

Identification of Factors for Cessation of Exclusive Breastfeeding among Mothers of Infants

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ABSTRACT

Background: For the healthy growth of a child, it is essential that the child be breastfed exclusively for 6 months and continued up to 2 years of their age. Although the practice of breastfeeding is common in India, the District Level Household and Facility Survey showed that the percentage of exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) dropped from 63% <1 month to 49% under 3 months and 32% under 5 months. **Aim:** This study was undertaken to identify the factors for cessation of EBF among mothers in Puducherry. **Materials and Methods:** It was a hospital-based cross-sectional study where 80 mothers of infants who fulfilled the eligibility criteria were selected by purposive sampling technique. Fifteen factors addressing the main reasons for cessation of EBF were developed. **Results:** The results revealed that during the 1st month, 78 (97.5%) of the mothers provided EBF, during the 2nd month, 87.5% of the mothers provided EBF, and during the 3rd, 4th, and 5th month, 80%, 54%, and 26% of the mothers provided EBF, respectively. The factors leading to cessation of EBF by mothers were not having sufficient milk (77.5%), going back to work (51%), had too many household chores (60%), felt tired due to breastfeeding (42.5%) and baby-centered factors such as baby continuing to remain hungry even after taking breastfeed (51%), baby failed to breastfeed (47.5%), and baby not gaining adequate weight (48.5%). **Conclusion:** EBF continues to be low among the mothers. Strategies need to be undertaken to improve EBF.

Keywords: Cessation, Exclusive breastfeeding, Infants, Mothers

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INTRODUCTION

Exclusive breastfeeding is very important for the infants growth and development. Global data indicate that exclusively breastfed infants are fourteen times more likely to survive the first 6 months of life than non-breastfed children.^[1,2]

The WHO estimates that only about one-third of infants are breastfed exclusively for the first 6 months of life.^[3] Although the practice of breastfeeding is common in India, the District Level Household and Facility Survey showed that the percentage of exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) dropped from 63% <1 month to 49% under 3 months and 32% under 5 months.^[4]

According to the National Family and Health Survey-4, on average, only 56% of Indian mothers practiced EBF for the full 6 months. Among that, 56% of the rural infant and 52.1% were urban infants.^[5]

In South India, Tamil Nadu has reported the least compliance with 48.3% of children who have been exclusively breastfed till 6 months. South India has the least compliance to exclusive to breastfeeding when compared to other states in India.^[6] In the Global Targets 2025, the WHO and UNICEF have set a goal that in 2025 at least 50% of infants will be breastfed exclusively for the first 6 months.^[7]

Understanding factors that influence EBF practices can contribute to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3 by 2030 of reducing neonatal mortality.^[8]

To promote EBF among mothers and create awareness and counseling about benefits of breastfeeding, this study was carried out first to identify the factors for cessation of EBF among mother of infants admitted in a tertiary care hospital, Puducherry.

Problem Statement

Identification of factors for cessation of EBF among mothers of infants admitted in pediatric unit of a tertiary care hospital, Puducherry.

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Aim

This study aims to identify the factors for cessation of EBF among mothers of infants.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was a descriptive hospital-based cross-sectional study. Eighty mothers of infants who fulfilled the eligibility criteria took part in the study. The present study was conducted after getting clearance from Institutional Human Ethics Committee. The tool consisted of two parts, namely, sociodemographic variables and a structured questionnaire on factors leading to cessation of breastfeeding. The participants rated the factor as yes/no response, and more than 1 factor could be given for stopping breastfeeding. The reliability of the tool was checked by test-retest method which was $r = 0.8$. Descriptive statistics were used for the study.

RESULTS

The results revealed that most of the mothers 65 (81%) were in the age group of 21–30 years. Forty-one (51%) of the mothers had undergone lower segment cesarean section. Sixty-eight (81%) of the mothers provided colostrum. During the 1st month, 78 (97.5%) of the mothers provided EBF, during the 2nd month, 87.5% of the mothers provided EBF, and during the 3rd, 4th, and 5th month, 80%, 54%, and 26% of the mothers provided EBF, respectively.

Table 1 indicates that the factors leading to cessation of EBF by mothers were going back to work (51%), had too many household chores (60%), not having sufficient milk (77.5%), felt tired due to breastfeeding (42.5%) and baby-centered factors such as baby continuing to remain hungry even after taking breastfeed was (51%), baby failed to breastfeed (47.5%), and baby not gaining adequate weight (48.5%).

DISCUSSION

The present study showed that not having sufficient milk, going back to work, having too many household chores, and feeling tired due to breastfeeding were the primary reasons for cessation of EBF. Insufficient milk was the major cause for not providing EBF. The study findings corroborate with similar studies which state that nutritional factors played a major role in breastfeeding cessation.^[9-11]

A related study implies that those mothers who did not have adequate knowledge regarding the normal lactation process or the common problems encountered during breastfeeding were anxious of their capacity to have a normal production of milk.^[12]

Table 1: Frequency and percentage distribution of factors leading to cessation of breastfeeding, *n*=80

S. No.	Factors	Yes		No	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1.	I did not like breastfeeding	02	2.5	78	97.5
2.	I went back to work	41	51	39	48.7
3.	I had other children to take care of	30	37.5	50	62.5
4.	I had too many household chores	48	60	32	40
5.	I was embarrassed to breastfeed	10	12.5	70	87.5
6.	I had sore nipples/too painful	12	15	68	85
7.	I felt very tired due to breastfeeding	34	42.5	62	77.5
8.	Milk was not sufficient, so started with artificial feeds	62	77.5	18	22.5
9.	Baby failed to breastfeed	38	47.5	42	52.5
10.	Baby continues to remain hungry even after breastfeed	41	51	39	48.5
11.	I was losing weight	22	27.5	58	72.5
12.	My baby's weight gain was not adequate	39	48.5	41	51.5
13.	I felt pressurized due to my in laws	17	21	63	78.5
14.	I wanted my body back to myself	06	7.5	74	92.5
15.	I felt dizzy at times due to breastfeeding	10	12.5	70	87.5

The other reason was that mothers who returned to work did not provide EBF. Our findings are consistent with the results of the previous studies^[13-15] which showed that only one-third of women maintained breastfeeding after 2 weeks of returning to work. Evidence also shows that sooner the mothers returned to work, the shorter their duration of breastfeeding.^[13,14] For mothers who returned to work, lactation programs that included flexible work schedules and easier access to a private lactation room significantly influenced the duration of breastfeeding.^[15]

This study has some limitations that need to be considered during its interpretation. This was a retrospective study, and the factors about environment and policy were not included. The reasons cited by the mothers for ceasing EBF were based on mothers' subjective judgments and some reasons might be interchangeable. This study was conducted in a single hospital which may limit the generalizability of the results to other populations and settings.

CONCLUSION

EBF continues to be low among the mothers. The reasons cited were insufficient milk, going back to work, poor weight gain, fatigue, etc. Strategies need to be taken such as by providing health education for improving the knowledge and skills of the mother and also family support for reducing mothers' burden, and continuous support for baby-mother-friendly environment.

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