

Research Article

Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices among Lactating Mothers on Breastfeeding and Weaning Attending the Immunization Clinic at District Hospital, Sagar (M.P)

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ABSTRACT

Background: Optimal breastfeeding and appropriate weaning practices are critical determinants of infant growth, development, and survival. Despite global and national recommendations, suboptimal practices persist due to knowledge gaps, socio-cultural beliefs, and inadequate counselling.

Objectives: To assess the knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) regarding breastfeeding and weaning among lactating mothers attending an immunization clinic at a district hospital in Sagar, Madhya Pradesh.

Methods: A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted among 200 lactating mothers attending the immunization clinic over a period of three months. Data were collected using a pretested semi-structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and appropriate inferential tests were applied.

Results: Among participants, 82% were aware of early initiation of breastfeeding and 72% knew about exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) for six months. However, 18% believed colostrum should be discarded. Only 60% initiated breastfeeding within one hour, and 65% practiced exclusive breastfeeding. Complementary feeding at six months was correctly practiced by 62% of mothers.

Conclusion: Although knowledge and attitudes were generally favourable, actual practices were suboptimal. Strengthening counselling services and addressing cultural misconceptions are essential to improve infant feeding practices.

Keywords: Breastfeeding, Weaning, Kap, Lactating Mothers, Exclusive Breastfeeding, Complementary Feeding.

INTRODUCTION

Breastfeeding is a fundamental practice essential for optimal infant growth, immunity, and survival. The World Health Organization recommends initiation of breastfeeding within one hour of birth, exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months, and continued breastfeeding along with complementary feeding up to two years or beyond. These practices significantly reduce infant morbidity and mortality and improve long-term health outcomes.¹

Appropriate complementary feeding after six months is equally crucial, as inadequate or inappropriate feeding can lead to malnutrition, stunting, and increased susceptibility to infections. According to WHO, complementary feeding should be timely, adequate, safe, and nutritious.² In India, despite strong policy support, optimal breastfeeding practices are still not universally followed. The National

Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019–21) reports that only about 63.7% of children under six months are exclusively breastfed.³

Several factors such as maternal education, socio-cultural beliefs, lack of counselling, and family influence play a significant role in determining infant feeding practices.⁴ Understanding the knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) of mothers is therefore essential to identify gaps and design effective interventions.

Aim

To assess the knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding breastfeeding and weaning among lactating mothers.

Objectives

1. To assess knowledge regarding breastfeeding and weaning.

2. To determine attitudes toward breastfeeding and weaning.
3. To evaluate breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices.
4. To provide recommendations for improving infant feeding practices

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design

A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted to assess the knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding breastfeeding and weaning among lactating mothers.

Study Area

The study was carried out at the Immunization Clinic of the District Hospital, Sagar, located in the state of Madhya Pradesh, India. The hospital serves a large catchment area, catering to mothers and infants from both urban and rural backgrounds, thus providing a diverse study population.

Study Population

The target population comprised lactating mothers attending the immunization clinic during the study period. These mothers visited the clinic for their children's routine immunizations and health check-ups.

Sample Size

A total of 200 lactating mothers were included in the study. The sample size was determined based on feasibility and the average attendance at the immunization clinic, ensuring adequate representation of the population.

Study Duration

The study was conducted over a period of three months.

Inclusion Criteria

Mothers were included if they met the following criteria:

- Lactating mothers having children aged less than 24 months.
- Attending the immunization clinic during the study period.
- Willing to participate and provide informed consent.

Exclusion Criteria

The following participants were excluded from the study:

- Mothers having children older than 24 months.
- Non-consenting mothers or those unwilling to participate.

Data Collection Tool

Data were collected using a pretested, semi-structured questionnaire developed after reviewing relevant literature and consulting subject experts. The questionnaire was designed to obtain comprehensive information from participants and was administered through face-to-face interviews in the local language to ensure understanding.

The questionnaire consisted of the following components:

1. Socio-demographic profile: Information on age, education, occupation, socioeconomic status, family type, and residence.
2. Knowledge regarding breastfeeding and weaning: Awareness about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding, initiation time, duration, and weaning practices.
3. Attitudes toward infant feeding: Beliefs, perceptions, and cultural influences related to breastfeeding and introduction of complementary foods.
4. Actual feeding practices: Details on initiation and exclusivity of breastfeeding, complementary feeding habits, frequency, and type of weaning foods introduced, and hygiene measures followed.

