



Factors leading to early weaning of infants: A Descriptive Survey

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ABSTRACT

Breast milk is the priceless gift a mother can give to her baby. Weaning at the proper time forms an important milestone in the life of a child and contributes to its growth and development. But today early weaning has become a trend because of several reasons and has resulted in high child mortality rate in our country. The main aim of the present study is to assess the factors leading to early weaning among mothers of infants and to find an association between the factors leading to early weaning and selected demographic variables.

The research design adopted was descriptive in nature. The study was conducted among 100 mothers of infants of Kotekar area, Mangalore. The samples were selected by non probability purposive sampling technique. After the approval from the Institution Ethics Committee, the data was collected using a closed ended questionnaire with 7 sections to assess the possible causes of early weaning. The baseline data revealed that 58% of the samples were in the age group of 25-31 years and most (43%) were Muslims. Majority (30%) of the participants completed primary education and 59% of them had only 1 child. Around 56% of the samples belonged to the joint families and 49% were homemakers. Majority (84%) of the mothers were from the middle class families and 66% weaned their infants before the age of 6 months. The study findings denote that miscellaneous factors (89%) like working mother, lack of knowledge, young mothers and inadequate breast milk secretion were the prime factors which lead to early weaning of the infants. The chi-square computed found that there is association between factors leading to early weaning and selected demographic variables like religion, education and occupation. Lack of knowledge, working mother, young mothers and inadequate breast milk secretion were identified through this study as the factors leading to early weaning. Mothers and infants could be benefited by conducting health teaching programs on the importance of exclusive breast feeding.

INTRODUCTION

An important milestone for the growth and development of the child is weaning it from the breast feeds[1]. Exclusively breast feeding a child for the first 6 months is favourable for both the mother and the child[2]. The benefits of breast feeding are incalculable and nothing can duplicate the properties of breast milk[3].

A prospective population based cohort study was conducted in UK on parents of 923 term infants using postal questionnaires and

weaning diaries, in order to examine what predicts the age of weaning. The study concluded that social factors had some influence on infant weaning, where majority of the infants were established on solids before the age of 4 months[4].

The objectives for breast feeding of the Healthy People 2000 were, 75% of women will breast feed during early postpartum, and that at least 50% will continue for 5- 6 months of infant's life[5]. But then it's evident that these objectives are not met because of the breast feeding trends adopted. This trend of early weaning is chiefly because of the false notion that prevails among

the mothers in developing nations i.e., early introduction of complementary foods will increase the height and weight of their babies, as displayed in the commercial advertisements. India has a population of approximately 1.1 billion, of which children are an important part[6]. But due to many reasons these assets are deprived and lost. The child mortality rate in India is 72 per 1000 live births as per 2014 estimate [7]. The reasons for these deaths are mainly diarrhoea, acute respiratory infections and malnutrition. Early weaning being the prime cause for the above mentioned diseases, possibly directs to high infant mortality rate[8].

Breast milk is the priceless gift a mother can give her baby[9]. It provides a best start in life for the infants and forms the ideal food for the baby[10,11]. Despite of all the evidences of the benefits of exclusive breast feeding, today early weaning has been practiced. A large number of women are now working outside homes and weaning may therefore take place in preparation to return to their work[12].

A survey conducted on middle class mothers on breast feeding duration and employment showed that, the usual duration of breast feeding is significantly shorter for working mothers, which is 16 weeks on average compared with 25 weeks for non- working mothers[13].

In India, breast feeding in rural areas appear to be shaped by the beliefs of a community, which are in turn influenced by social, cultural, economic factors and also because of the lack of knowledge regarding nutritional needs of their infants[14,15]. Child suffers in the interplay between nutrition, socio- economic status and factors that leads to malnutrition.

