

Mothers' knowledge and attitudes towards breastfeeding in Thi-Qar City, Iraq

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Objective: To assess mothers' attitudes and knowledge about breast feeding in Thi-Qar City, Iraq.

Methodology: This cross-sectional study was conducted at Hospital in Nasiriyah from January to February 2023 and included 192 mothers. United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)-adapted questionnaire was used. Socio-demographic information was recorded. The mother's viewpoint and intellectual capacity regarding breast feeding were assessed and their general opinions toward breast feeding were evaluated.

Results: Out of 192 mothers, 103 (53.6%) were between the ages of 18 and 20. Most 87 (45.31) had

completed elementary school and had a higher education; 79.17 percent of the sample lived in an urban area; and around half of the mothers were unemployed. The mothers had good knowledge of breast feeding and their attitude towards breast feeding was good.

Conclusion: This study concluded that early mothers' knowledge of and attitudes toward Breast feeding were generally excellent at AL Hussein Teaching Hospital in Nasiriya city, and that these factors were crucial in determining the health of the children.

Keywords: Early mothers', knowledge, attitudes, breastfeeding.

INTRODUCTION

Giving an infant only breast milk for the first 6 months of life without any additional supplements, vitamins, or medications is known as breast feeding (BF).^{1,2} The benefits for mothers and infants are acknowledged worldwide.³ When a baby is exclusively breast fed, other than liquid medication or vitamin/mineral supplements, no other liquids or solids are administered to them.⁴ In addition to suitable complementary foods, starting nursing during the first hour after birth is advised by WHO and UNICEF, continuing it for up to two years, or longer, and starting it exclusively for the first 6 months.^{5,6}

According to estimates, good BF coverage can reduce under-five mortality rates by 13 – 15%, especially in middle and low income nations.⁷ In the entire world, only 44% of newborns receive breast milk within an hour of delivery, and 40% of babies exclusively breast feed for the first 6 months.⁸ The nutrients included in breast milk are well-balanced, easily absorbed, and quickly assimilated.⁹ Infants who breast feed are less likely to experience stomach discomfort, diarrhea, or constipation.² The current study sought to assess BF knowledge and attitudes among lactating early moms in Thi-Qar City/Iraq.

METHODOLOGY

This cross-sectional survey was conducted at Al-Hussein Hospital and Al-Nasiriyah General Hospital in

Nasiriyah, Iraq, from January to February 2023. The Hospital was inaugurated in 1983 with 65,000 square meter site and 400 bed capacity. Al-Hussein Teaching Hospital was specifically chosen since it is the sole public hospital in Nasiriyah and offers medical care to people from all socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds.

The sample was drawn from mothers and babies using the Nasiriyah General Hospital's outpatient clinic. United Nations' FAO adapted questionnaire was used.¹⁰ The study was divided into three sections: Information on sociodemographic aspects, such as mother's age, place of residence, level of education and employment, height and weight, and infant's age. In the knowledge section, the mother's perspective and knowledge of BF were assessed. Ten questions, including what BF is, how long it should last, how often it should be done, how to keep a supply of milk, and how to get past obstacles to exclusive BF, were used to gauge level of knowledge. Each accurate response received one-mark, while incorrect responses received zero marks, resulting in a maximum score of ten. Each mother received a knowledge score based on the total number of questions successfully answered. The mother's general opinions toward BF were evaluated in the third section.

Statistical Analysis: SPSS version 26 was utilized to analyze the data.

RESULTS

Out of 192 moms, 103 (53.6%) were between the ages of 18 and 20. The bulk of the children (n = 116) (60.42%) were between the ages of 4-6 months, and the BMI of the mothers was 18.5 to 24.9 (Table 1). Mothers' knowledge about breastfeeding is shown in Table 2 and their attitudes towards BF are shown in Table 3.

