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Research Article

THE AWARENESS AND ATTITUDE OF MOTHERS TOWARDS THE BENEFITS OF BREASTFEEDING IN FIRST 6 MONTHS ON THEM AND THEIR BABIES IN MAKKAH REGION, SAUDI ARABIA, 2019

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Abstract

According to the World Health Organization report, 2009 recorded low 'exclusive breastfeeding' rates in developing countries in comparison to the developed ones. In Saudi Arabia, there is, unfortunately, insufficient data available on breastfeeding. Previous studies have shown that the impact of social media and health awareness on mothers in breastfeeding their children. The present study aimed;

i. To estimate prevalence breastfeeding in 1st six months

ii. To compare awareness about breastfeeding benefits with other regions in kingdom

iii. To assess the prevalence of the practice in breastfeeding and its duration

Methods: *A randomized cross-sectional study was conducted among adult Saudi adults. The data were gathered using a specifically designed self-administered electronic questionnaire translated to Arabic with close-ended multiple-choice questions to assess awareness and attitude of mothers towards the benefits of breastfeeding in 1st six months on them and their babies*

Results: *While breastfeeding usually exclusively involves a woman and a child, the present sample also collected opinions from men about breastfeeding in the first 6 months. 163 out of 561 (29.1%) of the respondents were male, while the rest were females. At 5% level of significance, there was no association between the age group of respondents reported and the attitude towards breastfeeding $p=0.062$, which was also the case with the father's highest level of education $p=0.114$.*

Conclusion: *The population of Makkah appears to embrace breastfeeding across ages, education level gender and family size. However, most parents use both industrial milk and breastfeeding methods to feed their infants in the first six months*

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INTRODUCTION:

Breastfeeding encompasses a natural process through which mothers provide their young infants with the nutrients they need to enhance healthy growth and development. Mothers feed their children exclusively for six months, while there are those who breastfeed their infants for two consecutive years. The benefits of breastfeeding for both the infants and mothers are numerous which include protection against infectious diseases, transferring immunity from mother to child, reduces the incidence of obesity in children and reduces allergies and diabetes. Breastfeeding also serves as a normal contraceptive and protects against ovarian cancer and breast cancer¹. Conversely, however, there are advantages of not breastfeeding like; increasing risk of infectious morbidity elevated risks of childhood obesity and type 1 and type 2 diabetes and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) among others (Stuebe, 2009).

World Health Organization reported that in 2009 low 'exclusive breastfeeding' rates in developing countries in comparison to the developed ones. In Saudi Arabia, there is, unfortunately, insufficient data available on breastfeeding. The WHO does not report any breastfeeding data in the country profile because there is no national data on breastfeeding (Al Juaid, Binns, & Giglia, 2014). However, there are some studies were done in Saudi Arabia about breastfeeding and its effect.

A study conducted between February 10 and March 25, 2015, with the purpose of evaluating the impacts of a Twitter-based educational campaign on the awareness, knowledge, and adherence to breastfeeding behaviour for women in Saudi Arabia found an increased awareness among Twitter users of the importance of breastfeeding (Bahkali, S., Alkharjy, Alowairdy, Househ, M., Da'ar, & Alsurimi, 2015).

Another study in Riyadh was conducted in 2005 with the aim of the study of understanding the patterns of breastfeeding practice during the first six months of life. The results showed 95% initiated breastfeeding, but up to (83.4%) started to use formula milk with a rapid decline in lactation duration after six months⁵. A cross-sectional study conducted also in Riyadh from 7 July-22 July 2009, about breastfeeding knowledge and attitude among Saudi women showed that there is a relationship between the level of education and maternal breastfeeding (49.8%). Although most of them preferred mixed feeding, followed by exclusive breastfeeding (48.5%, 36.8% respectively) ⁶. As previous studies have shown that the impact of social media and health awareness on mothers in breast-feeding their children, in addition to the high

level of education will increase their concern (Arafat, Yousuf, & Al-Battawi, 2017). The aim of this study is to assess the level of awareness and attitude of mothers towards the benefits of breastfeeding in 1st six months on them and their babies in the Makkah region under the primary objective;

To assess the level of awareness and attitude of mothers towards the benefits of breastfeeding in 1st six months on them and their babies in the Makkah region

The primary objective will be investigated under the constituent secondary objectives that state;

- a. To estimate prevalence breastfeeding in 1st 6 months
- b. To compare awareness about breastfeeding benefits with other regions in kingdom
- c. To assess the prevalence of the practice in breastfeeding and its duration

METHODS:

A randomized cross-sectional study was conducted among adult Saudi adults. The data were gathered using a specifically designed self-administered electronic questionnaire translated to Arabic with close-ended multiple-choice questions to assess awareness and attitude of mothers towards the benefits of breastfeeding in 1st six months on them and their babies. The sample members were exclusively adult Saudis. The first part of the questionnaire gave information about demographic data of the participants, while the second part of the questionnaire assessed the awareness and attitudes of mothers towards the benefits of breastfeeding in 1st 6 months on them and their babies. The collected data were entered and statically analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program for conducting descriptive analysis. Sample size taken in this study was according to the below formula with significance adopted at $p > 0.05$

$$(n = NZ^2P(1 - P)/(D^2 + Z^2P(1 - P)))$$

Analysis and results

While breastfeeding usually exclusively involves a woman and a child, the present sample also collected opinions from men about breastfeeding in the first 6 months. 163 out of 561 (29.1%) of the respondents were males, while the rest were females. For the mother's highest level of education, 53.5% of the respondents had a university degree or higher, while the percentage with no formal education is 9.4%.