The investigator during her clinical postings in the paediatric wards and outpatient departments has witnessed the fact that many children were weaned early before 6 months and also it was found in the literature review that there are many mothers who have weaned early because of several reasons. This motivated the investigator to choose this project, so as to explore the factors leading to early weaning in her local community.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study design chosen was descriptive in nature. The study was conducted among 100 mothers of infants of Kotekar area, Mangalore. The samples were selected by non probability purposive sampling technique. After the approval from the Institution Ethics Committee of Yenepoya University, the data was collected. The tool consisted of Section-A: Baseline Performa which included 8 items such as age, religion, education, number of children, type of family, occupation, socio-economic status and age of weaning, Section-B: Structured questionnaire which consisted of 7 sections to assess the possible causes of early weaning such as medical conditions of the mother, medical conditions of the infant, mythical factors, mother's attitude, past experiences, role of significant others and miscellaneous factors. Each item is a closed ended question with 'yes' or 'no' option (Table 1). The samples were interviewed with the questionnaire and the data was compiled and analysed by descriptive and inferential statistics.

RESULTS

The baseline data (Table 2) revealed that 58% of the samples were in the age group of 25-31 years and most (43%) were Muslims. Majority (30%) of the participants completed primary education and 59% of them had only 1 child. Around 56% of the

Table 1. Seven sections of the questionnaire to assess the causes of early weaning

I. Medical conditions of the mother	
1.	Any infections
2.	Cracked nipples/ breast abscess, tumours
3.	Intake of any drugs
4.	Pain in the nipples
II. Medical conditions of the infant	
5.	Cleft lip/ cleft palate
6.	Prematurity and got admitted in NICU
7.	Baby not sucking well
III. Mythical factors	
8.	Bottle feeding enhances growth
9.	Breast feeding spoils my beauty
10.	Breast milk is inadequate for the growing baby
11.	Bottle feeding provides baby with variety of tastes
12.	Mother needn't worry about her diet
IV. Mother's attitude	
13.	Breast feeding is painful and uncomfortable
14.	Breast feeding is difficult and stressful
15.	Breast feeding is indecent
16.	Bottle feeding is convenient
17.	Bottle feeding provides flexibility
18.	Attraction towards the advertisements on commercial feeds
19.	Difficulties with public breast feeding
20.	Dislike to feed the baby many times a day
V. Past experiences	
21.	Past sexual abuse
VI. Role of significant others	
22.	Husband's negative opinion
23.	Unsupportive friends
24.	Unsupportive in- laws
25.	No leave benefit from the working environment
26.	No day care centre in the working place
VII. Miscellaneous factors	
27.	Working mother
28.	Lack of knowledge
29.	Young mothers
30.	Inadequate breast milk secretion

Table 2. Distribution of samples based on demographic variables

Demographic variables		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1. Age in years			
a)	18- 24	26	26
b)	25- 31	58	58
c)	32- 38	16	16
d)	>38	0	0
2. Religion			
a)	Hindu	22	22
b)	Muslim	43	43
c)	Christian	35	35
d)	Other	0	0
3. Education			
a)	Primary	30	30
b)	High school	23	23
c)	PUC	22	22
d)	Graduate	17	17
e)	No formal education	2	2
f)	Postgraduate	6	6
4. Number of children			
a)	1	59	59
b)	2	28	28
c)	3	12	12
d)	>3	1	1
5. Type of family			
a)	Nuclear family	41	41
b)	Joint family	56	56
c)	Extended family	3	3
6. Occupation			
a)	Home maker	49	49
b)	Sedentary worker	10	10
c)	Government employee	11	11
d)	Private employee	30	30
e)	Self employed	0	0
7. Socio- economic status			
a)	Lower class	13	13
b)	Middle class	84	84
c)	High class	3	3
8. Age of weaning			
a)	< 4 months	66	66
b)	4- 6 months	34	34

Table 3. Factors leading to early weaning

Area	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD	Mean percentage
Medical conditions of the mother	26	26	0.260	0.630	6.50
Medical conditions of the infant	37	37	0.370	0.630	12.33
Mythical factors	25	25	0.250	0.458	5.00
Mother's attitude	79	79	0.790	0.977	9.88
Past experiences	0	0	0.000	0.000	0.00
Role of significant others	71	71	0.710	0.988	14.20
Miscellaneous factors	89	89	0.890	0.634	22.25

samples belonged to the joint families and 49% were homemakers. Majority (84%) of the mothers were from the middle class families and 66% weaned their infants before the age of 6 months.

