# Research Article

# **Breastfeeding practice and perception among women attending Primary Health Care Center in Giza, Egypt**

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#### Abstract

**Background:** Breastfeeding is an unequaled way of providing ideal food for the healthy growth and development of infants; it also affects the reproductive process, with important implications for maternal health. The global public health recommendation is that infants should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life, starting in the first half hour after delivery. There are various factors that affect the decision regarding the initiation and duration of exclusive breastfeeding, including socio-demographic factors (education level, monthly household income, and parity), residence and cultural beliefs, employment policies, health-related factors, and biosocial factors (breastfeeding support). In Egypt, the Egypt Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS, 2014) shows that exclusive breastfeeding is common but not universal in very early infancy. Among infants under two months of age, 71% received only breast milk. However, the proportion exclusively breastfed drops off rapidly among older infants. Aim of the study: To assess the practice and perception level of breastfeeding among women attending the Primary Health Care Center in Giza, Egypt. Research methodology: This study is cross-sectional study among women had at least one child aged 2 years or younger, included 380 participants, recruited from Primary health care center in Giza. Face to face interview questionnaire was used in data collection. Results: The practice level of breastfeeding was significantly affected by women' age, residence, work status and socio-economic level. Women with higher breastfeeding perception score had higher odds for good practice (AOR, 1.16; 95% CI, 1.04-1.3). **Conclusion:** The study findings revealed effect of work on practice level of breastfeeding, and it was that poor practice level was found more likely among women with longer working hours and women who were taking longer time to reach work. **Recommendations:** Early initiation of breastfeeding within the first hour of infant life, the infant only receives breast milk, breastfeeding on demand – often as the child wants, day and night and no use of teats, bottles, or pacifier

Key words: Breastfeeding, practice, perception, Giza.

### Introduction

Breastfeeding and human breast milk are the normative standards for ideal feeding and nutrition for infants (**Gartner et al.**, 2012) with many established short- and long-term benefits (Young, 2016). According to World Health Organization (WHO, 2017), exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for infants during their first 6 months of life.

This should be continued in conjunction with the appropriate complementary food

for up to 2 years or beyond. However, currently, fewer than 40% of infants under 6 months of age are exclusively breastfed worldwide (WHO, 2011). Many factors affect exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months of life, including maternal socio-demographic traits and medical factors (Girish and Gandhimathi, 2015).

The following four leading reasons women often report for breastfeeding discontinuation: breast discomfort (including nipple pain), perceived insufficient milk supply, a negative family or healthcare support system, or conflicts with other activities, such as employment (Otsuka et al., 2008). Length of maternity leave, occupation type and status, workplace accommodations, and supportive policy are factors known to impact women's breastfeeding initiation and duration (Attanasio et al., 2013; Bai & Wunderlich, 2013).

#### Subjects and methods Study design

This is a cross-sectional study carried out in Giza governorate. The study sample recruited from Primary health care center, which were selected randomly, where women had at least one child aged 2 years or younger were attending to get contraceptive methods or have vaccines for their infants. The sample size of this study was calculated using a 95% confidence interval (Newcombe formula) and was found to be 380 mothers (http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc. htm (Creative Research Systems, 2014; Newcome, 1998).

# Data collection Data collection tool

Questionnaires were printed and fulfilled by the researcher during the interviews with mothers. On the basis of the participants' responses, their perception and practices of breast feeding were assessed.

## **Ethical consideration**

The study protocol was approved by the research ethical committee of faculty of Medicine in Minia University. Approval of the faculties' deans was obtained. Data were collected from participants after explaining the nature of the study and taking verbal consent from each of them. Confidentiality, privacy, and freedom to withdraw from the study on the participant's decision were assured.

# Statistical analysis

After the collection of the questionnaires, the obtained data were organized using the MS Excel software program, coded, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. Means and standard deviation (SD) were used for numerical data, whereas percentages were used for categorical data. First, chi squared  $(\gamma 2)$  test and independent t-test were conducted to assess the effect of certain factors on breastfeeding perception and practices. Second, the predictors of perception and practice levels were determined using multinomial logistic regression analysis. Adjusted odds ratio (AOR) with 95% confidence interval (CI) was computed and a p-value less than 0.05 was selected as the cut-off for statistical significance.

