

A Study of Knowledge, Attitude and Practice of Mothers about Breast Feeding in Children

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Breast feeding is a universal phenomenon common to all cultures. In the last 2 decades, there is a universal awareness of advantages of breast milk. In the western world, there have been increased trends of breast feeding in recent years. On the other hand, there has been decline in the breast feeding in the developing countries. In order to identify the knowledge, attitude and practice about breast feeding in general community, a study was designed in paediatrics department, Mayo Hospital, Lahore. Our survey instrument was a set of 10 questions related to critical ideas about breast feeding. A conclusive study was conducted after pre-testing and results showed that although majority of women knew general benefits of breast feeding and danger of bottle feeding, a number of beliefs were widely held and would tend to interfere with determination to promote colostrum feeding and exclusive breast feeding. Gender based behaviour was also pre-dominant in the study. It is concluded that society should be made aware that breast feeding has not only of nutritional and health advantages but is also vital for infant mother relationship and healthy development of infant's brain and other body parts.

Key word. Breast feeding

Breast feeding is a universal phenomenon common to all cultures. By the last 2 decades, there is an increased awareness of advantages of breast milk¹. In the western world, there has been increased trends of breast feeding in recent years. On the other hand, there has been decline in the breast feeding in the developing countries. The rising incidence of bottle feeding is of serious concern as this is important cause of gastroenteritis and other disease leading to infant morbidity and mortality².

Colostrum, a high density low volume deep yellow secretion, alkaline in reaction and is secreted in the first 2-3 days after child birth³. Colostrum and breast milk in the first five days post partum contains large quantities of immunoglobulin in breast milk secretions is secretory immunoglobulin A (SIgA) which is endowed with special properties equipping it for a role is the antimicrobial protection of mucosal surfaces. SIgA can also neutralize live poliovirus in the gut as well as other viruses such as the myxovirus group, which affect the respiratory tract. Immunoglobulin patterns in breast milk are similar irrespective of the duration of gestation prior to lactation. Breast feeding, therefore, is the major factor in the protection against intestinal infection at least in the first few weeks of life⁴.

Human milk is a complex biological fluid composed of thousands of constituents in several compartments; an aqueous phase with true solutions (87%), colloidal dispersions of casein molecules (0.3%), emulsion of fat globules (4%), fat-globule membranes and live cells. Human milk composition varies among and within women. Changes occur in the concentration of energy yielding macronutrients and micronutrients of human milk. The composition and volume of human milk secreted are influenced by factors such as genetic individuality, maternal nutrition and stage of gestation and lactation⁵.

This study was planned to assess the trends of breast feeding in general community, effect of mother's education and of gender biased behaviours on breast feeding and formulate a counselling material for breast feeding promotion.

Subjects and Methods

Our survey instrument was a set of 10 questions related to critical ideas about breast feeding. A conclusive study was conducted after pre-testing in paediatrics department, Mayo Hospital, Lahore. Our questionnaire was easily understandable to all mothers so this study was conducted over 160 mothers in paediatrics medical and surgical wards, paediatrics emergency, isolation and out patient department of Mayo Hospital Lahore from 15th November 2000 to 20th February 2001. It is mentionable that only those mothers were interviewed who had their last child of age more than 2 years.

Our aim was to establish a pattern of knowledge, attitude and practice of mother about breast feeding in children. No formal attempt was made to indicate "correct" answer to the particular question. We preferred to let the respondents speak for themselves.

Results

A total of 160 mothers were interviewed. Among those, 59% fed their children for complete 2 years period. Although majority knew general benefits of breast feeding and danger of bottle feeding, a number of beliefs were widely held that trend to interfere with a determination to promote colostrum feeding and exclusive breast feeding. Most of important of all are

- the belief that many women, owing to their own poor diet, can't be expected to breast feed exclusively.

- the wrong family tradition for not feeding colostrum as it is considered toxic.
- the belief that breast fed babies need extra water.

In addition to it, gender biased attitude was prevalent in this study and 70% of male babies while only 40% female babies were fully fed. Our study also highlighted that educated mothers fed their children more than uneducated one.

| | n | %age |
|---|-------------|------|
| Children fully fed for 2 years | 94 | 59 |
| Female babies fully fed for 2 years | 35 | 40 |
| | (out of 76) | |
| Male babies fully fed for 2 years | 59 | 70 |
| | (out of 84) | |
| Breast feeding practice in educated mothers | 88 | 55 |
| Children fed with colostrums | 90 | 57 |

Discussion

It has been proved that breast feeding beneficial for both mother and child. It is most economical, promotes uterine involution protects against pregnancy and breast cancer and ensures mother-child bond. For a child, it is complete food to meet nutritional requirements of normal infant till first 4-6 months of life, anti-infective and has immunological properties and protect against infection of gut and respiratory tract, bacteria free, mild laxative and do available to right temperature and no preparation is required⁶.

Our results are in accordance with other studies⁷⁻⁸⁻⁹. In western societies, it is a common belief among pregnant women, doctors and nurses that a large number of women are now physiologically incapable of breast feeding. For the great majority of babies throughout the world, successful lactation by the mother is a sine qua nom of survival. Breast feeding has been the key physiological mechanism of birth spacing and the decline of this natural control of fertility made a major contribution to the recent exponential increase in the world's population. Breast feeding without supplementation continues for 3 to 4

years. This results in an average birth interval of 35.4 months¹⁰.

Conclusion

It is concluded that considerable effort needs to be put with specifically targeted interventions in the training of health personnel and society. Breast feeding is not only of nutritional and health advantage but is also vital for infant mother relationship and healthy development of infant's brain and other body parts. Also to promote breast feeding, mothers must initiate breast feeding within half hour after birth and no formula supplements should be given to child at any stage especially in the period of exclusive breast feeding, i.e. first six months of life.

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