

Knowledge, Attitude and Practices about Exclusive Breastfeeding in Grandmothers of Newborns – An Observational Study

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The rate of exclusive and early breastfeeding in India is only 64% (NFHS 5- National Family Health Survey) even though WHO has suggested exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months. Breastfeeding plays a crucial role in the development of a newborn, not only physically but mentally as well. Most of the would-be Mothers spend maximum time with their mother or mother-in-law who has the biggest influence on counseling these new-to-be mothers. These grandmothers know the benefits of breastfeeding, the importance of a special diet, and proper hydration for good quality milk but report inadequacies in the treatment of breast complications and the need for exclusive breastfeeding till 6 months of life. Which is why we decided to explore the knowledge, attitude, and practices about exclusive breastfeeding among these grandmothers.

Material and methods: A survey was done in Dr. D. Y. Patil Hospital Pimpri, in which 270 grandmothers were interviewed out of 309 deliveries in the hospital over a period of 3 months from July to September 2022. This study was done as a part of World Breastfeeding Week activities.

A questionnaire was formed to ask grandmothers about antenatal and postnatal counseling, exclusive breastfeeding, early initiation of breastfeeding, the importance of colostrum, etc.

Analysis of the collected data was done using percentages and represented diagrammatically.

Results: It was observed that though 70% of grandmothers knew about the early initiation of BF, only 43% of patients actually initiated breastfeeding within one hour. The importance of colostrum is known by only 66% of grandmothers but colostrum feeding was encouraged by 81% of grandmothers. Almost all grandmothers knew about 6-month period of exclusive breastfeeding and it is practiced by most of them. A very minor 19.32% of mothers are counseled antenatally about breastfeeding while 90% of mothers are counseled postnatally by grandmothers.

Conclusion: Breastfed babies seem to have better immunity and development than those fed by top feeds. The awareness about this is much less than what it should be. So, it is important to raise the awareness amongst community through the most powerful resources. So, interventions to promote exclusive breastfeeding should be tailored to the needs of each population by identifying the factors that influence the practice in a given context. Grandmothers have knowledge that has been validated by their experiences and can directly affect the new, would-be mothers and their breastfeeding practices.

Clinical significance: These results indicate that there is a significant gap between knowledge and practices about exclusive and early breastfeeding and more active steps should be taken to change the attitude of grandmothers so that they will more actively and positively counsel the mothers to breastfeed. It is important to raise the awareness and implications of exclusive breastfeeding.

Categories: Obstetrics and gynecology, Breastfeeding, Breastfeeding awareness.

Keywords: Awareness, Breastfeeding, Exclusive breastfeeding, Newborns.

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INTRODUCTION

Breastfeeding is intrinsic to humans; however, it is directly influenced by political, economical, social, and cultural aspects, which are passed down to generations. Though, WHO has recommended exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months, the rate in India is only 64% (NFHS 5).^{1,2}

In the Indian scenario, most of the NEW or 'Would-be Mothers' spend maximum time with their mothers or mother-in-laws. Grandmothers have the biggest influence on counseling these New to-be mothers. They tend to follow advice given by senior ladies at home. Grandmothers have knowledge that has been validated by their experiences and can directly affect the new, would-be mothers and their breastfeeding practices.³ Grandmothers often play a key

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support role but may need updating on current breastfeeding management, that's why we decided to explore the knowledge, attitude, and practices about early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding in these grandmothers.⁴ These grandmothers know the benefits of breastfeeding, the importance of a special diet, and proper hydration for good quality milk but report inadequacies in the treatment of breast complications and the need for exclusive breastfeeding till 6 months of life. We noticed that the influence of grandmothers on breastfeeding can either favor it or cause difficulties.⁵

This was the reason behind exploring this area, especially in developing countries like India.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

'World breastfeeding week' is celebrated every year from the 1st to 7th of August in commemoration of the 1990 innocent declaration.⁶ A survey was done in Dr. D.Y. Patil Hospital Pimpri, in which 270 grandmothers were interviewed over a period of 3 months from July, 2022 to September 2022. A questionnaire was formed to ask grandmothers about exclusive breastfeeding, early initiation, the importance of colostrum, exclusivity, and antenatal, and postnatal counseling. Permission were obtained from the ethical committee.

