

ABSTRACT

The benefits of breast feeding for mother and child have been long established. This study was undertaken to determine the prevalence of breast feeding among mothers at selected clinics at the University Hospital of the West Indies and the barriers relating to exclusive breast feeding. Additionally the study sought to determine the knowledge, attitudes, perceptions and practices of the mothers with respect to breast feeding.

A convenient sample of 120 mothers was selected from the Postnatal and Well Baby Clinics at the hospital. The mothers were interviewed using a structured questionnaire. A focus group interview was conducted with selected mothers.

Results showed that the prevalence of breast feeding was 67.2% with exclusive breast feeding being 22.7%. Respondents who were not currently breast feeding were significantly more likely to give their baby water.

Approximately 38% of respondents did not know how long breast feeding should last for. The majority of respondents (83.3%) indicated that breast milk was the first feed given to their baby. Approximately 23% of mothers had problems with breast feeding and 63% of those who experienced problems with breast feeding were first mothers. Seventy seven percent (77%) of mothers introduced supplementary feeds

into the infant's diet and those who introduced supplementary feeds were significantly less likely to breast feed.

Approximately 46.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed that breast milk alone can satisfy a 3-month old baby.

There is need for mothers and other family members to be educated more about the benefits of breast feeding and the University Hospital of the West Indies should endeavour to fully implement the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative.