



MOTHERS' KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE REGARDING EXCLUSIVE BREASTFEEDING

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Abstract

Background: Exclusive breastfeeding has many health benefits and advantages for infants, and up to six months of age, breast milk alone is considered sufficient and complementary. Introducing additional foods during this period can lead to disruptions and various diseases, negatively affecting the natural growth and development of infants. However, if the exclusive breastfeeding program, as emphasized by the World Health Organization and UNICEF, is correctly followed by mothers, the child's growth and development will be normal, and it will enhance the child's immunity and resistance to diseases. To evaluate the level of mothers' knowledge regarding exclusive breastfeeding for infants in the first six months of life we carried out this study.

Methods: This study is a descriptive cross-sectional study conducted using questionnaires with 200 mothers in the Pediatric Department of Maiwand Teaching Hospital, Kabul City, Afghanistan.

Results: The study interviewed 200 mothers by Epi info Programme, of whom, were under 30 years old 21.0%, 33.1% were between 31 and 40 years old, 15.1% were between 41 and 50 years old, and 20.8% were over 50 years old. Were housewives 88.5%, and 11.5% had jobs outside the home. The main source of information for 48.9% of mothers was family members, 29.3% from hospitals and health centers, and 11.6% from the media. Mothers had three or fewer children 43.1%, while 56.8% had more than

Three children. 23.5% of mothers were literate, and 76.5% were illiterate, 69.6% of mothers were Aware of the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding until six months and 30.4% had exclusively breastfed their infants in the first six months.

Conclusion: More than half of the mothers in the study were between 31 and 40 years old. Most were housewives. The primary source of information for the mothers was family members, followed by hospitals and health centers, and the media. A significant number of mothers had more than three children, and most were illiterate. The majority of mothers had knowledge about the benefits of breastfeeding and practiced exclusive breastfeeding for their infants up to six months due to public health.

Keywords: Awareness, Breastfeeding Exclusive, Performance.

Introduction

Breastfeeding provides essential nutrients and has multiple health benefits for infants. Up until six months of age, exclusive breastfeeding is considered both sufficient and complete. Introducing supplementary foods during this period can lead to disruptions and various diseases, negatively affecting the natural and healthy growth and development of infants. If the exclusive breastfeeding program, which has been emphasized by the WHO and UNICEF until the age of six months, is properly implemented by mothers, and supplementary foods are introduced at the appropriate time (i.e., after six months of age), it will not only support normal growth and development but also improve the child's immunity and resistance. Furthermore, it plays a key role in preventing diseases and complications caused by inadequate breastfeeding or the early and inappropriate introduction of complementary foods [1, 2].

The WHO and UNICEF have consistently emphasized that breastfeeding should continue at least until the child reaches the age of two, with exclusive breastfeeding recommended until six months of age [3]. In a study conducted in Ethiopia in 2010, 90.8% of mothers were aware of the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, and 82.8% of them practiced it. Similarly, a study conducted in 2020 by Masood Rana and colleagues at a hospital in Bangladesh found that 35.0% of mothers knew about exclusive breastfeeding, while 22.9% practiced it [4]. In another study conducted in 2018 at a hospital in Lahore, Pakistan, 80% of mothers knew the practice, and 52% had a positive performance regarding exclusive breastfeeding. A

study in southeastern Nigeria in 2011 found that 88% of mothers were aware of the benefits of breastfeeding, and 53.7% practiced

exclusive breastfeeding. A study conducted in southwestern Ethiopia in 2016 by Tadele N. and colleagues found that 80.9% of mothers were aware of the benefits, and 59.3% of them practiced exclusive breastfeeding. Another study in 2020 by Bala K. and colleagues in Jammu Kashmir, India, showed that 89.9% of mothers had knowledge about exclusive breastfeeding, but only 42.7% practiced it [5]. In a 2016 study by Saffari M. and colleagues in Iran, 80% of mothers were aware, and 49% practiced exclusive breastfeeding. A study in 2022 by Murjia Sultana and colleagues in Noakhali, Bangladesh, found that 51.5% of mothers knew the practice, while 39.5% followed the guidelines [6].

Materials and Methods

This study used a descriptive cross-sectional method and was conducted at the pediatric department of the Maiwand Teaching Hospital. The data was collected through questionnaires and interviews with 200 mothers whose children were admitted or visiting the pediatric service at the Teaching Hospital. The information collected was initially recorded on the questionnaires and then analyzed using IBM SPSS Version 20. The study used a census sampling method, and 200 mothers which determined by Epi info programme were included in the research.

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Received 09 Apr 2020; Received in revised form 01 May 2020; Accepted 20 May 2020; published Online 27 May 2020.

Results

As observed in the results of Table 1, 69.62% of mothers are aware of the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding until six months, while 30.37% of

mothers are not aware. Additionally, 67.20% of mothers have exclusively breastfed their children until six months, while 32.79% of mothers have supplemented breast milk with additional food.

Table 1: Knowledge of mothers regarding the benefits and breastfeeding until six months of age.

Variables	Category	Number	Percentage
Mother's Age (in years)	18-30	209	51.08
	31-40	168	33.136
	41-50	77	15.187
	Over 50	3	0.5917
	Total	507	100
Mother's Occupation	Housewife	440	87.0712
	Outside the home	67	13.228
	Total	507	100
Source of Mother's Information	Family	248	48.910
	Hospital	149	29.388
	Media	110	21.696
	Total	507	100
Number of Children	3 or less	219	43.190
	More than 3	288	56.804
	Total	507	100
Mother's Education Level	Literate	119	23.47
	Illiterate	388	76.528
	Total	507	100
Awareness of Breastfeeding	Yes	353	69.620
	No	154	30.374
	Total	507	100
Did They Only Use Breast Milk in the First Six Months?	Yes	341	67.208
	No	166	32.791
	Total	507	100

Table 2: Knowledge of the benefits and breastfeeding until six months among literate and illiterate mothers.

Education Level	Variable	Category	Number	Percentage
Illiterate (388)	Awareness	Yes	237	61.082
		No	151	38.918
	Performance	Yes	229	59.02
		No	159	40.98
Literate (119)	Awareness	Yes	116	97.48
		No	3	2.52
	Performance	Yes	112	94.12
		No	7	5.88

As shown in the results of Table 2, 61.08% of illiterate mothers and 97.48% of literate mothers are aware of the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding until six months. Moreover, 59.02% of illiterate mothers and 94.12% of literate mothers have exclusively breastfed their children during the first six months.

Table 3: Knowledge of mothers based on source of information

Source of Information	Variable	Category	Number	Percentage
Family (248)	Awareness	Yes	99	39.91
		No	149	60.08
	Performance	Yes	109	43.95
		No	139	56.04
Hospital (149)	Awareness	Yes	140	93.96
		No	9	6.03
	Performance	Yes	143	95.97
		No	6	4.02
Media (110)	Awareness	Yes	109	99.09
		No	1	0.90
	Performance	Yes	109	99.09
		No	1	0.90

As observed in the results of Table 3, among mothers with family as a source of information, 39.91% have awareness about the benefits of

exclusive breastfeeding until six months, while 93.96% of mothers with hospital as a source and 99.09% with media as a source have this awareness.

Furthermore, 78.1% of mothers with family as a source, 90.9% with hospital as a source, and 99.9% with media as a source have exclusively breastfed their children until six months.

Discussion

As observed in the results of this study, 79.7% of mothers were aware of the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, and 77.2% of them exclusively breastfed their children. These findings are in contrast with the results of studies conducted in other countries. For example, a study in Ethiopia in 2010 showed that 90.8% of mothers were aware of exclusive breastfeeding, and 82.8% practiced it. Similarly, a 2018 study in a hospital in Lahore, Pakistan, found that 80% of mothers had knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding, and 92% practiced it. A 2011 study in southeastern Nigeria revealed that 87% of mothers were aware of the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, and 93.7% practiced it. Furthermore, research conducted in 2016 by Tadele N. and colleagues in southwest Ethiopia showed that 80.9% of mothers were aware of exclusive breastfeeding, and 99.3% practiced it. Another study in 2020 by Bala K. and colleagues in Jammu and Kashmir, India, showed that 89.9% of mothers were aware, and 92.7% practiced exclusive breastfeeding. A study conducted in Iran by Saffari M. and colleagues in 2016 found that 80% of mothers were aware of the benefits, and 99% practiced exclusive breastfeeding [7].

Comparing our findings with these international studies, we observe that the awareness and performance rates are lower in our study. This discrepancy could be attributed to the higher illiteracy rates and lower levels of awareness among mothers in our sample. However, it is important to note that our findings still surpass the results of a 2020 study by Masoud Rena and colleagues in Bangladesh, where only 73.0% of mothers were aware of exclusive breastfeeding, and 77.9% practiced it. Additionally, a 2022 study in Noakhali, Bangladesh by Murjia Sultana and colleagues found that 91.8% of mothers were aware, and 99.0% practiced exclusive breastfeeding. This highlights that, despite the challenges, our study presents relatively higher awareness and performance rates compared to those two studies, indicating that the mothers in our study were better informed and had higher literacy levels [8, 9].

Conclusion

More than half of the mothers in this study were between 18 and 30 years old. The majority were housewives. In terms of sources of information, family members, health centers, and the media played significant roles, with family members playing the largest role. Most mothers had more than three children, and the majority were illiterate. A significant portion of mothers were aware of the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding until six months, and most of them practiced it exclusively for their children during the first six months.

Ethical Considerations:

This study is free from any harm, and it began after obtaining approval from the relevant department and approval from the ethics committees of Kabul Medical University.

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