

ABSTRACT

FACTORS AFFECTING THE CHOICE AND DESIRE TO BREASTFEED IN JAMAICA

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This study was done to analyse and explain the factors that contribute to the low exclusive breastfeeding rate in Jamaica as early a stage as six weeks postnatal. The aim was to determine the intentions of women, regarding breastfeeding, during the prenatal period, to define the breastfeeding initiation rate in the study population, to ascertain the level of awareness of the benefits of breastfeeding and determine the level of knowledge and the attitudes toward breastfeeding. The exclusive breastfeeding rate at 6 weeks postnatal was to be defined along with the factors affecting the decline in exclusive breastfeeding. The study also aimed to determine the reasons for adding complementary foods by 6 weeks and to identify the most common types of complementary foods that were added. The benefits that women expected their infants to gain by adding certain popular supplementary foods were also to be ascertained.

A cross-sectional study was designed to explore relevant cultural, social and economic factors to determine what influenced the nutritional selection of mothers for their infants. The study took place at 3 postnatal clinics in Kingston, Jamaica where mothers brought their infants for their six week follow up visit. The study group consisted of 200 women. 100 were from the University Hospital of the West Indies and 100 from the Glen Vincent and the Olympic Gardens Health

Centres. Mothers were interviewed using a 52 item questionnaire after obtaining their informed consent.

The findings revealed that i) The UHWI population consisted of women who were more educated with higher levels of employment, a higher socio-economic status and who were more likely to be married ii) The exclusive breastfeeding rate for the study population was 32% at six weeks, that for UHWI was 37% and that for the health centres was 27% iii) The breastfeeding initiation rate of the study population was 97.5% iv) A complementary food was being given to 61.5% of the population by age six weeks v) Formula was being given to 51% of the population by six weeks and was added at a mean age of 2.8 weeks vi) The most common complementary food was water, followed by glucose, then followed by bush tea vii) 28% of mothers who intended to exclusively breastfeed for at least 4 months were exclusively breastfeeding at six weeks viii) 93% of the population had adequate antenatal care, attending at least 5 antenatal visits. ix) All persons at UHWI and 85.9% of the health centre group were taught to store breast milk but only 20.7% of the population as a whole actually recalled the information correctly x) There were consistent beliefs shared by many about the benefits of complementary foods and that certain foods should be avoided while breastfeeding because of perceived harmful effects that it may cause in the infant xi) 59.5% of mothers did not believe that breast milk can

satisfy an infant for six months and this was a statistically significant determinant of exclusive breastfeeding xii) Sore nipples were the most common problem experienced amongst those who had a past experience with breastfeeding.

The study has shown the need for improved prenatal education to change the erroneous perception of mothers to ensure that they understand and believe that breast milk is a sufficient nutritional source for the first six months of life and that complementary foods are not beneficial before six months. Education on the prevention of sore nipples is important and speaks to a lack of understanding of proper latch technique. Information on, and encouragement in the areas of expressing and storing breast milk is needed. Breastfeeding education and support should be extended to the family and the community.