# Results

The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 44 years old. 49.2% of the participants lived in urban areas, about half of the females 49.2% had secondary or intermediate education and 33.9% of the participants were working mothers.

Table	(1): Socio-demograp	hic characteristics	s of the	studied	women	attending	Primary
Health	n Care Center in Giza	, Egypt, 2019					

	Total participants (n=380)
	N (%)
Age	
$Mean \pm SD$	28.68±5.71
(Range)	(18-44)
Religion	
Muslim	344 (90.5%)
Christian	36 (9.5%)
Marital status	
Married	376 (98.9%)
Divorced	4 (1.1%)
Residence	
Rural	64 (16.8%)
Urban slum	129 (33.9%)
Urban	187 (49.2%)
Education	
Illiterate – Read &Write	56 (14.7%)
Primary	13 (3.4%)
2ry/intermediate	187 (49.2%)
University/postgrad.	124 (32.6%)
Occupation	
Housewife	251 (66.1%)
Manual worker	20 (5.3%)
Clerk/Professional	109 (28.6%)
Education of husband	
Illiterate – Read &Write	47 (12.4%)
Primary	8 (2.1%)
2ry/intermediate	178 (46.8%)
University/postgrad.	147 (38.7%)
Occupation of husband	
Manual worker	72 (18.9%)
Business	108 (28.4%)
Clerk/Professional	200 (52.6%)
Numbers of family	
members	219 (57.6%)
< 5 members	161 (42.4%)
$\geq$ 5 members	
Income from all sources	34 (8 9%)
Insufficient	312 (82 1%)
Meet routine expenses	34 (8 9%)
Able to save money	51 (0.970)

**Table 1** shows that the mean age of the studied mothers was  $28 \pm 5.7$  years, (98.9%) of them were married and (49.2%) of them came from Urban areas. About one third of women and 38.7% of husbands had higher education. More than half of husbands (52.6%) had clerk and professional occupations, while more than half (66.1%) of mothers were housewives. Most of the families (57.6%) were less than five members and the majority (82.1%) met their routine expenses only.

		Total
		participants
		(n=380)
		N (%)
Have your baby received pre-lacteal food?	Yes	202 (53.2%)
Have your baby received colostrum?	Yes	344 (90.5%)
Time to initiate breastfeeding	1 <sup>st</sup> day after delivery	314 (82.6%)
	2 <sup>nd</sup> day	18 (4.7%)
	3 <sup>rd</sup> day	22 (5.8%)
	After that	26 (6.8%)
Duration of avalusiva broastfooding (months)	Mean $\pm$ SD	3.54±1.62
Duration of exclusive breastreeding (months)	(Range)	(0-9)
	every 1 hour	127 (33.6%)
Frequency of breastfeeding in the 1st 6 months	every 2 hours	131 (34.7%)
Frequency of breastreeting in the 1st o months	every 3 hours	48 (12.7%)
	Other	72 (19.0%)
Did you take any supplement during	Yes	107 (28.2%)
breastfeeding?		
Did you take special diet or food items to increase	Yes	291 (76.6%)
the milk during breastfeeding?		
Did you practice milk expression to be used to	Vac	16(4,00())
feed the baby while you are outside the home or	res	16 (4.2%)
in the work?		
Baby age at time of weaning (months)	Mean ± SD	15.69±8.08
	(Range)	(0.5-24)

 Table (2): Breastfeeding practices among the studied women attending Primary Health

 Care Center in Giza, Egypt, 2019 (Answer yes)

**Table 2** shows the breastfeeding practices among the studied mothers. It was found that 53.2% of babies received pre-lacteal food and 90.5% received colostrum. More than half of mothers (68.6%) initiated breastfeeding during the first hour after delivery and the mean duration of exclusive breastfeeding was about three and half months.

