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AWARENESS REGARDING BREASTFEEDING IN FEMALES OF LOWER SOCIOECONOMIC GROUP IN KARACHI

1. **AKHTAR ALI BALOCH**
MRCP (London), FRCP (Glasgow), FRCP (Dublin)
2. **AMBREEN BHUTTO**
MBBS, (FCPS, MRCOG)
3. **SABA SOHRAB**
4th year Student of MBBS.
4. **ZOHAIB MUMTAZ**
4th year student of MBBS.
5. **ALI AFTAB**
4th year student of MBBS.
6. **ZAINAB AKABAR**
4th Year student of MBBS

1. ***Assistant Professor***
Medical unit V
DOW UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCE/ CIVIL HOSPITAL KARACHI.
2. ***Woman Medical Officer***
Department of Surgery
CIVIL HOSPITAL, KARACHI.
3. 4th year Student of MBBS.
4. 4th year student of MBBS.
5. 4th year student of MBBS.
6. 4th Year student of MBBS
DOW UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCE KARACHI,

Correspondence to:
AKHTAR ALI BALOCH
MRCP (London), FRCP (Glasgow), FRCP (Dublin)
Assistant Professor
Medical unit V
DOW UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCE/ CIVIL HOSPITAL KARACHI.

ABSTRACT:

OBJECTIVE: *To evaluate the awareness regarding breastfeeding in females of lower socioeconomic group.*
PLACE AND DURATION OF STUDY: *This study was conducted at Civil Hospital Karachi from March 1 to June 15, 2009.*
STUDY DESIGN: *This is a descriptive/cross sectional study.*
MATERIAL AND METHODS: *This study included a total of 200 females, visiting Civil Hospital, Karachi as outpatients in various wards including gynecology and obstetrics, pediatrics, and medicine and surgery. A questionnaire was designed and all lactating mothers were interviewed in detail after taking proper consent and questionnaire was filled in.*
RESULTS: *In this study the mean age of sample was 31 years, the study shows that 79% (158 out of 200) mothers considered breastfeed to be the best for their child and 50% (100 out of 200) considered 6 months to be the duration of exclusive breastfeeding. 69% (136 out of 200) mothers were counseled about breastfeeding and 31 %(62 out of 200) were counseled by doctors. 72% (144 out of 200) mothers fed colostrum and 12% (24 out of 200) were aware of benefits of colostrum whereas 11% (22 out of 200) mothers considered colostrum is unhealthy for their babies.*
CONCLUSION: *This study reveals fifty percent of population do not have the awareness that the duration of exclusive breastfeeding is up to six months and majority of the mothers breastfed their babies the colostrum (the first milk) but majority were unaware of its benefits.*

KEYWORDS: Breastfeeding, health of the child, colostrum

INTRODUCTION:

Imagine that the world had invented a new dream product to feed and immunize every newborn on earth. It was available everywhere, required no storage or delivery and helped mother to plan their families and reduce the risk of cancer. Then, imagine that the world refused to use it. [1]

Childhood mortality and morbidity has been an issue of great concern worldwide. Especially in Southeast Asia where this problem is aggravated by preexisting poor socioeconomic conditions and unhygienic living.

Benefits of breastfeeding are so great and the act itself is so natural that one might expect all mothers to feed their babies as a matter of course. But circumstances often seem to conspire against this practice. [2]

15 million children under the age of 5 die every year partly from malnutrition. Well over 90% of these deaths occur in developing countries. [3]

It is a conservative statement that lives of more than 1 million infants could be saved each year if all the babies were exclusively breastfed for the 1st 4-6 months of life.[4]

Moreover a country like Pakistan with trade deficit of rs169 billion of scarce foreign exchange to purchase infant formula, a product which actually increases infant mortality and morbidity. [5]

Compared to babies fed on formula milk, breastfed babies are:

1. 5 times less likely to suffer from gastroenteritis.
2. 5 times less likely to suffer from UTI.
3. 20 times less likely to suffer from inflammatory disease of the premature babies.
4. Less likely to have asthma or wheezing disorders.
5. Less likely to have insulin problems, HTN, and high cholesterol later in life.

6. The exclusive breast feeding for six months gives protection to babies against both diarrhea and respiratory tract infections. A pooled analysis of studies, (from Brazil, Gambia, Ghana, Pakistan, Philippines, and Senegal), assessing the protective effect of breast-feeding, revealed that in the first six months of life, protection against diarrhea was substantially greater than against deaths due to acute respiratory infections. [7]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this research a questionnaire was designed for interviewing lactating mothers visiting various wards of Civil Hospital Karachi including gynecology and obstetrics, pediatrics, and medicine and surgery.

The inclusion criteria for mothers were:

· Mothers included should be currently breastfeeding.

· Mothers included should be belonging to lower socio-economic group of society i.e. families having monthly income ranging from 2000 to 10,000 Rupees.