RESULTS

The socio-demographic profile of the study participants shows that the majority of mothers belonged to the younger age group, with 58% aged between 21–25 years, followed by 32% in the 26–30 years group, and only 10% above 30 years. In terms of education, 40% had secondary-level education, while 28% were graduates, indicating a moderately educated study population, though 32% still had only primary education or were illiterate. Most participants were homemakers (86%), with only 14% being employed. Nearly half of the participants (45%) belonged to the lower-middle socioeconomic class. Regarding parity, 56% were primiparous, while 44% were multiparous, suggesting a slightly higher representation of first-time mothers. (Table 1)

The assessment of knowledge regarding breastfeeding and weaning practices revealed generally satisfactory awareness among the participants. A majority (82%) correctly knew that breastfeeding should be initiated within one hour of birth, and 72% were aware of the recommended duration of exclusive breastfeeding for six months. Additionally, 65% of mothers knew the appropriate timing for introducing complementary feeding. However,

certain misconceptions persisted, as 18% of participants believed that colostrum should be discarded, reflecting gaps in essential neonatal feeding knowledge. Importantly, knowledge levels were found to be significantly higher among educated mothers ($p < 0.05$), indicating a strong association between maternal education and awareness. Fig 1

With regard to actual practices, 60% of mothers initiated breastfeeding within one hour of delivery, and 65% practiced exclusive breastfeeding for the recommended six

months. Complementary feeding was introduced at the appropriate time (six months) by 62% of participants. However, suboptimal practices were also evident, as 25% of mothers introduced top feeds early, and 38% practiced either early or delayed complementary feeding. These findings highlight a noticeable gap between knowledge and practice, suggesting that despite adequate awareness, a proportion of mothers do not fully translate knowledge into optimal infant feeding practices. (Table 2)

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Profile (N=200)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	21–25 years	116	58%
	26–30 years	64	32%
	>30 years	20	10%
Education	Illiterate	24	12%
	Primary	40	20%
	Secondary	80	40%
	Graduate	56	28%
Occupation	Homemaker	172	86%
	Employed	28	14%
Socioeconomic Status	Lower-middle class	90	45%
Parity	Primiparous	112	56%
	Multiparous	88	44%

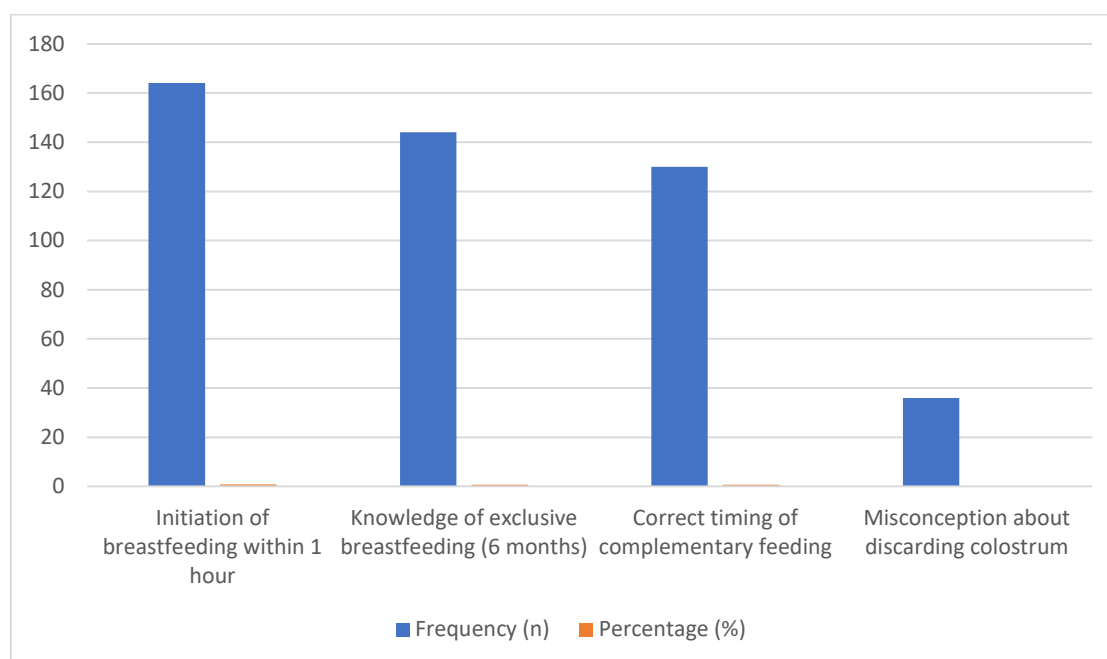


Fig 1: Knowledge Assessment on Breastfeeding and Weaning (n = 200)

Table 2. Practices of Breastfeeding and Weaning*

Practice	Frequency	Percentage
Initiated breastfeeding within 1 hour	120	60%
Exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months	130	65%
Introduced top feeds early	50	25%
Complementary feeding at 6 months	124	62%

Early/Delayed complementary feeding	76	38%
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*multiple responses.

