

Attitudes of Mothers admitted to a Maternity Ward in Port Harcourt, to Breast-feeding

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Summary

Oruamabo RS and Mbuagbaw LT. Attitudes of Mothers admitted to a Maternity Ward in Port Harcourt, to Breast-feeding. *Nigerian Journal of Paediatrics* 1985; 12:81. One hundred and forty-six recently delivered mothers at the University Teaching Hospital, Port Harcourt, were questioned within 24 hours of delivery, about how they intended to feed their new babies. Of the 146 mothers questioned, 65 (45%) intended to exclusively breast-feed their new babies, 81 (55%) hoped to use a combination formula and breast-feeding and none wanted her newborn baby wholly bottle-fed. The main reasons given for intending to wholly breast-feed were that the breast-milk was better for baby's health and that breast-feeding was a natural thing to do. Mothers who chose to supplement breast-feeding with artificial feeds were mainly working mothers and those who thought that breast-milk alone was not sufficient for their babies. The choice of feeding method was not significantly influenced by maternal age, parity, educational status, maternal occupation, marital status and mode of delivery of the new baby, but was so influenced by the method of feeding a previous baby ($p < 0.001$).

Introduction

As a nutrient, breast-milk remains unrivalled in its ability to support the growth of the infant.¹ Breast-milk represents an important and inexpensive source of protein and essential nutrients in those countries in which majority of the population are too poor to afford suitable

human breast-milk substitutes.² Reports from centres in India,³ Republic of Cameroon⁴ and Benin City in Nigeria,⁵ showed that 86% to 100% of mothers breast-fed their babies, although Nigerian and Cameroonian mothers, unlike the Indian mothers, sometimes preferred a combination of feeding methods from birth.

Several factors are believed to influence the choice of feeding method. Noticeable among these are urbanisation, mothers working outside the home, women's education, and the influence of marketing advertisement.^{3 4 6} In this preliminary study, we sought to find out the attitudes of recently-delivered mothers in a maternity ward in Port Harcourt, to breast-feeding.

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Subjects and Methods

During the period, November 1984 to January 1985, there were 1129 deliveries in the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital (UPTH). One thousand and fifty two mothers had spontaneous vaginal deliveries and seventy seven were sectioned principally for cephalo-pelvic disproportions. One hundred and forty six (13%) of the 1129 mothers were interviewed within 24 hours of delivery. The choice of those interviewed was governed by the conditions that obtained in the lying-in ward. It is an open ward with the beds close together, thus, there was little or no privacy. It was thus, possible for an interview conducted with one mother to be overheard by others. Therefore, in order to reduce the resultant effects of bias due to this situation, every fourth bed was chosen and not more than three mothers were interviewed on any single day.

Interviews were conducted in the mornings by one of us (RSO) and the Registrar in the Special-Care Baby Unit (SCBU). Interviews were conducted mostly in orthodox English and in a few cases, in pidgin English; they followed a set questionnaire and lasted approximately twenty minutes. At the interview, maternal age, parity, state of origin, address, educational status, marital status and occupation were ascertained. Further information obtained from each mother was how she intended to feed her new baby, why she chose that method, how she fed her previous baby and previous advice received on infant feeding. Data on gestational age, mode of delivery, foetal outcome and whether or not the baby was admitted into the SCBU were obtained from the case notes.

Statistical comparison of the groups of mothers was by the chi-square test.

Results

Of the 146 mothers recruited into the study, 65 intended to exclusively breast-feed their new babies, while 81 intended to breast-feed and

bottle-feed their babies simultaneously. Over 90% of the mothers who intended to exclusively breast-feed their babies chose this method because they felt that breast-milk was better for the health of the baby and that breast-feeding was the natural thing to do (Table I).

TABLE I

Reasons for wanting to wholly Breast-feed Baby

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>No of Mothers</i>	<i>% of Total</i>
Better for baby's health	35	53.9
Natural thing to do	24	37.0
High cost of artificial milk	3	4.6
Husband's wish	1	1.5
Convenience	1	1.5
Family tradition	1	1.5
Total	65	100.0

The main reasons given by the mothers for wanting to practise breast-feeding and bottle-feeding simultaneously, are shown in Table II. Majority of these mothers either thought that breast-milk alone would be insufficient, or felt that their occupations would not allow them enough time for breast-feeding.

As shown in Tables III and IV, the choice of feeding method was influenced very significantly ($p < 0.001$) by the method of feeding a previous baby, but not by other factors such as age, parity, educational status, marital status, booking status and occupation.

Discussion

The present study has clearly shown that a previous feeding experience very strongly influences a mother in her choice of feeding

TABLE II

Reasons for wanting to simultaneously Breast-feed and Bottle-feed

Reasons	No of Mothers	% of Total
Breast-milk thought to be insufficient	32	39.5
Working mother	17	21.0
For baby to grow well	12	14.9
Not enough time for wholly breast-feeding	9	11.1
Artificial milk just as good as breast-milk	3	3.7
Others feed the same way	3	3.7
Wholly breast-feeding will adversely affect mother's health	3	3.7
For baby to sleep well	1	1.2
Previous experience	1	1.2
Total	81	100.0

method. This finding suggests that the campaign for breast-feeding ought to be directed at a much younger age group in the population. For instance, an important step would be the introduction of infant feeding into the curriculum in secondary schools since it has been established by other workers,⁷ that the decision to breast-feed if made early before pregnancy, significantly influences the subsequent choice of feeding method. Action along this line is likely to succeed, since more young women now attend school.

