

Knowledge and attitude of breast feeding of female students

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Abstract

To assess knowledge and attitude of college girls, Medicine, Pharmacy and Arts in Baghdad City towards breast feeding. Across-sectional study with a random sample of 258 female studies during period of 1994-1998 from girls, medical, pharmacy & art college in Baghdad City, using a self-administered questionnaire. The ages of the females ranged from 18 to 32 years. About 13% of them received some health education about breast feeding. One-quarter reported that they learned about breast feeding at school. About 4% of students learned from their mothers. Less than half the students in the sample (40%) knew the meaning of colostrum. Only 22% students gave the right answer about the right time for the first feed. Regarding the frequency of breast feeding, one third gave the right answer. The study showed considerable deficiency in the knowledge of the college female students about breast feeding. Relevant knowledge and skills about breast feeding should be included in the curriculum of college to prepare them successful breast feeding.

معلومات إيضاحية حول الرضاعة الطبيعية لمجموعة من طالبات الجامعة

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المستخلص

تقييم معلومات واتجاهات طالبات كليات البنات ، الطب ، الصيدلة ، والفنون في بغداد لموضوع الرضاعة الطبيعية ، تم إجراء دراسة مقطعية لعينة عشوائية لطالبات كليات البنات ، الطب ، الصيدلة والفنون في بغداد وبلغ حجم العينة 258 طالبة، وقد استخدم استبيان مُعد للدراسة تم تعبئته من قبل الطالبات. يتراوح عمر الطالبات المشاركات في الدراسة من 18 إلى 32 سنة وبلغت نسبة اللاتي حصلن على بعض التنقيف الصحي عن الرضاعة الطبيعية 13% وقد اكتسبت 25% من الطالبات معلومة عن الرضاعة الطبيعية من المدارس و 4% من الأمهات. لقد أعطت 22% من الطالبات الإجابة الصحيحة عن بداية الرضاعة الطبيعية ولقد اتضح من الدراسة إن هناك نقصاً في معلومات الطالبات في الكليات المشار إليها عن الرضاعة الطبيعية ونقترح أن تضاف المعلومات المناسبة والمهارات عن الرضاعة الطبيعية لمنهج الكليات فيما يخص الطالبات وإعدادهن للرضاعة الطبيعية الناجحة .

Introduction

Breast feeding is a cultural role for women in middle Eastern societies. It was universally practiced until a few decades back when it started to decline. Promotion of breast feeding is one of four priorities strategy proposed by UNICEF to safeguard the health of children. Breast feeding is beneficial for both babies and mothers in rich and poor countries. Besides being ideal for babies, it helps to prevent sepsis in newborn babies. It protects gut, chest, ear and urinary tract from infections in young children, and is valuable in the management of diarrhea. Although the advantages of breast feeding are well documented, studies in Iraq showed a decreasing incidence of breast feeding a long with diminishing length of the nursing period.^(4,5) In view of this, research is needed to find ways and means of reversing this trend. Primary health care physician, more than others, should have concern for the current status of breast feeding in Iraq. Knowledge and attitudes of colleges female students constitute a priority in breast feeding research as they will eventually become mothers & Doctors. Studies have shown that the level of education of women can affect the intention and success of breast feeding. *¹ Since college students qualify to become teachers, doctors and Pharmacists, they can play an important role through their future careers. Besides, they can enlighten women in the community on the benefits and importance of breast feeding. The objective of this study was to assess knowledge and attitude of these colleges towards breast feeding and to use this as a basis for a strategy to promote appropriate knowledge* attitude themselves and the women in community.

Materials and Methods

This was across-sectional study. The study population included samples of female students in the girls, pharmacy, Medical & Art colleges in Baghdad city. A self-administered questionnaire was used as a tool for the study. The questionnaire was filled by all students simultaneously. It was designed to collect demographic, personal data and important questions on breast feeding such as.

the right time for the first feed, frequency and duration of breastfeeding. Open ended questions on benefits of breast feeding to the mother and baby were also included.

Results and Discussion

A total of 158 students: responded giving a response rate of 63.24%. The majority of them from the middle. The ages of students ranged from 18-32 Years, More than 13% were married; 6 of them (3-1%) were divorced and more than, half were single. Nearly half the student's mothers were either illiterate or semi-literate. 30% of the mothers had primary education. Only 6% had university education and 2 had postgraduate degree. Forty-seven of the students 30% said they had received some education about breast feeding- About one quarter of the students reported that they learned about breast feeding at school while the rest learned about it outside school. When they were asked who gave the lesson on breast feeding, only 8.9% said they learned from their mothers, 12% from the teacher, 13.5% from media and 18% from other sources. Almost 40% of them did not receive any education on breast feeding. Less than half of students knew the meaning of colostrum. The rest gave incomplete or a wrong answer. Regarding the right time of the students gave the right answer. Half of the students said the baby should be put to the breast few hours after birth, and about 12% said the first feed should be giving within days. Some thought it is no necessary when to start the first feed. When asked about how often should a mother breast feed her baby, about one third of the students knew the right frequency of breast feeding, then they answered "on demand" \ However, the rest of the students gave different wrong answers, some said every hour, others said every two hours and some said three times per a day. When asked about how long should a feed last, about 30% said it should last 10 minutes, about one fourth said it should last more than 15 minutes, about 1 fifth said it should last 5 minutes and the rest not know. Regarding how Long should a baby breast feed, 35% of the

students said it should be more than a Year, 25% said the duration of breast feeding should be one year, the others said it should be 9 months or less. Table I shows the most

repeated responses from the students about the benefits of breast feeding to the baby and mother.