 Table (3): Barriers to breastfeeding among the studied women attending Primary

 Health Care Center in Giza, Egypt 2019 (Answer yes)

	Yes
Lack of knowledge about benefits of Breastfeeding	7 (1.8%)
Misconception that formula is equivalent	6 (1.6%)
Lactation problems	228 (60.0%)
Lack of support and embarrassment about feeding in public	6 (1.6%)
Returning to work and accessing supportive childcare	92 (24.2%)
Other problems (as immersed nipple, mother feels that	
breastfeeding is boring, infant stayed long time in the incubator, the	91 (23.9%)
mother taking medicine preventing her to breastfeed)	

**Table 3** shows that the main barrier to breastfeeding was lactation problems (60%) followed by returning to work (24.2%). Other barriers included were lack of knowledge about benefits of breastfeeding (1.8%), misconception that formula is equivalent and lack of support and embarrassment about feeding in public (1.6%).



#### Figure (1): Breastfeeding practice among the studied women attending Primary Health Care Center in Giza, Egypt 2019

**Figure 1** shows that 71.9% of the studied women had fair breastfeeding practice, 22.6% had poor practice and only 5.5% of them had good breastfeeding practice.

Table (4): Perception regarding advantages of breastfeeding among the studied women
attending Primary Health Care Center in Giza, Egypt 2019 (Answer yes)

Perception regarding advantages of breastfeeding	Yes
Superior nutrition	327 (86.1%)
Increase resistance to infection	293 (77.1%)
Decrease risk of allergies & lactose intolerance	62 (16.3%)
Breast milk is sterile & cheap	304 (80.0%)
Fewer stomach upset & constipation	313 (82.4%)
Having higher IQs due to good brain development	97 (25.5%)
Babies benefit emotionally	147 (38.7%)
Babies sucking causes mother's uterus to contract	83 (21.8%)
Mothers breastfeed loss weight	60 (15.8%)

**Table 4** shows that the majority of mothers know that breast milk is superior nutrition (86.1%), sterile and cheap (80%), associated with fewer stomach upset (82.4%) and increase resistance to infections (77.1%).

Disadvantages of bottle feeding	Yes
Bottle feeding is less convenient during midnight	245 (64.5%)
Formula food expensive &transit infection	298 (78.4%)
Absence of Antibodies	181 (47.6%)
Loose bond bet mother &child	107 (28.2%)
Affect digestive system	348 (91.6%)

 Table (5): Perception of the studied women attending Primary Health Care Center

 regarding disadvantages of bottle feeding in Giza, Egypt 2019 (Answer yes)

**Table 5** shows that most mothers know that bottle feeding can affect digestive system of the baby (91.6%), formula food is expensive and may transit infection (78.4%), and bottle feeding is less convenient during midnight (64.5%). Moreover, 47.6% of women know that bottle feeding lack antibodies and 28.2% believe that bottle feeding may cause loose bond between mother and child.

# Figure (3): Breastfeeding perception among the studied women attending Primary Health Care Center in Giza, Egypt 2019



**Figure 3** showed that 52.9% of the studied women had fair perception level of breastfeeding, 26.8% had good level and 20.3% of them had poor perception level.



Figure (4) Perception of the disadvantages of bottle feeding among the studied women attending Primary Health Care Center in Giza, Egypt, 2019, according to the work status

**Figure (4)** shows that most of housewives think that bottle feeding affecting digestive system (88%) and most of working women (98.4%) think that also. (60.5%) of working women think that bottle feeding loosing bond between mother and child, while (11.6%) of housewives think that.

Figur	e (5) Baby	7 age a	t weaning a	among the st	tudied wo	omen attendir	ng Primary	Health
Care	Center in	Giza,	Egypt, 201	9, according	to the wo	ork status		



Figure (5) Shows that baby age at weaning were 12.56 months among housewives, while were 19.11 months among working women.

