



Original Article

Breast Feeding Practice among Females of Pakistan and Factors Affecting its Practice.

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ABSTRACT

The duration of breastfeeding has reduced in Pakistan in recent decades. So this analysis aimed to find the key factors that could affect breastfeeding among mothers. The reasons that affect a mother's decision to shift towards formula milk were analyzed. **Objective:** The study aimed to find the factors that have any impact on breastfeeding practice by the mothers. **Methods:** A cross-sectional phenomenological technique was used to find the mother's experience during breastfeeding. Non-probability convenience sampling technique was used and snowballing strategy was used to select the participants. The analysis was done by using the interpretative phenomenological analysis method. A participant's information sheet was given to all mothers to collect the data for the study. Interviews were audio-recorded so that any data don't get missed. **Results:** Obstetrical complications that may produce a negative impact on breastfeeding practice were analyzed and it was found that 35 mothers complained about obstetrical issues. Moreover, the psychological factors were studied and 36 mothers showed negative emotions during the analysis. Results revealed that absence of support from society, lack of knowledge about breast feeding significance are some of the hurdles in lowering the rate of its practice among mothers. **Conclusions:** Healthcare professionals, doctors, and paramedic staff should be trained to provide mothers with basic education and training about breastfeeding to increase the average duration of breastfeeding in Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan has witnessed a significant reduction in the duration of breastfeeding. This study was carried out to find the factors that are negatively impacting breastfeeding duration among mothers. As per a survey, the rate of breastfeeding has reduced by 2% in the last year [1-2]. There is a lack of appropriate planning needed to support mothers and help them get rid of hurdles on their way. The study was carried out on 130 mothers, interviews were conducted and data were collected by providing them with forms. Most of the selected mothers answered all questions and they were fully aware of the study. In this

study, the factors that affect breastfeeding were studied. A cross-sectional survey was conducted and it was found that the current rate of breastfeeding practice was far less than that recommended by World Health Organization. Most working women stated that they don't find societal support in this matter. There is no supportive environment present at the workplace where they can breastfeed their child without any issues. One of the issues reported by mothers was that there is not enough milk produced by them that's why they prefer formula milk. As per studies, there is a lack of professional help provided to women

related to such issues, which reduces the rate of duration of breastfeeding by the mothers [3]. Another study showed in the case of working women when children are sent to daycare centers, the chance of breastfeeding gets reduced [4-5]. The conditions like obesity sometimes play role in lowering the rate of breastfeeding. Similarly, if the mother is facing health issues after delivery it becomes difficult for her to continuously breastfeed her baby [6-7]. Studies showed that if mothers breastfed their child after 1-2 hours of delivery it increases the duration of breastfeeding [8]. Education seems to play an important role as an educated mother knows about the significance of breastfeeding so she makes sure the baby gets it for at least 7-8 months. Hospital-based practices can also be considered an important factor linked to breastfeeding duration. Mothers should be given proper advice about the significance of breast milk and its duration so that the rate of breastfeeding is increased [9]. As per a survey conducted to study the factors associated with breastfeeding it was found that some health care centers provide their patients with proper lactation guidance after delivery. If women complain about any issue related to lactation, a pediatrician's visit solves her problem [10]. Therefore, there is a need of the hour to make effective measures and to build a supportive environment for lactating women so that they can achieve their breastfeeding goal easily. Stopping breastfeeding earlier than planned was merely because of un supportive family and negative comments from society. It was observed that lack of support from family and illiteracy has played role in lowering the duration of breastfeeding.

METHODS

This is a cross-sectional study conducted on mothers that visited tertiary care units Shaikh Zayed Hospital, Rahim Yar Khan and Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, Karachi for one year from January 2021 to December 2021. The study was carried out on 130 mothers, semi-structured interviews were conducted and forms containing all the questions regarding lactation and related issues were given to the mothers. Non-probability convenience sampling technique was used to select women for the study. Mothers that had a baby of fewer than 2 years of age were selected for the study. The participants answered all the questions and data was later on used to find the factors that could be linked with decreased breastfeeding in Pakistan. The breastfeeding experience of mothers was analyzed by an interpretative approach. Interviews were semi-structured and were conducted on 130 mothers that visited tertiary care hospitals for one year. All the characteristics of the mothers such as education, age, employment status, and socioeconomic status, were studied. The experience of

mothers at the hospital, the family support they are getting, and the facilities they get at their workplace regarding breastfeeding were also studied. The data related to the calorie intake of the mother were also collected.

RESULTS

There were 130 women included in the study. The mean age of the women was 30 years \pm 4.5 years. Among these 130 women, there were 43% that were first-time mothers. 80% of the women went through vaginal delivery and 20% had to go through C-section. 10% of women were included in the obese category. There were 37% that continued their breastfeeding to 8 months after the delivery. The continuation of breastfeeding was more successful in cases where breastfeeding started within 1-2 hours of birth. Several social factors were studied to find the factors affecting breastfeeding. The age of the mother, the socio-economic status of the family, the education level of the mother and father, exercise habits of the mother, and calorie intake by the mother are some of the features that were taken into consideration.