Table(1): -Benefits of breast feeding to the baby and mother according to students

Benefits to baby		Benefits to mother			
Gives baby immunity against disease .	55	35	Restores womb to normal position .	36	23
Gives child psychological satisfaction .	28	18	Creates strong bond to the baby.	32	20
Ideal nutrition .	27	17	Improves figure of mother	27	17
Enables infant to grow healthy.	30	19	Prevents cancer of breast and uterus .	26	16
Enable to recognize and love his/her mother .	4	2.5	A natural contraceptive .	12	7.6
Protect babies from diarrhea and enteric disease.	10	6	Protect mother from different diseases .	11	7
Increase the level of intelligence.	4	2.5	Makes mother happy	8	5
			Rids mother of milk in the breast .	6	4

35 % of the students thought that breast feeding gives baby immunity against some disease. Regarding the benefits of breast feeding to mother 23% of the students

thought that breast feeding restores womb to normal position and this represents the highest response about benefits of breast feeding to mother.

Table (2):- shows the relationship between knowledge about duration of each feed and distribution. It was noticed that younger students (less than 20 years) knew the correct answer about duration of each feed compared to other age.

Age distribution (in years)	Wrong No.	Right No.	Total No.
< 20	13	37	50
20-24	72	18	90
25-32	12	06	18
Total	97	61	158

Discussion

For any breast feeding program to succeed, it is important to improve the knowledge and attitude of mothers about it. In this study 13% of college students seem to have received some education about breast feeding. This percentage is small if we know, there is about 60% of females their ages between 20-32 year. The effect of deficient education should be evaluated with change in life style in mind with more urbanization and more dismantling of extended families, the need for educating young inexperienced women become essential⁽⁸⁾. The school seems to have a limited role in education about breast feeding as only one quarter of them had some teaching on it. Several studies encourage teaching about breast feeding to school^(3,8,9) girls to influence their decision on breast feeding. A small proportion of students [earned about breast feeding from their mothers. In this study, the role of mother as a source of health education about breast feeding is much less than, expected. It is surprising that such a small percentage of students received instructions from their mothers but the percentage might be expected to be a little higher if the population studied were all young mothers rather than students. Also this could be explained by the high proportion of educated mothers change in life style. Studies have shown strong association between educational level attained the incidence and duration of breast feeding^(9,10). A woman's education affects her motivation to breast feed. In many industrialized countries in the west, breast feeding now a days is becoming more common among educated and upper class women. On the other hand, in third world countries the educated women are more likely to *feed* their infant artificially. However in some countries women's education apparently has no effect either way⁽¹¹⁾. If mothers do not practice breast feeding, this will be reflected in the attitudes and knowledge of their children about breast feeding. Less than half the students in the sample knew the meaning of colostrum. This represents a deficiency in the knowledge of the students about mother's milk and its protective value. Knowledge about colostrum

is particularly important, not only because of its protective value but also because of the prevalent misperceptions about it. When asked about the right time for the first feed only 38.6% of the students gave the right answer. This is a vital information that they would need shortly. This means that married students probably did not give the first feed in time. Also we do not know if these students had seen their own mothers breast feed immediately after delivery. The time of the first feed is crucial to successful breast feeding. Several studies encourage immediate postpartum suckling^(12,13). Early suckling helps milk-production to start sooner and encourages the important psychological bonding of the mother and her new born through a close, warm contact. It has also been found that mothers who initiate breast feeding early will breast feed longer than those who start after 12 hours later. It is documented that colostrum is beneficial to the infant both nutritionally and immunologically^(10,12,13). The poor responses on the frequency of feeding warrant a special attention. Most of recent studies recommend "on demand" feeding whereby infants should be given the breast whenever they cry or hungry^(2,9,11,12,13). The students were also asked about the duration of each feed and more than one third answered correctly. Several studies have shown that the average time of a feed is about 5-10 minutes^(7,11,13). About 70% thought that breast feeding should last more than a year while the rest thought, it should be up to one year. In this culture it was the norm for women to breast feed for 2 years. A duration of 2 years is recommended by religious teaching. In this study the respondents were not clear about breast feeding duration. This could be explained by deficiency in their knowledge or may reflect observation of their mothers or other close female relatives. This needs to be attended to through a number of possible measures such as: health education. The tradition in most parts of the developing world is to breast feed for at least 12 month, but it is recommended to continue breast feeding up to 2 years of age^(9,11,12). The knowledge of the students about the benefits of breast feeding to mother

and to the baby was satisfactory- This could be explained by the fact that most of health education programs about breast feeding concentrate on this aspect. The study shown that students who were less than 20 years of age knew more about breast feeding than 20 years or above. Mass media and school nowadays play a role on health education about breast feeding.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the study shows a serious deficiency in the knowledge of colleges "female" students about breast feeding- mothers play a minimal role on health education about this topic. It is recommended that relevant knowledge and skills about breast feeding be integrated in the curriculum

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of Iraq health professionals at all levels. The training and education of health professionals is of the utmost importance as they play a key role in the education of the public in general and mothers in particular* Mother should have a positive role on the education of their daughters about breast feeding. This can be effected through educating them in school about breast feeding. Child rearing practice with the emphasis on breast feeding should be included in the curriculum of health education for secondary schools and colleges. Instructions in school should he one part of a three pronged instructional strategy based in primary care, well baby clinics and in Antenatal clinics .A comparative study involving the Knowledge of women in our Antenatal clinics would be of interest .

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