

KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES OF BREAST FEEDING AMONG NURSES WORKING IN PUBLIC SECTOR HOSPITALS OF BAHAWALPUR CITY

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ABSTRACT

Background: Knowledge of breast feeding is essential among healthcare providers. **Objective:** To determine level of knowledge and practices of breastfeeding among nurses working in public sector pediatric and obstetric units of Bahawalpur City. **Methodology: Study design:** Cross sectional study. **Place and Duration:** Public sector hospitals of Bahawalpur City from 1st June to 31st December 2013. All nurses working in Pediatric and Obstetrics departments for more than one month were included in the study after taking verbal consent. Information was collected through a structured questionnaire. Questions for assessing level of knowledge were feeding of colostrum, initiation of breastfeeding within half hour after delivery, duration of exclusive breastfeeding, total duration of breastfeeding, maximum interval between two feeds, continuation of breastfeeding during adverse health conditions of mother like fever, diabetes mellitus, hepatitis (B, C), active pulmonary tuberculosis and continuation of breastfeeding in adverse health conditions of children like, diarrhea, fever, respiratory tract infections and malnutrition. Practices of breastfeeding were evaluated among married nurses having one alive child of less than 2 years of age by asking breastfeeding her child currently, initiated breastfeeding within half hour after birth of her child, fed colostrum to infant or discarded, exclusively breastfed till age of 6 months and maximum interval between two feeds. Data was analyzed by using SPSS version 17. Scoring method was used to assess level of knowledge and practices of breastfeeding. One mark was given for correct answer and zero for incorrect. Knowledge was categorized into good if score was more than 70%, transitory if score between 50-70% and below 50% were labeled as having poor knowledge. **Results:** Out of 13 aspects asked about knowledge of breastfeeding highest knowledge was found about continuation of breastfeeding if child is suffering from diarrhea (79.31%) followed by correct knowledge about feeding of colostrum (75.86%) and about exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months (68.10%). The duration of service was directly related with level of knowledge ($p=0.0000$). Our study revealed that 29.16% nurses initiated breastfeeding within half hour of delivery, 16.66% were breastfeeding her child currently, 12.5% Fed colostrum to her child and practices of exclusive breastfeeding till age of 6 months and correct interval between two feeds was not observed by any study participant. **Conclusion:** There was poor knowledge and lack of proper practices of breastfeeding among nurses.

Key words: Breastfeeding, Nurses, Public Sector Hospitals.

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INTRODUCTION

In Pakistan, 27 million births occur every year and out of which 1.7 million children die before one year of age.¹ Lives of 1 million infants in developing world can be saved per year by promoting breastfeeding.² Breast milk is clean, always at the right temperature, inexpensive and nearly every mother has more than enough of this high quality food for her baby. Breastfeeding is the ideal method suited for the physiological and psychological needs of an infant.² Lack of knowledge, non-supportive behaviors, attitude of maternity nurses, inconsistent advice, and minimal prenatal encouragement to breastfeed are barriers to breastfeeding. Some nurses and physicians are less than supportive of breastfeeding and tend to encourage mothers to supplement with formula feed if they experience difficulties with breastfeeding. The key to successful breastfeeding is Information, education and communication strategies aimed at behavior change. For such a promotional campaign to be

effective, attitudes and practices of health care providers must be improved.^{4,5} Hospitals that perform evidence-based practices related to breastfeeding can improve breastfeeding initiation rates, rates of exclusive breastfeeding at time of hospital discharge, and possibly breastfeeding duration rates.⁶

Nurses can play vital role in promoting breastfeeding by informing, motivating, encouraging and supporting the mother during antenatal period, immediately after birth and postnatal period. So this study was aimed to assess knowledge and practices of breastfeeding among nurses working in public sector pediatric and obstetric units of Bahawalpur City.

METHODOLOGY

This cross sectional study was conducted in public sector hospitals of Bahawalpur City from 1st June to 31st December 2013, to assess the knowledge and practices of breastfeeding among nurses working in obstetrics and pediatric departments of public sector

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hospitals of Bahawalpur City. All nurses working in these departments for more than one month were included in the study after taking verbal consent. A structured questionnaire was developed and information was collected regarding knowledge and practices of breastfeeding. Questions for assessing level of knowledge were feeding of colostrum, initiation of breastfeeding within half hour after delivery, duration of exclusive breastfeeding, total duration of breastfeeding, maximum interval between two feeds, continuation of breastfeeding during adverse health conditions of mother like fever, diabetes mellitus, hepatitis (B, C), active pulmonary tuberculosis and continuation of breastfeeding in adverse health conditions of children like, diarrhea, fever, respiratory tract infections and malnutrition. Practices of breastfeeding were evaluated among married nurses having one alive child of less than 2 years age. Questions to evaluate practices among respondents were breastfeeding her child, initiated breastfeeding within half hour after birth of her child, fed colostrum to infant or discarded, exclusively breastfed till age of 6 months and maximum interval between two feeds. Data was analyzed by using SPSS version 17. Scoring method was used to assess level of knowledge and practices of breastfeeding. One mark was given for correct answer and zero for incorrect. Knowledge was categorized into good if score was more than 70%, transitory if score between 50-70% and below 50% were labeled as having poor knowledge.