Inclusion criteria – Interview of grandmothers was taken on day two of delivery (vaginal/cesarean section) from those who were willing to an interview and consented to participate in the study.

Exclusion criteria – Those who were unwilling were not included.

Data collected from the questionnaire was organized in an Xcel sheet and analysis of the collected data was done using percentages. Analyzed data is represented diagrammatically using pie charts, bar diagrams, etc.

RESULTS

Almost all grandmothers were in the range of age group of 50–70 years. Out of all participants, 36 (13.3%) grandmothers were illiterate while 174 (64.4%) had been to school for primary education while 60 (22.2%) grandmothers were having graduate level education.

Initiation of Breastfeeding

	Early initiation	Late initiation
Knowledge	Yes 70% (145)	No 30% (62)
Practices	Yes 43% (89)	No 57% (118)

As per [Figure 1](#), it was observed that though 73% of grandmothers knew about early initiation, only 27% of patients actually encouraged early breastfeeding.

As shown in [Figure 2](#), the importance of colostrum is known by only 81% of grandmothers but is fed to the baby by 19% of mothers after getting counseled by health professionals.

Almost all grandmothers knew about 6 months period of exclusive breast-feeding but only 50% practice it as Annaprashan Ceremony is performed in 4th of 5th month, especially in the case of grand-daughters where the baby is fed sweets or rice.

Also, it was observed that 62% of grandmothers give GHUTI/ Honey to a newborn as a ritual in the 1st week, without doctors and staff knowing it. Though all grandmothers knew that counseling is

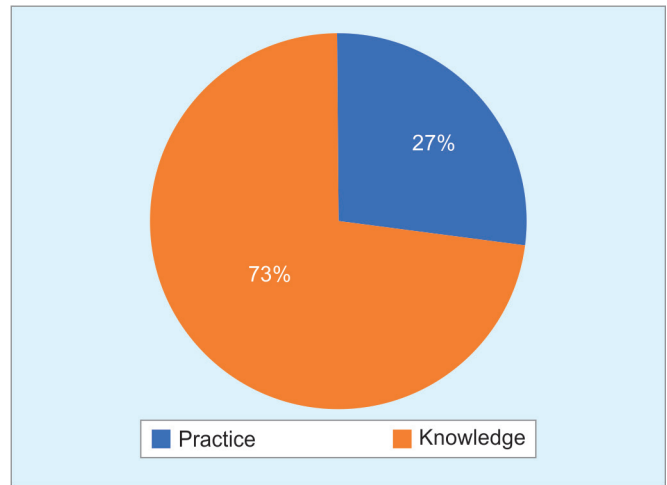


Fig. 1: Period of exclusive breastfeeding 6 month (73%) Less than 6 month (27%)