The study findings denote that miscellaneous factors (89%) like working mother, lack of knowledge, young mothers and inadequate breast milk secretion, mother's attitude (79%), role of significant others (71%), medical conditions of the infant (37%), medical conditions of the mother (26%) and mythical factors (25%) were the causes for early weaning (Table 3).

Chi-square test proved that there is association between factors leading to early weaning and selected demographic variables like religion, education and occupation (Table 4).

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study revealed that 58% of the mothers were in the age group of 25- 31. Majority (43%) of the mothers were Muslims. 30% of the mothers completed primary education, 59% had only 1 child, 56% belonged to the joint family's, 49% were homemakers, 84% were from the middle class family and 66% of the mothers weaned early before the age of 4months. The findings of the study are consistent with a study conducted in Tehran to identify the reasons for early weaning. Nine hundred mothers were interviewed using a systematic randomized sampling method. Among them 15% of the mothers involved were illiterates and 93% were housewives[16]. The findings are also supported by a prospective birth cohort study conducted in Finland to assess the socio- demographic determinants of early weaning among 5991 infants recruited between 1996 and 2004. The study revealed that 63% of the

infants were weaned before the age of 4 months[17].

The present study clarifies that miscellaneous factors (89%) like working mother, lack of knowledge, young mothers and inadequate breast milk secretion, mother's attitude (79%), role of significant others (71%), medical conditions of the infant (37%), medical conditions of the mother (26%) and mythical factors (25%) were the causes for early weaning. The study findings are alike the results of a study conducted on 84 primiparous in urban Midwestern hospital with the objective to identify the factors associated with early weaning. According to the multivariate analysis, women who weaned early had a positive bottle feeding attitude and less positive breast feeding attitude and planned to work outside home. A similar study conducted in Michigan and Nebraska revealed that mastitis, breast or nipple pain, not enough milk and return to work were the most common reasons given for early weaning[18].

Chi-square test proved that there is significant association between factors leading to early weaning and selected demographic variables like religion, education and occupation. The findings are supported by a study conducted in South Gujarat to determine situation of breast feeding. The results showed that there is association between factors leading to early weaning and demographic variables like maternal age less than 20 years and paternal occupation as labor[19].

The limitations of the present study are that it was confined to a specific geographical area, which obviously imposes limitation to the generalisation of the study findings. The study has implications in all the fields of nursing such as to equip nurses with essential knowledge, skills and attitude regarding the causes of early weaning and its harm on the infants, involve active

Table 4. Association between factors leading to early weaning and selected demographic variables

Demographic variables	Calculated value	df	Table value
1. Age in years a) 18- 24 b) 25- 31 c) 32- 38 d) >38	2.586	2	5.99
2. Religion a) Hindu b) Muslim c) Christian d) Other	13.522	2	5.99*
3. Education a) Primary b) High school c) PUC d) Graduate e) No formal education f) Post graduate	8.262	3	7.810*
4. Number of children a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) >3	2.701	2	5.99
5. Type of family a) Nuclear family b) Joint family c) Extended family	0.992	1	3.84
6. Occupation a) Home maker b) Sedentary worker c) Government employee d) Private employee e) Self employed	14.733	1	3.84*
7. Socio- economic status a) Lower class b) Middle class c) High class	0.236	1	3.84
8. Age of weaning a) < 4months b) 4- 6 months	3.595	1	3.84

participation of the nurses in community health programs by providing direct and indirect care to achieve the goal of exclusive breast feeding up to 6 months and co-ordinate and discuss the adverse effects of early weaning at various forums, meetings and health programs as a nurse administrator.

CONCLUSION

The present study highlighted the causes for early weaning among mothers of infants. Efforts can be taken to educate the

mothers regarding the benefits of exclusive breast feeding which will in turn help to reduce the infant mortality and morbidity.

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