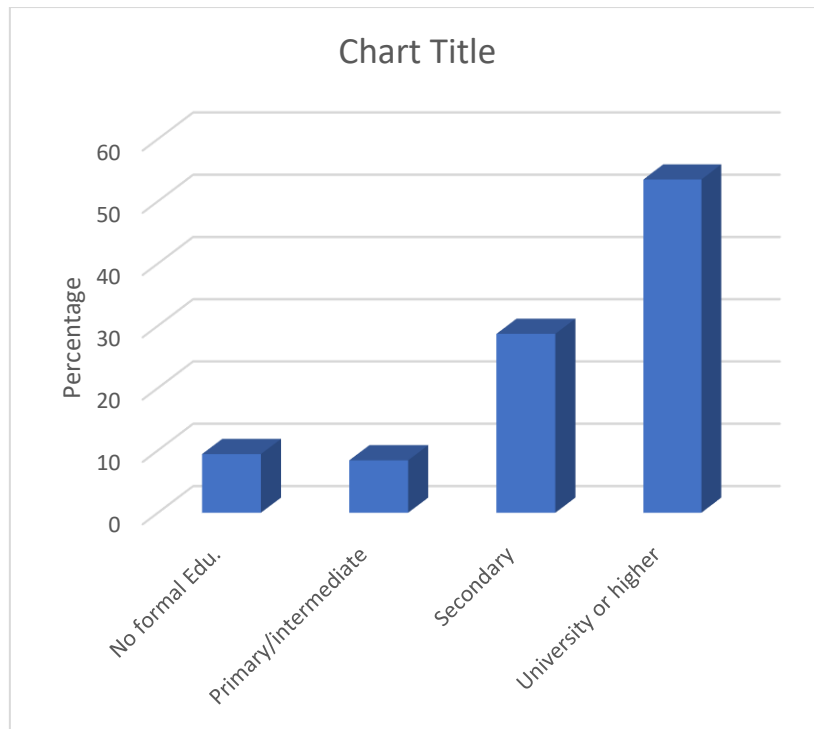
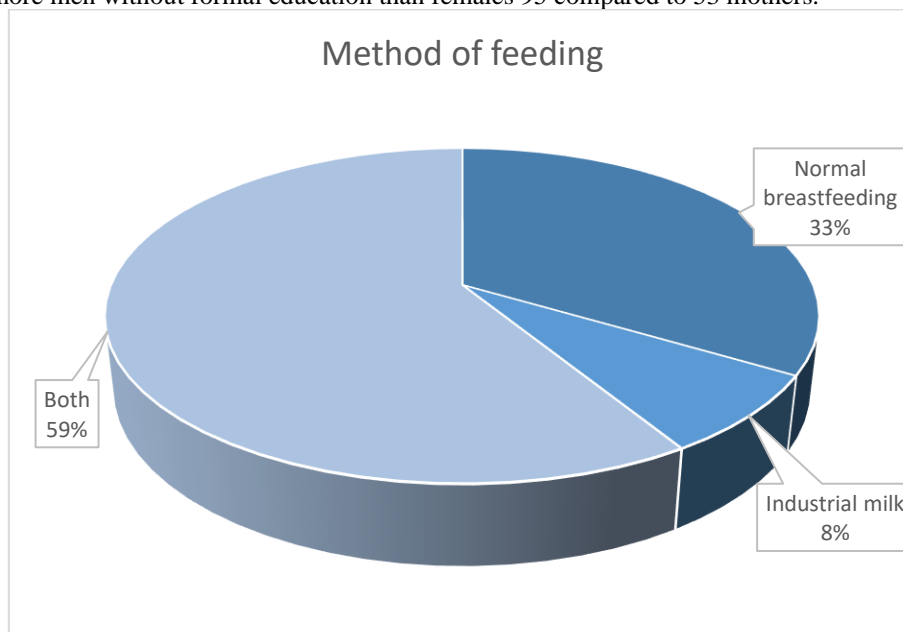


Figure 1: Bar graph of mother's education level

There were more men without formal education than females 95 compared to 53 mothers.



Most of the study respondents reported having children as per the time of filling out the questionnaires, while 8.7% of the study respondents said they had six or more children, while 29.6% of the respondents had less than three children. More than half (58.8%) of the study respondents reported to both breastfeeding and using industrial milk to feed their infant babies. See table 1 for more demographic details.

