice scores.

Conclusion

Breast milk is a natural resource that is too valuable to lose, to ignore it is to promote mortality, suffering, personal, national and economic stress. Currently breastfeeding saves six million infant lives each year by preventing diarrhea and acute respiratory infections.

Many women going back to work decide that the "added stress" of nursing is the last thing they need. Nowadays motherhood receives scant respect and self-respect comes mainly from the success at work. The main obstacle to the continuation of breastfeeding is maternal employment especially in the absence of work place facilities.

The healthy people 2010 goal for breastfeeding is to increase at least 75%, of the proportion of mothers who breast feed their babies in the early postpartum period and increase to at least 50% of the proportion of mothers who continue breastfeeding until their babies are five to six month old.

Recommendations

- ◆ Similar study can be undertaken with a large sample to generalize the findings.
- ◆ A comparative study on knowledge, attitude and practice of employed and unemployed mothers regarding breastfeeding.
- ◆ A SIM can be developed based on the learning needs

of the mothers

- ◆ A planned teaching programme can be developed with regard to expression and storage of breast milk.

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