A Study to Assess the Knowledge, Attitude, Practice and Problems of Postnatal Mothers Regarding Breastfeeding

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INTRODUCTION

The first year of life is crucial in laying the foundation of good health. At this time certain specific biological and psychological needs must be met to ensure the survival and healthy development of the child into a future adult. Breastfeeding is the ideal method suited for the psychological and physiological needs of the infant.

During antenatal period, the mother and the foetus are physically linked and the mother feeds her baby completely through her placenta. After birth, breastfeeding creates an unique bond between the mother and her baby. When the mother breastfeeds, she gives adequate warmth, affection and security as well as food and protection to her baby.

Breast milk the "Cinderella substance of the decade" is nature's most precious gift to the newborn, and equivalent of which is yet to be innovated by our scientific community despite tremendous advances in science and technology. Western world having experimented with bottle feeding for over five decades, now wants to go back to breast feeding and hence the slogan, "Breast is Best for the Baby". Babies need appropriate nutrition, affection, stimulation and protection against infection. Breastfeeding meets these needs and gives them the best start in life. It is an integral part of the reproduction process and its effects on child spacing, family health, family and national economy and food production is well recognized. Breastfeeding is therefore a key aspect of self- reliance and primary health care.

Recently there has been a surge of interest in the relative value of breastfeeding versus bottle feeding. Promotion of breastfeeding is of high priority concern today throughout the world and more so in the developing countries. Series of steps have been undertaken to increase the incidence and duration of breastfeeding.

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Objectives of the study

- To assess the knowledge of mothers regarding breastfeeding.
- To explore the attitude of mothers towards breastfeeding.
- To find out the breastfeeding practices existing among mothers.
- To assess the relationship between the socio demographic data and the problems of postnatal mothers regarding breastfeeding.

ASSUMPTIONS:

- Primi para mothers will have less knowledge regarding breastfeeding than the multipara mothers.
- Mothers living in Nuclear family will have less knowledge regarding breast feeding when compared with the mother living in joint families.
- Primi postnatal mothers will have some problems in breastfeeding.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research approach adopted was Descriptive Survey method. Random Sampling method was used to select the population for the study. Post natal mothers (No: 100) who have had normal deliveries in the selected hospitals of Madurai, not in the medical or Paramedical profession and in a position to communicate and converse in Tamil were included as Study Sample. The instrument used for data collection was structured interview Schedule. In this Study the interview Schedule was a questionnaire that was read out to the respondents and filled in.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections: Demographics data (11 items), Knowledge, Practices and Problems of mothers (32 items) and the attitude of mothers (26 items) towards breastfeeding. (It was formulated after discussions with the experts in related field and on the basis of review of literature).

The content validity was established for the tool. Reliability of the tool was checked by test-retest method.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

The study sample consisted of 100 Post natal mothers, in the age group of 18-35 years. Majority of the study population were Hindus (85%), housewives (77%), living in nuclear family set up (66%).

Overall knowledge regarding breastfeeding in the study population was 47.4 $\pm$11.84 (Range 25-78). All the study population (100) liked to breastfeed their babies and were aware of the benefits of breastfeeding. Only fourteen (14) of the population were antenatally prepared for breast- →

feeding.

Regarding the importance of breast milk, majority, seventy seven (77) of the population remarked that breast milk is the ideal food for the baby and twenty two (22) said that it contains protective substances. Ninety one (91) of the population knew that they should feed the baby with colostrums but only fifty (50) of the population knew the reason for feeding colostrums. Ninety two (92) of the total population fed their babies soon after delivery but only twenty three (23) knew the reason for feeding breast milk soon after delivery. None of the population under study was aware of the relationship of early feeding with involution of uterus. With regard to "rooming–in" ninety five (95) of the population had positive attitude.

Necessity to feed from both breasts each time was known to seventy five (75) of the population. Only Hindu multi para mothers (54) had more knowledge when compared with Hindu Primi para mothers (8) on this aspect of breast feeding (X^2 value is 5.23.p< 0.05).

With regard to the necessity of lactating mothers to drink more fluid, sixty five (65) of the population had knowledge of it. But only twenty nine (29) of the population knew the reason for drinking more fluid during lactating period. Seventeen (17) of the population voiced that it is essential to improve milk secretion. Forty eight (48) had the wrong notion that liberal intake of water by the mother will increase the size of the belly and cause cold to the baby. Sixty five (65) of the population had misconception that the mother should not eat nuts, dal and tubers during the first month after delivery since it may cause stomach upset to the baby. Knowledge on period of starting weaning to the baby was known to fifty two (52) of the population. Sixteen (16) of the population opined that it should be started only after one (1) year and six (6) of the population opined that it can be started one (1) month after delivery.

Sixty five (65) of the population knew how to prevent breast engorgement. Fifty six (56) of the population remarked that frequent sucking is essential to prevent breast engorgement. Multi Para mothers (57) had more knowledge when compared with primi para mothers (8). (X^2 value is 10.5< 0.001).

Regarding treatment of breast engorgement seventy six (76) of the population knew the measures to get relief from breast engorgement. Fifty nine (59) of the population opined that manual expression of breast milk will relieve breast engorgement. Twelve (12) of the population said that hot water fomentation will relieve breast engorgement.

Thirty four (34) of the population had correct attitude of giving breast milk to the premature child. There is significant difference in the attitude between primi (6) and multi para (13) mothers living in nuclear family set up on this aspect of breastfeeding. (X^2) value is 4.27 P< 0.05).

Seventy nine (79) of the population had wrong notion that the mother should not breastfeed when she is pregnant.

With regard to hygiene of the baby ninety one (91) of the population opined that the baby should be changed with the fresh napkin before feeding. As breastfeeding promote better growth of the baby, it should be fed on demand was remarked by sixty five (65) of the population.

As breast milk gives more energy and protection against severity of illness, it should be fed to the baby when he is ill was opined by fifty six (56) of the population while the remaining forty four (44) of the population had misconception that the baby should not be fed with breast milk when he is ill. The reason given by them is most of the babies do not have appetite and not want to take milk while ill.

Regarding Social consideration, ninety (90) of the mothers felt that breastfeeding does not disfigure the mother's body structure. Knowledge and attitude about breast feeding among postnatal mothers, reflect the beliefs and practices prevalent among the women in community.

CONCLUSION

Exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life is probably the single most cost effective child survival measure available and the infant's primary defence against infection. Yet in this fast moving modern world, this fact is being neglected by many mothers, resulting in ill health and increasing morbidity among children. So it is of paramount importance that the coming generation's health and well being must be looked after, right from the time of conception, through pregnancy, birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence as well into adulthood. Breastfeeding is of extreme importance for safeguarding health and welfare of the growing infant and this practice must be preserved, protected and promoted by all means.

This healthy practice of breast feeding is declining in most of the industrialized societies of the world due to various reasons. The time is ripe enough to awaken the health care providers who can have great influence on the family, especially on the mothers on breast feeding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations have been made for further study.

A similar study on a larger →

population with a follow up, to find out the number of mothers continuing breastfeeding and reasons for stopping breastfeeding if any.

- A Comparative study between urban and rural mothers regarding breastfeeding pattern.
- A comparative study between unemployed and employed mothers regarding breastfeed-ing pattern.
- A comparative study of breastfeeding between two groups; those who are well informed and those who are not informed regarding breast feeding during the antenatal period.

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