

Research Article

A study of breastfeeding practices among working women in urban area of Davangere, Karnataka, India

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ABSTRACT

Background: Amongst the many determinants that influence the exclusivity of breastfeeding, the working status of the mother is the probably the most important. Objective of the study was to determine breastfeeding practices among working women in urban area and the factors affecting exclusive breastfeeding (EBF).

Methods: This prospective study included 50 working mother and their babies attending routine immunization at MCH clinic in Davangere. Information on their breastfeeding practices was obtained using a pretested, structured questionnaire during every follow up visit. Data was entered in excel sheet and analyzed using SPSS software. Results were expressed in terms of percentages and proportions.

Results: The mean age of the study subjects was 29.7years. Majority of them were teachers, had availed leave up to 135 days. Around 60% had initiated breastfeeding within an hour, 51.06% mothers had given Exclusive Breast Feeding (EBF) to their infants up to 18 weeks. Majority of them opined that short duration of leave (90%) and non-availability of crèche (94%) were the main barriers for exclusive breastfeeding.

Conclusions: Majority of the working mothers had initiated breastfeeding within an hour and had exclusively breastfed their children up to 18weeks and none of practiced bottle feeding. The duration of exclusive breastfeeding was related to the duration of leave availed.

Keywords: EBF, Working mother

INTRODUCTION

Malnutrition accounts for 11% of the global burden of disease, leading to long-term poor health and disability. Worldwide, by 2010 it was found that about 104 million children under five years of age were underweight and 171 million were stunted.¹ Nearly 20 million children under five suffer from severe acute malnutrition, which contributes to 1 million child deaths every year.^{2,3} Improvement of exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) practices, adequate and timely complementary feeding, along with continued breastfeeding for up to two years or beyond, could save annually the lives of 1.5 million children

under five years of age.⁴ Appropriate breastfeeding practices not only play a significant role in improving the health and nutrition of young children, they also confer significant long-term benefits during adolescence and adulthood.⁵

However, in the recent years, despite the increased awareness, the breast feeding practices are declining due to urbanization, marketing of infant milk formulae and maternal employment outside the home. Hence this present study was conducted to determine the breastfeeding practices among the working women in an urban area of Davangere.

METHODS

A prospective study was conducted over a period of one year at Maternal and Child Health (MCH) clinic of Bapuji Child Health Institute and Research Center, Davangere, Karnataka.

Mothers and their babies who came for routine immunization at MCH clinic were registered and based on their working status, 50 working women with their babies were included in the present study after obtaining their informed consent. Information on their sociodemographic profile and breastfeeding practices was obtained using a pretested, structured questionnaire. Regular follow up was done at 6, 10, 14, 18 and 24 weeks, at each visit the mothers were questioned about breastfeeding practices, their infant's feeding behaviour and problems faced by working mothers when they returned to work. Anthropometry measurements of the babies including height, weight, head circumference and chest circumference were recorded.

Data was entered in excel sheet and analysed using SPSS software. Results were expressed in terms of percentages and proportions.

RESULTS

The mean age of the study subjects was 29.7years (20-40). Based on the type of job, 46% were teachers, 14% were doctors, 10% staff nurse and rest 30% were other professionals. Of the study infants, 60% were males and 40% were females.

Around 70% of working mothers availed leave up to 135 days, as it was provided by the government as maternity leave. The rest 18% of the working mothers availed less than 135 days and 12 % for 150 days.

In the present study, 51.06% mothers had given EBF to their infants up to 18 weeks. It declined to 11% at 24 weeks. None of the working mothers had given bottle-feeding to their babies.

Table 1: Distribution of study subjects based on the onset of breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding onset (Hrs)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
½	18	36
>1/2-1	12	24
>1-5	20	40

Majority (60%) of the working mothers had initiated breastfeeding within 1hour of the delivery.

Only about 50% of them were practicing EBF by 18 weeks.

Table 2: Distribution of study subjects based on duration of exclusive breastfeeding.