DISCUSSION

The socio-demographic profile in the present study showed that the majority of mothers (58%) were in the age group of 21–25 years, followed by 26–30 years (32%). This finding is consistent with studies conducted in India where younger reproductive-age women constitute the major proportion of lactating mothers. A study by Sharma P et al. reported that most participants (52.2%) belonged to the 20–29 years age group, reflecting similar demographic trends.⁵

The predominance of homemakers (86%) in this study is also in agreement with findings from Indian community-based studies, where most lactating mothers are not formally employed. Sebastian N. M. et al. reported a similar distribution, with a majority being homemakers in an urban Chennai population.⁶ In the present study, a majority of mothers demonstrated satisfactory knowledge regarding breastfeeding practices, with 82% aware of early initiation of breastfeeding and 72% aware of exclusive breastfeeding for six months. However, misconceptions such as discarding colostrum (18%) were still observed. These findings are comparable to a study by Sekar I et al. (2024), conducted in a tertiary care hospital in India, where 78.9% of mothers were aware of early initiation of breastfeeding and 78.6% knew about exclusive breastfeeding.⁷ Similarly, a study by Bala K et al. (2020) reported that although a large proportion of mothers had awareness regarding breastfeeding, misconceptions persisted, including inappropriate beliefs about substitute feeding and discontinuation practices.⁸

In contrast, a study by Rathoria E et al. (2025) showed comparatively lower levels of knowledge, where only 41.5% of mothers had adequate knowledge and 35% had inadequate knowledge regarding breastfeeding practices, indicating regional variability.⁹ Another study by Gajalakshmi S et al. (2024) reported that although 80.8% of mothers were literate, gaps in knowledge and practice still existed, highlighting that literacy alone does not guarantee adequate awareness.¹⁰ Furthermore, a study conducted by Krishnendu M et al. in Kerala found that 70.8% of mothers had only average knowledge regarding breastfeeding, suggesting that while awareness exists, it is often incomplete or superficial.¹¹

In the present study, the majority of mothers demonstrated a positive attitude toward breastfeeding and weaning practices, as reflected by their acceptance of exclusive breastfeeding and continuation beyond infancy. However, despite favourable attitudes, certain misconceptions and inappropriate practices persisted. Gajalakshmi S et al. (2024) observed that a large proportion of mothers exhibited favourable attitudes toward breastfeeding, but this did not always translate into appropriate feeding practices, highlighting the influence of socio-cultural factors.¹⁰ In contrast, a study by Rathoria E et al. (2025) reported comparatively lower positive attitudes, with a significant proportion of mothers demonstrating inadequate or neutral attitudes toward breastfeeding practices, indicating regional variability.¹²

In the present study, 60% of mothers initiated breastfeeding within one hour of birth and 65% practiced exclusive breastfeeding for six months. Complementary feeding was appropriately initiated at six months by 62% of participants. However, suboptimal practices such as early introduction of top feeds (25%) and inappropriate timing of complementary feeding (38%) were also observed. These findings were similar to a study done by Seyakumar et al. where 54.4% of mothers initiated breastfeeding within one hour of birth, which is slightly lower but closely aligns with the present study findings.¹³ Regarding exclusive breastfeeding, the present study finding (65%) is consistent with recent national trends. A 2024 analysis based on NFHS data reported relatively high levels of exclusive breastfeeding in India, though variations persist depending on maternal employment and socio-demographic factors.¹⁴

Conclusion

The present study highlights that the majority of lactating mothers possessed adequate knowledge and generally positive attitudes toward breastfeeding and weaning practices. A considerable proportion of mothers were aware of early initiation of breastfeeding, exclusive breastfeeding for six months, and the appropriate timing of complementary feeding. However, despite satisfactory knowledge and favorable attitudes, practices were not consistently aligned with recommended guidelines. A significant proportion of mothers

delayed initiation of breastfeeding, introduced top feeds prematurely, or practiced inappropriate timing of complementary feeding. Persistent misconceptions, such as discarding colostrum, further indicate gaps in essential neonatal feeding knowledge.

The study thus demonstrates a clear knowledge–practice gap, emphasizing that awareness alone is insufficient to ensure optimal infant feeding behaviors. Socio-cultural influences, inadequate counseling, and lack of sustained support systems appear to contribute to this discrepancy. Strengthening behavior change communication through antenatal care, postnatal counseling, and immunization clinic visits, along with community-based interventions, is essential to bridge this gap and improve infant feeding practices.

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