Table 1: Demographic data

Variable	Freq. (%)	p-value
Age		.000
<18	15(2.7)	
18-25	176(31.4)	
26-36	175(31.2)	
36-46	152(27.1)	
46>	43(7.7)	
Gender		.000
Male	163(29.1)	
Female	398(70.9)	
Marital status		.000
Divorced	16(2.9)	
Married	384(68.4)	
Single	154(27.4)	
Widowed	7(1.2)	
Number of children		.000
No children	190(33.9)	
<3	166(29.6)	
4-5	156(27.8)	
6 or more	49(8.7)	
Mother education level		.000
No formal Edu.		
Primary/intermediate	53(9.4)	
Secondary	47(8.4)	
University or higher	161(28.7)	
	300(53.5)	
Father education level		.000
No formal education		
Primary/intermediate	95(16.9)	
Secondary	70(12.5)	
University or higher	133(23.7)	
	263(26.9)	

When categorized according to education level, father's there was a generally positive attitude towards breastfeeding, where the average positive attitude was 96.65%. Interestingly, fathers with the highest education level as primary education had a 100% positive attitude towards breastfeeding. Fathers with no formal highest education reported that the 92.7% positive attitude towards formal education while 7.3% were not sure. The case of a 100% positive attitude towards formal education was observed in the mother's case. At 5% level of significance, there was no association between the age group of respondents reported and the attitude towards breastfeeding $p=.062$, which was also the case with the father's highest level of education $p=.114$. See table 2 for the presentation of chi-square tests of significance.

Table 2: Tests of association

Variable	Positive(%)	Don't know (%)	p-value
Father Education level			
No formal education			.114
Primary/intermediate	92.7	7.3	
Secondary	100	0.0	
University or higher	97.7	2.3	
	96.2	3.8	
Mother Education level			
No formal education			.007
Primary/intermediate	87.5	12.5	
Secondary	100	0.0	
University or higher	98.8	1.2	
	96.3	3.7	
No. of children			
No children			.010
<3	93.2	6.8	
4-5	97.6	2.4	
6 or more	98.7	1.3	
	100.0	0.0	
Age group			
<18			.062
18-25	86.7	13.3	
26-36	96.0	4.0	
36-46	95.4	4.6	
46>	98.7	1.3	
	100.0	0.0	
Marital status			
Divorced			.008
Married	100	0.0	
Single	98.2	1.8	
Widowed	92.2	7.8	
	100	0.0	
Method of feeding			
Normal breastfeeding			.081
Industrial milk	97.3	2.7	
Both	97.0	3.0	
	90.7	9.3	

DISCUSSION:

The present study was interested in evaluating the attitudes and knowledge towards breast feeding the population of Makkah Saudi Arabia using a descriptive study designed in a cross-sectional approach. Since respondents participated in the study out of sheer will, the study is limited to not being a full experiment in addition to the fact that there were no manipulated variables. Due to non-response in some of the questions presented in the study, the sample size was reduced accordingly to 561 sample respondents who had answered all the questions. This eased analysis and still allowed for analysis without interfering with the statistical power of the analysis. Our sample size is slightly higher (44 respondents more) than the study of Alshelby & Sobaiah (2016) on the attitudes of mothers towards breastfeeding. However, unlike the study by Alshelby & Sobaiah (2016) our sample included men at almost a third of the sample participants. This was so because with female empowerment it is possible that some men have fed their infant children at least once and hence could have had some useful information for the present study.

A clear pattern from the results of our study is that most of the respondents had some formal education, with more than half of the mothers having at least a university degree. Their attitudes towards breastfeeding were positive despite about 8% of them having to breastfeed their children using industrial milk (Al-Hreashy, et al. 2008). This could be due to the mother being medically unable to breastfeed or being that the mother could be deceased. In such scenarios fathers or house helps could have assisted with the necessary information. Most of the mothers from our study were young mothers aged between 18 and 36 as compared to the older respondents and hence the probable reason only 8% of the respondents reported having six or more children.

Our analysis showed a non-significant association between father's education level and attitude towards breastfeeding. However, the mother's education level was significantly associated with attitudes towards breastfeeding, a factor that is consistent with the findings of (Meedya, Fahy & Kable, 2010; Hegazi et al., 2019, Alyousefi, et al 2017; Arafat, Yousuf & Al-Battawi, 2017). The studies sought to investigate the determinants of adherence to breastfeeding in the first 6 months of infancy. Our study findings suggest that the father's level of education might not have much bearing on breastfeeding attitudes of the mother. The number of children one has is also sufficiently associated with the attitudes towards breastfeeding with a higher number of children who have contributed the most towards a positive attitude.

This could be due to the observed benefits of at least six months of breastfeeding from previous children by parents. Alternatively, this could be due to embracing of breast-feeding campaigns and their importance to subsequent parents (Gosadi, et al 2019). People who have experienced marriage (married, widowed, or divorced) appeared to have more positive attitudes towards breastfeeding, with $p=0.008$. This could not be attributed to age since people who have undergone marriage at some point in their lives tend to be older than people who are still single generally. Age was not significantly associated with attitudes towards breastfeeding $p=0.081$.

In conclusion, the population of Makkah appears to embrace breastfeeding across ages, education level gender, and family size. However, most parents use both industrial milk and breastfeeding methods to feed their infants in the first six months. For exclusive breastfeeding, one would suggest more time granted to mothers in order to take care of their infants.

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