A proper consent was taken from the mothers and questionnaire was filled in detail along with biodata by interviewing each mother.. Analysis of data was carried out by using the software SPSS version 16.0.This study was conducted from March, 2009 to June, 2009

RESULTS:

The study shows that 57% (114 out of 200*)* mothers are uneducated. 68% (136 out 200) mothers were counseled regarding breast feeding and 31% (62 out of 200) were counseled by the doctors.

49.5% (99 out of 200) mothers think that babies should be exclusively breastfed up to 6 months.

Where 72% (144 out of 200) mothers have fed the colostrum, only 16.7% (24 out of 200) mothers were aware regarding the benefits of colostrum. Out of 28% (56 out of 200) of mothers who did not feed colostrum, 38% (22) considered it as unhealthy for child, making 11% of total

sample. With 46% (92 out of 200) mothers, colostrum was the first feed. The above results are illustrated in Table No. 1

Further, 53.5% mothers breast fed within an hour of child birth and 81% (162 out of 200) mothers think that breast feeding is best for child. 74.6% mothers feel that bottle feeding has no advantage. 54.8% mothers feel that there are some conditions in which the they should not breast feed. 50.8% mothers experienced increased appetite while breast feeding

Table No.1
Facts regarding awareness of breastfeeding

CHARACTERISTIC		No. OF MOTHERS	PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS
Mothers counseled about breastfeeding		136 out of 200	68%
Mothers who fed colostrums		144 out of 200	72%
Mothers considering Colostrums unhealthy for child		22 out of 200	11%
Mothers considering breast milk best for their child		162 out of 200	81%
Literacy Rate	Uneducated Primary Secondary Graduate	114 out of 200 32 out of 200 41 out of 200 13 out of 200	57% 16% 20.5% 6.5%
Counseled by whom	Doctor Media Health visitor Family member	67 out of 136 1 out of 136 11 out of 136 66 out of 136	49% 0.7% 8.0% 48.5%
Period of exclusive breastfeeding	Up to 3 months Up to 6 months Up to 1 year Up to 2 years	40 out of 200 99 out of 200 23 out of 200 38 out of 200	20% 49.5% 11.5% 19%
First feed to child	Colostrum Honey Water Others	92 out of 200 76 out of 200 8 out of 200 24 out of 200	46% 38% 4% 12%

DISCUSSION:

Breastfeeding is by far the most natural and certainly the most ideal way to feed your child. This research is done with the objective to assess the awareness regarding breastfeeding in mothers of lower socioeconomic group irrespective of literacy rate amongst them.

Despite the dire need of resorting to exclusive breastfeeding by all infants, a survey shows that only 16% of females in Pakistan exclusively breastfed their child for 3 months[9] compared to China, India and Bangladesh where these values are 64%, 51% and 52% respectively [10] as shown by the graph in Figure No.1

But by exclusive breastfeeding they considered water with breast milk in 45.2% (90) of cases these results coincide with the study done on college girls where 50% considered water with breast milk during the duration of exclusive breastfeeding [8] as shown by graph in Figure No. 2

As suggested by Kulsoom and Saeed, we found that a high proportion of children were breastfed after birth, however, very few were exclusively breastfed for first four to six months[17].

A demographic survey in Pakistan showed that 90% females initially breastfed their babies but either started weaning too early or give inappropriate foods along with it under cultural or religious beliefs or bottle-feed the infant [11]

Those who did not feed colostrums, 38.6% [22] considered it harmful to child; reflects a myth running in our societies.

These colostrum related myths were also addressed in a college, where only 36% girls were sure to feed their baby the 1st milk [12] as shown by graph in Figure No.3. This shows that these misbelieve are still prevailing even in literate people.

On the contrary colostrum is a good laxative and helps the baby to pass meconium. It is also rich in antibodies.

Even those with some right concepts, it cannot be said with certainty that those "right" concepts will be practiced, as it is also known that in this respect nutritional beliefs and practices differ [13]

Benefits of breast-feeding continue in the weaning period as documented in some studies including one from Yemen which

documented that mortality was lower in weaning children who continued to receive breast-milk than in bottle-fed weaning children [14].

In another multi-center study it was shown that infants who had not been breastfed had a 10-fold higher risk of dying of any cause and a 3-fold higher risk of being hospitalized for any cause when compared with those who had been predominantly breastfed [15].