RESULTS

Total 122 nurses were working in public sector pediatric and obstetrics units, out of which 4 refused to be interviewed and two were on maternity leave during the period of data collection. Remaining 116 nurses were interviewed. Regarding the knowledge 75.86% nurses knew about giving colostrum, 42.24% knew about initiation of breastfeeding within 30 minutes of delivery, 21.55% knew correctly about the maximum interval between two feeds, 68.10%, Knew correctly about exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months, 44.82% Knew correctly about continuation of breastfeeding for upto 2 years, correct knowledge of continuation of breastfeeding in adverse health conditions of mother like fever, diabetes mellitus, hepatitis (B,

C) and active pulmonary tuberculosis was in 14.65%, 69.82%, 28.44% and 11.20% nurses respectively, similarly correct knowledge of continuation of breastfeeding in adverse health conditions of children like diarrhea, fever, respiratory tract infection and malnutrition was in 79.31%, 66.37%, 50.86% and 40.51% respectively as shown in table I.

Out of total 116 nurses interviewed to assess the knowledge only 24 married nurses were having one alive child of less than 2 years age. Among them 16.66% were breastfeeding her child, breastfeeding initiated within half hour in 29.16% respondents. 12.5% fed colostrum to their child, practices of exclusive breastfeeding till the age of six months and correct interval between two feeds was observed in 0% respondents.

Table I: Knowledge of nurses regarding correct practices of breastfeeding (N=116)

| Knowledge of breastfeeding | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Knew about feeding of colostrum | 88 | 75.86% |
| Knew about initiation of breastfeeding within 30 minutes of delivery | 49 | 42.24% |
| Knew correctly about maximum interval between two feeds | 25 | 21.55% |
| Knew about exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months | 79 | 68.10% |
| Knew about continuation of breastfeeding for up to 2 years | 52 | 44.82% |
| Knew correctly about continuation of breastfeeding if mother is suffering from fever | 17 | 14.65% |
| Knew correctly about continuation of breastfeeding if mother is suffering from diabetes mellitus | 81 | 69.82% |
| Knew correctly about continuation of breastfeeding if mother is suffering from hepatitis (B, C) | 33 | 28.44% |
| Knew correctly about continuation of breastfeeding if mother is suffering from active pulmonary tuberculosis | 13 | 11.20% |
| Knew correctly about continuation of Breastfeeding if child is suffering from diarrhea | 92 | 79.31% |
| Knew correctly about continuation of Breastfeeding if child is suffering from fever | 77 | 66.37% |
| Knew correctly about continuation of Breastfeeding if child is suffering from respiratory tract infections | 59 | 50.86% |
| Knew correctly about continuation of Breastfeeding if child is malnourished | 47 | 40.51% |

Table II: Knowledge regarding breastfeeding among respondents in relation to duration of service

| Knowledge | Duration of service | |
|---------------------|---------------------|----------|
| | >5 years | <5 years |
| >70% (good) | 0 | 6 |
| 50-70% (Transitory) | 1 | 9 |
| <50% (Poor) | 68 | 32 |
| Total | 69 | 47 |

$$\chi^2 = 25.130, \quad df = 2, \quad P = 0.0000$$

DISCUSSION

The study included nurses working in public sector hospitals of Bahawalpur City and allowed us to obtain a broad perspective of their knowledge and practices of breastfeeding.

Out of 13 aspects asked about knowledge of breastfeeding highest knowledge was found about continuation of breastfeeding if child is suffering from diarrhea (79.31%) followed by correct knowledge about feeding of colostrum (75.86%), about exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months (68.10%), continuation of breastfeeding if child is suffering from fever (66.37%) and continuation of breastfeeding if child is suffering from respiratory tract infections (50.86%). In a study conducted by Dachew BA et al. among female nurses and midwives revealed that all the respondents knew correctly about initiation of breastfeeding immediately after delivery and three fourth of the participants knew correctly about duration of exclusive breastfeeding of 6 months⁷. This level of knowledge is higher from our findings. The correct knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding for 4-6 months was observed in 74% of the nurses by Sultana S. which is almost similar to our finding.⁸ Our study showed that knowledge regarding continuation of breastfeeding in adverse health conditions of children like diarrhea, fever and respiratory tract infections was good. These results are comparable with the study conducted by Rasheed S et al. in which about 80% of the nurses knew correctly about continuation of breastfeeding if child is suffering from diarrhea and 87% had correct knowledge of continuation if child is suffering from fever.⁹

Regarding the knowledge it was revealed that majority of the nurses (86.21%) have poor knowledge of breastfeeding while knowledge was good in only 5.17% respondents. The duration of

service was directly related with level of knowledge ($p=0.0000$).

Our study revealed that 29.16% nurses initiated breastfeeding within half an hour of delivery, 16.66% were breastfeeding her child at the time of survey, 12.5% fed colostrum to her child and practices of exclusive breastfeeding till age of 6 months and correct interval between two feeds was not observed by any study participant. The initiation of breastfeeding within 30 minutes of delivery had been reported by 31.1% of the health care workers in the study conducted by Ali M et al, which is almost similar to our findings,² while practice of exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months was observed by 35.9% of respondents in the study conducted by Dachew BA et al,⁷ and our findings lag far behind these results as no participant practiced exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months.

The poor knowledge and practices of breastfeeding in our study may be due to the reasons that misbeliefs regarding breastfeeding are deep rooted in our community. Education and continuous training of nurses should amply cover the rectification of their beliefs and practices so that nurses can play their role in promoting breastfeeding by informing, motivating, encouraging and supporting the mother during antenatal period, immediately after birth and postnatal period and improve their own practices of breastfeeding.¹⁰

CONCLUSION

There is poor knowledge and lack of proper practices of breastfeeding among nurses. Such finding is alarming because the health care workers are the source of spreading such knowledge to general population.

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