Exclusive breast feeding	Frequency	Percentage (%)
6weeks	50	100
10	50	100
14	44	89.79
18	24	51.06
24	05	11

Table 3: Variables affecting the duration of exclusive breast feeding.

		No. of cases (%)	Mean duration of leave (days)	Mean duration of EBF (days)	P value
Broken hours of work	Yes	28 (56)	132.1	130.2	>0.05
	No	22 (44)	124.1	120.8	
Crèches availability	Yes	03 (06)	135	116.7	>0.05
	No	47 (94)	131.1	123.2	
Nursing breaks	Yes	17 (34)	134.1	133.23	<0.05
	No	33 (66)	129.8	116.5	
Shift job	Yes	33 (66)	124.3	132.3	>0.05
	No	17 (34)	132.4	121.2	

Among the various factors affecting the duration of EBF, the difference was found to be significant for those who availed nursing breaks and those with shift jobs.

Table 4: Duration of EBF and the leave availed.

Duration of leave in days	EBF duration (weeks)
90	12.8
120	16
135	17.8
150	20.8
160	18

In the present study, the duration of EBF increased with the duration of leave availed.

Table 5: Distribution of study subjects practicing Expressed Breast Milk (EBM).

Working status	Frequency (%)	No. of mothers using EBM for babies n (%)
Teachers	23 (46)	05 (10)
Doctors	07 (14)	06 (12)
Staff nurses	05 (10)	04 (08)
Others	15 (30)	04 (08)
Total	50 (100)	19 (38)

In the study group, 11 mothers continue to practice EBF in spite of returning to work; of them 7 mothers practiced EBF for 4 months, 6 mothers for 5 months and 5 mothers for 6 months.

Table 6: Barriers to exclusive breastfeeding.

Barriers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Short duration of leave	45	90
Non-availability of nursing breaks	33	66
Non-availability of crèche	47	94
Not allowed to take baby	45	90
Jobs with shift basis	23	46
Perceived milk insufficiency	8	16
Non-availability of Vehicle	12	24

Among the study subjects majority of them opined that short duration of leave (90%) and non-availability of crèche (94%) were the main barriers for exclusive breastfeeding.

DISCUSSION

Mean age of working mothers was 29.5yrs. It is in concordance with the study in Dhaka which has shown that average age of working mother is 29 yrs.⁶ Majority of women (60%) were able to initiate breastfeeding within 1hour and rest 40% within 6 hrs. This is similar to various other studies.^{7,8} However, National family health survey 2005-06 showed the percentage of mothers who started breastfeeding within 1hr as 23.4% in India and 35.6% in Karnataka.⁹

Exclusivity of breastfeeding declined to 51.06% at 4 ½ months and it was only 11% at the end of 6 months which is similar to study conducted by Sinniah et al and Yimyam et al.^{10,11}

In our study it was noted that as the duration of leave was increased, the duration of exclusivity of breastfeeding also increased and it is similar to study by Ertem et al.¹²

Duration of EBF was more in mothers who availed nursing breaks and those mothers who were having shift jobs which is in contradiction to the study by Yimyam S et al who have shown that women who were working outside the home for a long period or shift jobs encountered many obstacles to maintain breastfeeding.¹¹

In the present study, 90% of the mothers said short duration of leave and non-availability of crèche were being the main reason for early initiation of supplements. This is similar to study by Dearden KA et al which

showed the risk of not exclusively breastfeeding was 14 times greater for women who had returned to work than for woman who had not.¹³ Meek et al concluded that working mothers express several concerns about breastfeeding in the work place, including short maternity leave, difficulty in scheduling breastfeeding and finding time to express breastmilk.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

Majority of the working mothers had initiated breastfeeding within an hour. Around 50% of them had exclusively breastfed their children up to 18weeks and none of practiced bottle feeding. The duration of exclusive breastfeeding was related to the duration of leave availed. Short duration of leave and non-availability of crèche were the main barriers for exclusive breastfeeding.

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