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Dr. Payal Mahajan
Assistant Professor, School of
Medical & Allied Sciences, G.D
Goenka University, Gurgaon,
Haryana, India

Dr. Royal Gupta
Academician, Dept of Home
Science, University of Jammu,
Jammu, India

Breast feeding awareness among urban women (a comparative study of Gurgaon & Jammu)

Dr. Payal Mahajan and Dr. Royal Gupta

Abstract

The present study was conducted with the objectives: To see the awareness level of women regarding lactation; to access the causes of faulty feeding practices; to analyse the findings of the study and suggest remedial measures. 50 women from urban settings of Gurgaon & 50 women from urban settings of Jammu were selected through Simple random sampling technique. 50 lactating women were identified from each city & interviews were conducted by domiciliary visits. Detailed structured questionnaire cum interview schedule/informal discussions were implemented. Pretesting was done before finalized the tool. Data was collected from the selected area, coded and analysed thereafter.

Keywords: nutrition, breast feeding, feeding practices, colostrum

Introduction

Breastfeeding is the normal way of providing young infants with the nutrients they need for healthy growth and development. Virtually all mothers can breastfeed, provided they have accurate information, and the support of their family, the health care system and society at large. Colostrum, the yellowish, sticky breast milk produced at the end of pregnancy, is recommended by WHO as the perfect food for the new-born, and feeding should be initiated within the first hour after birth. Breastfeeding is the optimal method for achieving a normal growth and development of the baby. Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended up to 6 months of age, with continued breastfeeding along with appropriate complementary foods up to two years of age or beyond.

Breastfeeding, also known as “nursing” is the feeding of babies and young children with milk from a woman's breast ^[1]. Health professionals recommend that breastfeeding begin within the first hour of a baby's life and continue as often and as much as the baby wants ^[2, 3]. During the first few weeks of life babies may nurse roughly every two to three hours ^[4]. The duration of a feeding is usually ten to fifteen minutes on each breast ^[4]. Older children feed less often ^[5]. Mothers may pump milk so that it can be used later when breastfeeding is not possible ^[1]. Breastfeeding has a number of benefits to both mother and baby, which infant formula lacks.

A study conducted by Sowmini, P.K *et al* on Perceptions and Practices regarding Breastfeeding among Postnatal Women at a District Tertiary Referral Government Hospital in Southern India. This study aimed to study mothers' perceptions and practices regarding breastfeeding in Mangalore, India. Methodology. A cross-sectional study of 188 mothers was conducted using a structured Performa. Results. Importance of breast feeding was known to most mothers. While initiation of breast feeding within one hour of birth was done by majority of mothers, few had discarded colostrum and adopted prelacteal feeding. Mothers opined that breast feeding is healthy for their babies (96.3%) and easier than infant feeding (79.8%), does not affect marital relationship (51%), and decreases family expenditure (61.1%). However, there were poor perceptions regarding the advantages of breast milk with respect to nutritive value, immune effect, and disease protection. Few respondents reported discontinuation of breastfeeding in previous child if the baby had fever/cold (6%) or diarrhoea (18%) and vomiting (26%). There was a statistically significant association between mother's educational level and perceived importance of breastfeeding and also between the mode of delivery and

Correspondence

Dr. Payal Mahajan
Assistant Professor, School of
Medical & Allied Sciences, G.D
Goenka University, Gurgaon,
Haryana, India

initiation of breast feeding. Conclusion. Importance of breast feeding was known to most mothers. Few perceptions related to breast milk and feeding along with myths and disbeliefs should be rectified by health education.

Research Methodology

The present study aims to see the awareness level of women regarding breast feeding; attitude towards the same; to analyse the findings of the study and suggest remedial measures. 50 women from urban settings of Gurgaon & 50 women from urban settings of Jammu were selected through Simple

random sampling technique. 50 lactating women were identified from each city & interviews were conducted by domiciliary visits. Detailed structured questionnaire cum interview schedule/informal discussions were implemented. Pretesting was done before finalized the tool. Data was collected from the selected area, coded and analysed thereafter.

Results & Discussion

Background Information of the Respondents

Variables	Gurgaon No- 50 (%age)	Jammu No-50 (%age)
Age (in years)		
25-27	35(70)	39(78)
28-30	15(30)	11(22)
Educational Qualification		
Graduation	08(16)	23(46)
Post-Graduation	32(64)	19(38)
Other	10(20)	08(16)
Working Status		
Employed	33(66)	44(88)
Housewives	17(34)	12(24)
Type of Family		
Nuclear	33(66)	12(24)
Joint	17(34)	38(76)
Decision maker in the Family		
Self	37(74)	06(12)
Spouse	02(4)	11(22)
Elderly	11(22)	33(66)

The above table reveals that majority of the women from both Gurgaon (70%) and Jammu (78%) were in the age group of 25-27 years; 64% of Gurgaon mothers were post graduates whereas majority (46%) from Jammu were just a graduate; 66% of Gurgaon mothers were from nuclear family since they

are working and staying alone so every single decision has been taken by them whereas in Jammu 76% of the lactating mothers were putting up in a joint family and so the decision makers in the family are their elders.