The working mothers constitute an important group. Owing to economic difficulties existing currently in the country, more women are likely to be encouraged to take up full-time employment to supplement the family income. These mothers tend to introduce supplements early, preparatory to the time they would return to work after the maternity leave. This experience is not unique to Port Harcourt, but has been reported from

TABLE III

Maternal Characteristics

Characteristics	Mothers wholly Breast-feeding n=65	Mothers Breast-feeding & Bottle-feeding n=81	p
<i>Age</i>			
Under 20 years	7 (10.8)	12 (14.8)	>0.5
20-29 years	48 (73.8)	58 (71.6)	
30 years and over	10 (15.4)	11 (13.6)	
<i>Parity</i>			
None	12 (18.5)	21 (25.9)	>0.1
Multiparous	53 (81.5)	60 (74.1)	
<i>Booking Status</i>			
Antenatal care	63 (96.9)	79 (97.5)	>0.1
No antenatal care	2 (3.1)	2 (2.5)	
<i>Education</i>			
None	10 (15.4)	12 (14.8)	>0.5
Primary school only	37 (56.9)	40 (49.4)	
Secondary/post-secondary	18 (27.7)	29 (35.8)	
<i>Mother's Occupation</i>			
Housewife-fulltime	26 (40.0)	30 (37.0)	>0.1
Housewife-self-employed	31 (47.7)	30 (37.0)	
Full time employment	6 (9.2)	17 (21.0)	
Student	2 (3.1)	4 (5.0)	
<i>Marital Status</i>			
Single	0 (0)	3 (3.7)	>0.1
Married	65 (100)	78 (96.3)	
Divorced	0 (0)	0 (0)	
Widow	0 (0)	0 (0)	
<i>Perinatal Factors</i>			
SVD	59 (90.8)	75 (92.6)	>0.5
Operative delivery	6 (9.2)	6 (7.4)	
Birth weight less than 2500gm	0 (0)	0 (0)	

Figures in parentheses represent percentage

SVD = spontaneous vaginal delivery

other parts of Nigeria,⁵ the Republic of Cameroon⁴ as well as the United States of America.⁸ Working mothers who choose to wholly breast-feed their babies are beset with problems. There are factors to consider such as the length of the maternity leave as well as the importance of her earnings to the family budget. Nevertheless,

TABLE IV
Previous Feeding Practice and Source of Information on Infant Feeding

	Mothers wholly Breast-feeding n=52**	Mothers Breast-feeding & Bottle- feeding n=60	p
<i>Previous feeding practice</i>			
Bottle-fed	4 (7.7)	0 (0)	
Breast-fed	42 (80.8)	7 (11.7)	<0.001
Combined breast and bottle-feeding	6 (11.5)	53 (88.3)	
<i>Source of information</i>			
Mothers' advice	n = 65 15 (23.1)	n = 81 32 (39.5)	
Antenatal classes	23 (35.4)	25 (30.9)	
Mothers' advice/ ant. natal classes	14 (21.5)	12 (14.8)	>0.1
Seen others breast-feed	11 (16.9)	8 (9.9)	
Husband's advice, friend's advice and books	2 (3.1)	4 (4.9)	

** One mother's previous baby was stillborn.

Figures in parentheses represent percentages

working mothers could be encouraged to breast-feed for longer periods if there is general support from co-workers and employers and if given time-off for breast-feeding.

The advantages of breast-feeding as opposed to bottle-feeding under tropical conditions are well established and include the protection of the breast-fed baby against diarrhoea.⁹ Furthermore, by prolonging the period of lactational amenorrhoea, successful breast-feeding becomes an important factor in birth spacing and population control.¹⁰⁻¹²

In the present study, 39.5% of mothers who chose to supplement breast-feeds with artificial milk, did so because they believed that breast-milk alone was not sufficient for their babies. Reports from Nigeria⁵ and the Republic of

Cameroon⁴ have shown that 56% and 20% respectively, of mothers resorted to combined feeding method for a similar reason. Although it has been hypothesized that insufficiency of breast-milk is caused by malnutrition, occurring particularly in adolescence and pregnancy,⁵ other workers have reported extended duration of breast-feeding over two years among chronically malnourished women, thus suggesting that lactation may be affected more by primary protein deficiency than by total energy deficiency.¹³

Although our results cannot be said to be representative of either Port Harcourt or the hospital because of the sampling methods used, the results are indications of present trend. All the women interviewed intended to breast-feed, although partially in the majority of cases. Therefore, by intensifying the campaign for breast-feeding through the media, in schools, in family planning and other clinics, more mothers could be encouraged to exclusively breast-feed their babies at least, for the first few months of life.

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