Social demographic factors	Total no. of patients	Percentage
House-hold income		
Upper middle class	31	23%
Middle class	50	38%
Lower middle class	49	37%
Mother's education		
Middle	35	26%
College graduate	70	53%
University graduate	25	19%
Father's level of education		
Middle	37	28%
College graduate	64	49%
University graduate	29	22%
Mother's employment status		
Full-time	40	37%
Self employed	10	7%
Housewife or unemployed	80	61%
Maternal lifestyle		
Calorie intake on daily basis / 1000 kcal	70	53%
Exercise habits		
No exercise habits	84	64%
At least 10 minutes exercise daily	46	35%
Child condition getting disturbed because of breast feeding		
Absent	107	82%
Present	23	17%

Table 1: Social factors affecting breast feeding

Maternal factors that could affect breastfeeding were also studied. Body mass index was calculated for each mother, mostly the mothers had BMI values greater than 25 kg/m²(n=74). Obstetrical complications that may produce a negative impact on breastfeeding practice were also

analyzed and it was found that in almost 95 mothers there were no such issues found, however, 35 mothers complained about obstetrical issues. Moreover, the psychological factors that may have a negative impact on breastfeeding were also studied and data revealed that there were 36 mothers that showed negative emotions during the analysis.

Maternal physical factors	Total no. of patients	Percentage
Body mass index score		
18.5-25 kg/m ²	24	18%
Less than 18.5-25 kg/m ²	32	24%
Greater than 25 kg/m ²	74	56%
Obstetrical complications		
Absent	95	72%
Present	35	24%
Maternal psychological factors		
Negative emotions present	36	27%
Negative emotions absent	94	73%
Medical issues		
Vaginal delivery	85	65%
Caesarean	45	34%
Treatment for infertility		
Present	31	23%
Absent	99	76%

Table 2: Physical factors affecting breast feeding among mothers

DISCUSSION

This study highlights the factors affecting breastfeeding. Breastfeeding plays a significant role on the health of children. As per studies, 36% of the mothers are giving breastfeed to their children for at least 6 months. Several factors are generally linked to breastfeeding such as ethnicity, race, etc. As per studies, the lowest breastfeeding practice was observed among the black population as compared to white [11-12]. In this study, ethnicity was excluded and was not included as a factor affecting breastfeeding. In our study, it was found that among 45 cases of cesarean, most of the women were not giving proper breastfeeding to their children. As per studies, a cesarean operation halts breastfeeding for a short period after delivery but the mother can start it once she is recovered. In some cases, where the child was taken directly to the nursery for medical help, was unable to get the mother feed if the mother was also not healed yet. In such a scenario, the breastfeeding was disturbed for a shorter period of time [13]. As per data obtained from mothers, it was found that some of the factors hindering breastfeeding were obesity, presence of domestic violence, low income, etc. In our study 50 women were employed, among them, 40 had private jobs and 10 were self-employed. The breastfeeding rate was much reduced in working women as compared to housewives. The education of the mother seems to have an important impact on giving proper breastfeeding time to the child.

According to the literature educated mothers had an idea about the benefits and significance of breastfeeding that's why their child gets breastfeeding for at least 6 months as compared to uneducated women [14-15]. In our study, 64 women were college graduates and 37 had middle school education. The mothers that got 18 weeks of maternity leave had more time to focus on their child as compared to mothers who went straight to work after one or two weeks of delivery. There were some mothers that believed in providing their child with proper breastfeeding but still they were unable to do so the tension that originates because of multiple factors and several concerns stop them from doing so. The mothers that are juggling between their studies or jobs and being a new mother stop breastfeeding their child earlier than it is needed [16]. Some of the mothers in our study complained about their children not sleeping properly or having some health issues after breastfeeding so they start using formula milk instead. Social support from family can prove to be a great help for the mothers and it can give them the confidence to complete their child's breastfeeding duration. The staff of healthcare centers, doctors, and other healthcare professionals should give guidance about this matter [17-18]. If they will provide mothers with basic knowledge about the significance of breastfeeding, the initiation, and its duration it will help them understand better about its significance. As per studies, it was found that the unfriendly and non-cooperative environment at the workplace also proves to be a barrier to breast feeding [19]. As per studies, it was found that mothers who encounter any medical issue related to breastfeeding such as sore nipples don't visit the hospital, they just quit it and start using formula milk instead [20]. On inquiry these mothers told the doctors that they didn't find the issue as such important and they have trust on formula milk. Some of the mothers reported that the household burden and the responsibility to take care of other kids as well make it difficult for them to provide continuous breastfeeding to their children. As per studies if mothers are helped to manage the psychological burdens and postpartum depression they will be able to provide their child with breastfeeding for an appropriate duration [21]. As it was found that mothers that had no issues like depression, tension, and other societal pressure had 4 times more chance of breastfeeding their child as compared to others. As per studies, it was found that the average duration of breastfeeding was 12 weeks in the case of educated mothers as compared to uneducated mothers where the duration was 7 weeks [22]. Therefore, if the mother is uneducated, its responsibility of doctors to give her all information about pros of breastfeeding.

CONCLUSIONS

This study finds that in the absence of support from family and society breastfeeding is difficult for mothers. Low rates of breastfeeding can be linked to uneducated mothers, unhelpful advice from doctors and health care professionals, and unsupportive families. Moreover, working women are most of the time not available to the child so it is difficult for them to do so. If the mother's psychological tensions are managed it can help them achieve the breastfeeding goals. Moreover, the community, in general, should also support breastfeeding and they should be provided information about its significance.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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