

## Factors Influencing Initiation of Breastfeeding in an Urban Set Up

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Breastfeeding is traditional in our country and has been practiced through the centuries. In recent years there has been a decline in this practice due to various reasons. It has also been associated with myths and superstitions like colostrum being bad for the baby and insufficient milk during the first three days. Hence a prospective study was conducted to assess the knowledge and attitudes towards breast feeding in the mothers admitted for delivery. The aims of the study were to: (i) know the time of initiation of first breast feed; and (ii) identify factors that could be responsible for delayed initiation of breastfeeding.

### Material and Methods

In this prospective study 100 women in early post-partum period were included. A standardized questionnaire was circulated and the answers were recorded. The factors studied were age, parity, mode of delivery,

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maternal education, socio-economic status. These were correlated with time of initiation of first breastfeed.

### Results

Most of our mothers were between 20 to 30 years of age. Majority had normal deliveries and 91% of the mothers were housewives; the remaining being working mothers. Only 6% of the mothers started breastfeeding within two hours after delivery (Table I). Thirty two percent mothers started feeding after 24 hours ( $p < 0.0001$ ). Mothers with family income of less than Rs. 1,500/- per month breastfed their babies earlier than the mothers with a higher income. This was also statistically significant ( $p < 0.0035$ ). When the mode of delivery was correlated with the time of first breastfeed, more mothers who delivered normally breastfed their babies within 24 hours than mothers who underwent caesarean section ( $p < 0.005$ ). This showed that mothers with Caesarean section need encouragement and support for initiating early breastfeeding.

When the maternal literacy status was correlated with the timing of first breastfeed, it was found that illiterate mothers initiated breast feeding earlier ( $p < 0.03$ ).

**TABLE I— Time of Initiation of First Breastfeeding in an Urban Set Up**

Time of first feed (h)	Patients	
	Number	Percentage
<2	6	6
2-12	37	37
13-24	25	25
>24	32	32

$p < 0.001$ .

This is probably because illiterate mothers are also socially backward, so they have no other option but to breastfeed.

The main reasons for delayed initiation of first breastfeeding is shown in *Table II*. Most of the mothers were not clear and not aware about the ideal time for initiation of breastfeeding. We also asked whether they are willing to breastfeed their babies soon after delivery. Forty three per cent of the mothers who were ignorant of the fact that feeding could be initiated soon after the delivery were willing to initiate breastfeeds soon after the delivery after counselling. This question was particularly asked to the mothers as sucking reflex has been found to be very active during 1st half hour after birth.

**Discussion**

Cultural, traditional and scientific studies favor the first feed at breast soon after delivery. However, this is not practiced among the professionals and in most of the maternity homes. Only 24% of the mothers fed their babies within 8 hours after delivery. Similar observation has been made by other workers(1-5). The reasons given by the mothers like pain, tiredness, "no milk", etc. could be overcome by lactational counselling during antenatal and early post natal period.

TABLE II- *Factors Influencing Initiation of Breastfeeding in an Urban Set up*

Factors	Patients	
	Number	Percentage
Pain and tiredness	25	25
No milk	21	21
Ignorance	22	22
Advice by elders	32	32

In the educated mothers, the formal education they had, did not influence the initiation of breastfeeding. They depended more on tradition and advice of elders. Similar observations were made by others(5).

Earlier workers have established an association between early initiation of breast feeding and longer successful periods of lactation(5,6). Hence, the obstetrician, pediatrician and especially trained paramedical health workers should strive to initiate breast feeding within an hour after delivery.

From this study we conclude that majority of the mothers (in both the groups) were ignorant regarding the ideal time of initiation of breast feeding and the advantages of the same. Most of them were receptive to the concept of early initiation of breastfeeding when counselled. There was no positive influence of formal maternal education on early initiation of breastfeeding. Hence breastfeeding and its advantages should be introduced into our educational system at least at the high school level. For early establishment of lactation, a support team consisting of pediatricians, obstetricians and trained paramedical staff is essential.

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