A research done in Gambat, Sindh showed that 79.8% considered breast milk to be the best for their child; compared to our results where it was 81%. This research also showed that 23.5% considered additional feed in first 4-6 months of life has bad effects on child's health.[16a]

Breastfeed is the ideal food for the infant that adapts itself over the course of lactation. [16]

A survey done in government hospitals in Islamabad, Peshawar and Rawalpindi reported that most health care professionals (including paramedical staff and doctors) were unaware of National breastfeeding legislation in Pakistan and infant formula were continuing to flout the ban despite legislation.[5]

CONCLUSION:

This study reveals fifty percent of population do not have the awareness that the duration of exclusive breastfeeding is up to six months and majority of the mothers breastfed their babies the colostrum (the first milk) but majority were unaware of its benefits.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. All females during receiving antenatal care should be properly counseled to resort to initiation of breastfeeding as soon as possible after delivery with special emphasis on feeding colostrum and then continue the practice exclusively for 4-6 months.
2. Mass campaigning by media can also play a very effective role in increasing public awareness.
3. Legislation is to be made effective in regards to distribution of formula feed.
4. Lady health visitors can also play an effective role in this regard.
5. Arrangement of lectures and seminars in colleges and universities on this issue can also be helpful and can surely bring about a positive change.

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Figure No.1
Comparison of females who exclusive breastfeed in different countries

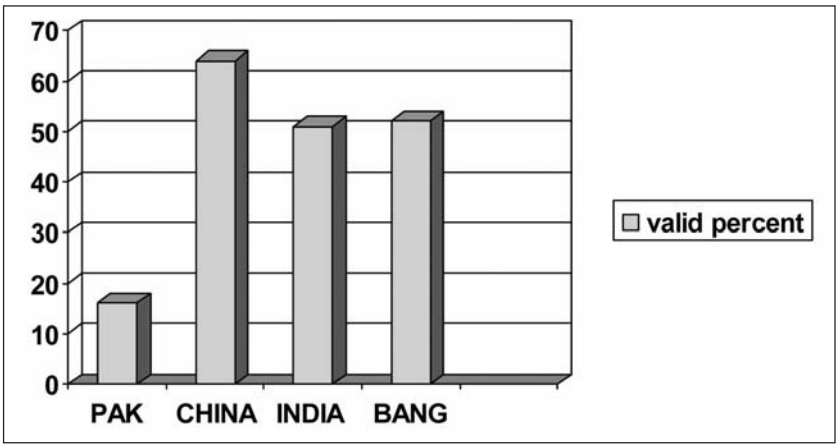


Figure No.2
Comparison between literate & illiterate females regarding need of water during exclusive breast feeding

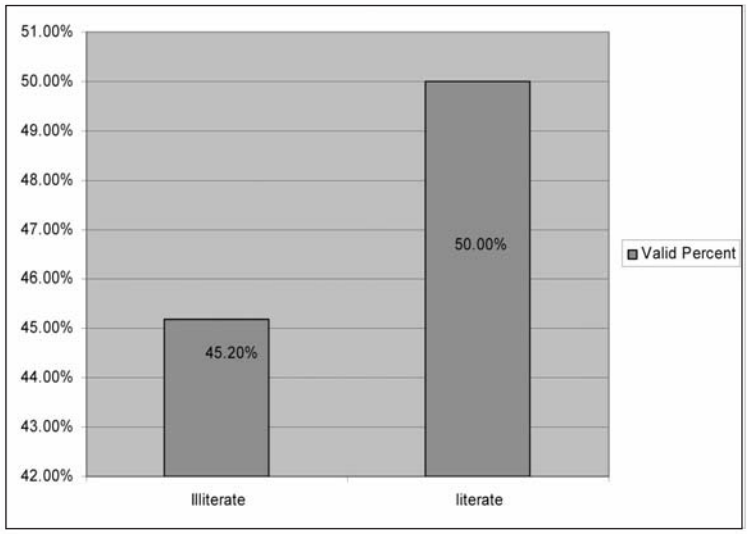
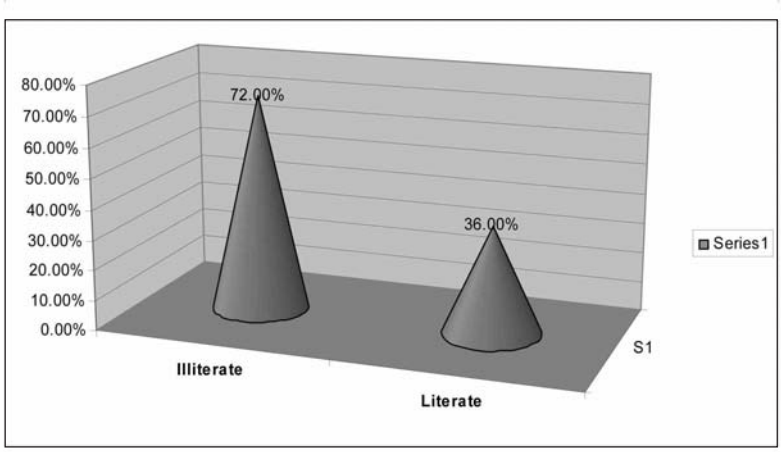


Figure No.3
Comparison b/w illiterate and literate females regarding perception of colostrums



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