Variables	Gurgaon No- 50 (%age)	Jammu No-50 (%age)
Heard of Breast crawl		
Yes		
No	50(100)	50(100)
*Source of Information		
Newspapers	2(4)	7(14)
Journals	4(8)	2(4)
Television/Internet	33(66)	12(24)
Elders/friends	18(36)	46(92)
Initiation of Breast feeding		
Within half an hour of birth	43(86)	37(74)
Within 2 hours	7(14)	10(20)
After 2 days	-	3(6)
Knowledge regarding ...		
Colostrum	50(100)	50(100)
Lifesaving properties	39(78)	41(82)
Anti-infective properties of colostrum	23(46)	22(44)
Importance of breast milk	50(100)	50(100)
Nutritive value of breast milk	36(72)	38(76)
Feeding time ...		
Timely	40(80)	40(80)
On demand	10(20)	10(20)
Age till baby should be fed		
3 months	-	-
6 months	-	-
1 year	50(100)	50(100)
Knowledge regarding sterilization of nipples		
Yes	24(48)	16(32)
No	26(52)	34(68)
Knowledge regarding holding the baby.....		
Yes	19(38)	17(34)
No	31(62)	33(66)

The above cited table reveals that 100% of the respondents had heard about breast crawl; 66% of Gurgaon mothers had such information from Internet and television whereas 92% of the sample had from their elders and friends; majority of the mothers from both the cities believe that initiation of breast feed should be within half an hour of birth. 100% of them

were aware of “colostrum”, ‘lifesaving properties’, “importance of breast feed”, “nutritive value of breast milk” and “feeding time & gap”. 100% of the mothers believe that at least till 1 year, baby should be breast fed. Majority of the mothers were not much aware about sterilization of nipples and regarding holding of the baby.

Variables	Gurgaon N(%age)	Jammu N(%age)
Is Breast feeding beneficial for infants?		
Yes	50(100)	50(100)
No	-	-
Is it justified to give water/honey/complementary food during first 6 months of life?		
Yes	11(22)	8(16)
No	39(78)	42(84)
Do you think offices should provide in-house facilities for lactating women so that they can nurse their children?		
Yes	50(100)	50(100)
No	-	-
Do you find formula feeding more convenient than breast feeding?		
Yes	44(88)	45(90)
No	6(12)	5(10)
Do you feel breast feeding increases mother-infant bonding?		
Yes	48(96)	50(100)
No	2(4)	-
Do you believe that formula fed babies are more likely to be overfed than breastfed babies?		
Yes	22(44)	11(22)
No	28(56)	39(78)
Do you find formula feeding to be better choice if mother plans to go back to work?		
Yes		
No	50(100)	50(100)
Do you believe breast milk is the ideal food for babies?		
Yes		
No	50(100)	50(100)
No	-	-
Do you believe breast milk is more easily digested than formula?		
Yes		
No	50(100)	50(100)
Do you that a mother who occasionally drinks should refrain from breast feeding?		
Yes	23(46)	45(90)
No	27(54)	5(10)
Do you think breast feeding produces weakness?		
Yes	33(66)	12(24)
No	17(34)	38(76)

100% of the mothers were aware about the benefits of breast feeding for infants and consider breast milk to be an ideal food. On the other hand believes that if a mother plans to go out for work, formula feeding is a good choice. Majority of the respondents' i.e. 78% from Gurgaon and 84% from Jammu doesn't believe in giving water, honey or any other complementary food during first 6 months of life; almost all the mothers believe that breast feeding increases mother infant bonding. Majority of the respondents from both the cities don't believe that formula fed babies are more likely to be overfed than breastfed babies though they found formula feeding to be more convenient than the breast feeding. Majority of the Gurgaon mothers thinks that breast feeding produces weakness whereas Mothers of Jammu hardly believes in the same. 100% of the mothers believe that offices should provide in-house facilities for lactating women so that they can nurse their children easily. Overall it has been found from the results that all the mothers from both Jammu & Gurgaon are very well aware of the importance of breast feeding; showed positive attitude as well towards the same; Gurgaon mothers became more aware regarding its value

from various websites whereas mothers from Jammu got such information from elders. All the mothers from both the regions showed positive attitude towards breast feeding practices. But they mentioned that there should be counselling sessions for pregnant mothers so that they are better equipped with such information.

Discussion

Breastfeeding is a cornerstone for child survival and health especially during early life because it provides essential irreplaceable nutrition for a child's growth and development. It serves as a child's first immunization - providing protection from common childhood illnesses, such as diarrhoea and pneumonia, few of the leading causes of under-five mortality in WHO's South-East Asia Region. Breast milk promotes sensory and cognitive development and is an unequalled way of providing ideal food for the healthy growth and development of infants; it is also an integral part of the reproductive process with important implications for the health of mothers.

Although decision to breastfeed and adopt a suitable feeding

behaviour is a matter of personal choice for each working mother, yet it is prone to the influence of her peculiar circumstances. A lack of appreciate information and support from family, workshop and society reduces the probability that a working woman would practice such recommendations. Thus, a breastfeeding friendly environment goes a long way in facilitating successful practice of optimal feeding behaviour.

Counselling exerts a positive impact on the practice of optimal feeding behaviour whereas its lack has an opposite effect. The present study confirms the positive impact of counselling on such behaviour of both Jammu and Gurgaon Mothers. This view is further reaffirmed by the participants' perception as most of them concurred on the effectiveness of counselling. They have been taught that Breastfeeding practices play an important role in reducing child mortality and morbidity. Also they have guided the beneficial effects of breastfeeding depend on breastfeeding initiation, its duration, and the age at which the breast-fed child is weaned Most participants further suggested that counselling is likely to be most effective if provided during the last trimester of pregnancy. It is pertinent to point out here that an additional advantage of timely counselling would lie in its inherent potential to caution working women against the questionable influence of profit driven interests of formula feed manufacturers.

On the occasion of the National Nutrition Week, which is celebrated every year from 1-7 September, WHO calls for special efforts to address the nutritional needs of mothers and infants during the 'first 1000 days' of life starting from conception up to two years of age. Promoting and supporting exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months, and continued breastfeeding until age 2 or beyond is of crucial importance to achieve this goal.

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