DISCUSSION

Approximately half of the moms had the same body weight. This study concurs with several previous studies in regard to socio-demographic factors.¹¹⁻¹⁴ In the current study, BF moms in Nasiriyah City with infants aged 0 to 6 months were asked about their knowledge of and attitudes toward BF. Mothers may be discouraged from providing breast milk solely to children for six months due to inadequate awareness about BF, its length, and its perceived benefits.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of mothers (N = 192).

Demographic Factors	N (%)
Age mother	
Less than 18 Y	15 (7.81)
18 – 20 Y	103 (53.65)
21 – 23 Y	74 (38.54)

Educational	
No read & Write	40 (20.84)
Primary	87 (45.31)
High school	48 (25)
College	17 (8.85)
Residence	
Rural	152 (79.17)
Urban	40 (20.83)
Employment status	
Unemployed	112 (58.34)
Employed	80 (41.66)
BMI	
Less than 18.5	11 (5.73)
18.5 to 24.9	106 (55.21)
25 to 29.9	70 (36.46)
More than 30	5 (2.6)
Child's age (months)	
Less than one month	7 (3.64)
1 – 3 month	69 (35.94)
4 – 6 month	116 (60.42)

Table 2: Mothers' knowledge about breastfeeding.

Categories	Know (%)	Don't Know (%)
1. The infant's only one food must be breast milk	145 (75.52)	47 (24.48)
2. Understands the advantages of exclusively breastfeeding for mothers	66 (34.38)	126 (65.62)
3. Requesting medical assistance for complications with breastfeeding	173 (90.10)	19 (9.90)
4. knows the advantages of nursing exclusively for infants	172 (89.58)	20 (10.42)
5. A infant under 6 months old should get breast milk whenever they want it	161 (83.85)	31 (16.15)
6. Breast milk should be the only food given to infants from birth until they are 6 months old	144 (75)	48 (25)
7. From birth to 6 months, breastfeeding is advised	111 (57.81)	82 (42.71)
8. Babies can continue to be fed only breast milk while their mothers are gone by extracting the milk, storing it, and asking someone to deliver it to the child	28 (14.58)	164 (85.42)
9. Possesses expertise in sustaining a supply of breast milk	157 (81.77)	35 (18.23)
10. An infant should only be fed breast milk for the first 6 months of life; no other liquids or solid foods should be given.	122 (63.54)	70 (36.46)

Table 3: Early mothers' attitudes towards breastfeeding through breast milk.

Categories	Yes (%)	Not sure (%)	No (%)
1. Having confidence while feeding the baby	41 (21.35)	103 (53.65)	48 (25)
2. Having the baby breastfed on demand feels fantastic	65 (33.85)	85 (44.27)	42 (21.88)
3. Having trouble exclusively breastfeeding the infant for 6 months	44 (22.92)	73 (38.02)	75 (39.06)
4. Having faith in one's ability to express and store breast milk while the mother is absent	68 (35.42)	52 (27.08)	72 (37.5)
5. Finding it challenging to feed my baby whenever I want to	33 (17.19)	35 (18.23)	124 (64.58)
6. I enjoyed exclusively breastfeeding the infant for 6 months	97 (50.52)	65 (33.85)	30 (15.63)

Despite certain limitations, the majority of the moms in the current study had a good level of awareness about BF. Previous studies have also noted such a level of understanding.¹⁵ Mothers had a high amount of understanding about BF and generally positive attitudes about BF. The current study showed that mothers generally had a positive attitude regarding BF.

Although many moms reported feeling unconfident while BF and expressed and stored breast milk while she was away, the results are comparable to those of earlier research.¹⁶ Working mothers who can't constantly be at home to solely nurse the infant face additional difficulties. Therefore, it is important to increase the implementation of programs aimed at boosting mothers' confidence and dispelling their misconceptions about expressing and preserving breast milk.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that mothers' knowledge of and attitudes regarding BF were generally excellent at Al-Hussein Hospital in Nasiriyah city. These factors were crucial in affecting the wellbeing of the children.

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