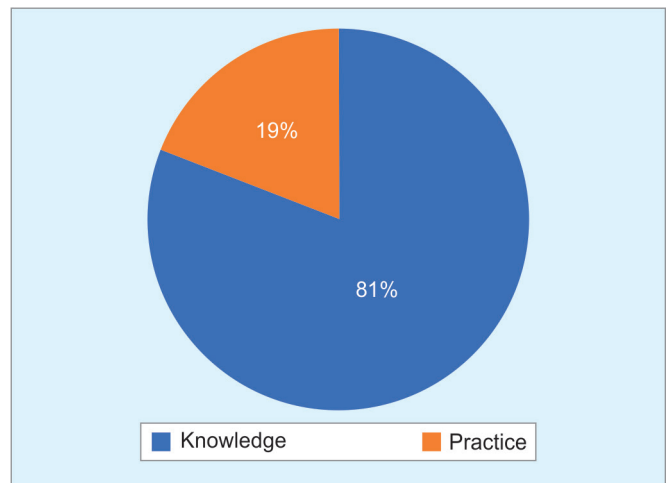


Fig. 2: Importance of colostrum

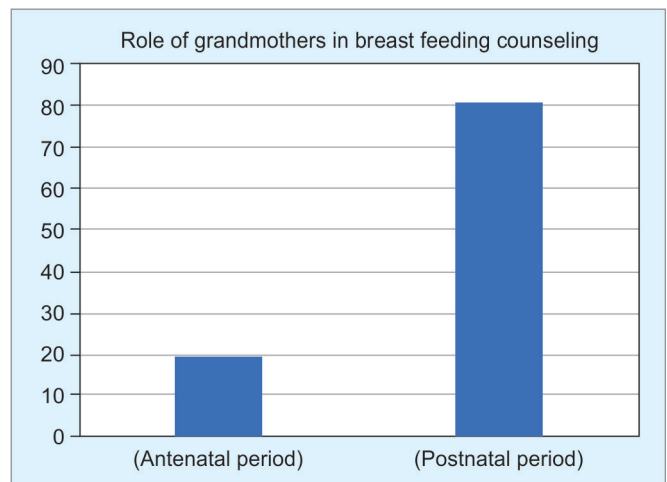


Fig. 3: Counseling about breastfeeding by Grandmothers

important in the antenatal period, a very minor 19.32% of mothers were counseled antenatally about breastfeeding while 90% of mothers are counseled postnatally by mothers or mother-in-laws as depicted in Figure 3. Hence grandmothers play a key role in breastfeeding.

Comparing these results with another study, which said that less than half of grandmothers had an influence on their decisions regarding breastfeeding; it was clear that the grandmothers' role in breastfeeding varies from place to place and as per socioeconomic and cultural factors.⁷ For example, in developing countries like India, the role is more significant than in Western countries and cultures.

DISCUSSION

Breastfeeding is the first feeding practice recommended for the promotion of child health and appropriate development. In a developing country like India, the identity of the most influential person in a woman's breastfeeding decision varies among cultures. Some identified individuals are the mother's relatives, particularly the mother's mother, peers, partners, and health care providers.⁷ Hence awareness about breastfeeding should be raised by multiple folds at ground level. Top feeds are easily available and accessible but the importance of breast milk should be thoroughly explained and embedded in new mothers by their elders so that the newborns can avail all the advantages of breast milk. In many surveys done, it was observed that 33.3% practiced exclusive breastfeeding even though most women heard of exclusive breastfeeding and considered it important for the health of the baby and the mother.⁸ So interventions to promote exclusive breastfeeding should be tailored to the needs of each population by identifying the factors that influence the practice in a given context.³ Grandmothers have knowledge that has been validated by their experiences and can directly affect the new, would-be mothers and their breastfeeding practices.³ Attitude of grandmothers can both positively or adversely affect a mother's behavior towards breastfeeding.⁷

In a Systematic review, 568 articles were reviewed about the influence of grandmothers on breastfeeding rates, the conclusion was made that grandmothers have the capacity to influence exclusive breastfeeding. Programs that seek to influence exclusive breastfeeding should include grandmothers in their interventions to achieve maximum impact.⁹

While in another systemic review, in most articles, although grandmothers were positive about breastfeeding for mothers and children, they recommend the introduction of water and other foods before 6 months of life as they are unaware that such practices negatively affect the time of exclusive breastfeeding and/or total breastfeeding which was similarly noticed in our study as well.

Passing on the health information that is not scientifically proven or in disuse is a frequent situation between generations and harmful to a child's health. For health professionals, beliefs, myths and misconceptions about breastfeeding are the result of a lack of knowledge about this theme.¹⁰

CONCLUSIONS

These results indicate that there is a significant gap between knowledge and practices about exclusive breastfeeding.

More active steps should be taken to change the attitude amongst grandmothers to fulfill this gap.

It is important to raise the awareness and implications of exclusive breastfeeding in *Grandmothers Also*.

It's time to educate and support grandmothers and mothers.

These results indicate that there is a significant gap between knowledge and practices about exclusive and early breastfeeding and more active steps should be taken to change the attitude of grandmothers so that they will more actively and positively counsel the mothers to breastfeed. It is important to raise awareness and implications of exclusive breastfeeding.

CLINICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Breastfeeding newborn babies are an important step in developing the mother-baby bond. Breastfeeding also seems to have an impact on the prevention of postpartum hemorrhage and it also acts as a contraceptive method because it causes lactational amenorrhoea. It also helps in preventing neonatal infections and complications like NEC. A simple step like educating and counseling grandmothers can increase breastfeeding rates and reduce neonatal morbidity and mortality.

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