### Discussion

This study showed that 82.6% of the mothers initiated breastfeeding in the first day after delivery, which was much higher than what was reported by Shiv et al. (2012), which found that only 20.9% of mothers started breastfeeding within one hour after delivery (Bhardwaj et al., 2012). Nearly 90.5% of infants had received colostrum. This finding was similar to a study that was conducted in Nepal where 83.3% of children received colostrum (Yadav et al., 2013). Out of 380 mothers, 53.2% of breastfeeding mothers gave prelacteal feeding, which was greater than what found in a study conducted on Saudi mothers whom been admitted for delivery at maternity hospitals in Riyadh, where pre-lactic feeding was practiced by 10.5% of mothers (Al-Shoshan, 2007). The average duration of exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) was 3.5 months. This may be due to suboptimal level of knowledge and awareness about EBF among the participant mothers. Similar results have also been detected in Ethiopia showed that Knowledge of study participant mothers who attend antenatal care and immunization clinic towards exclusive breastfeeding was poor (Alamirew et al., 2017). In this study, the range of infant age at the time of weaning was 15 months. Similarly a few percentage of mothers in Saudi Arabia (2%) continue breastfeeding at 2 years of age (El Mouzan et al., 2009). The main reasons for breastfeeding cessation were reported as insufficient breast milk, pregnancy, the use of contraceptive pills, and returning to work (Fida & Al-Aama, 2003; Al-Hreashy et al., 2008).

The major barrier that influenced the continuation of breastfeeding was lactation problems (60%) (as tiredness of mother, sore or painful nipples, insufficient milk production, their infants were still feeling hungry after breastfeeding, misinter-pretation of normal infants crying, infants comfort and ease with formula feeding, breast milk dried up and poor latching of baby at the breast). These findings were similar to the findings of Raffle who stated that pain of mothers had a negative impact

on breastfeeding decisions (Raffle et al., 2011). The findings of the current study suggest that the mother needs to be advised on the best feeding positions to help and eliminate her painful symptoms. And perceived insufficient milk supply is a worldwide issue that women report for

early discontinuation of EBF (Brand et al.,

2011).

In the present study, most of the mothers (86.1%) knew that breastfeeding is the superior nutrition for the baby. Similar findings were observed by Woldegebriel who found that almost all mothers considered human milk as the best milk for good child growth compared to cow's milk and/or formula milk (Woldegebriel, 2002). Only (38.7%) of mothers in our study knew that breastfeeding benefits the baby emotionnally and increases bond between mother and baby, but most of the mothers (77.1%) agreed that breastfeeding protects the child from infection. In comparison to a study conducted on Egyptian mothers in Assiut City, about 79% of the participants knew that breast milk promoted bonding between mothers and child and protects child from diseases (Safaa et al., 2012) (Mohamed et al., 2012).

The current study also found that only (25.5%) of mothers knew the role of breast milk in brain development of the infant, while the majority of mothers (82.4%) knew its effect in protection against constipation and stomach upset. Low percentage of mothers (15.8%) knew that mothers who breastfeed tend to lose weight and protected from breast cancer and only (21.8%) knew that Babies suckling causes mother's uterus to contract and have contraceptive effect. This reflects insufficient knowledge regarding the benefits of breastfeeding especially to mothers. This was similar to Abul-Fadl et al. who reported that lower percentage of mothers in Upper Egypt knew about the protective effects of breastfeeding, particularly against breast cancer and the lowest level of knowledge was about the potential contraceptive effect of exclusive breastfeeding (Abul-Fadl et al., 2012).

This study showed that most of the mothers (91.6%) said that bottle feeding affects digestive system of infants. This finding is similar to a study demonstrated that participants who encountered feeding problems with the formula milk reported constipation and sickness such as vomiting, diarrhea, colic, and regurgitation as the most common ones. The risk of constipation among formula-fed children is quite common and this has also been found in Italy, whereby the authors reported that there is a prolonged gastrointestinal transit in formula-fed infants and the stool consistency is hard compared to breastfed infants (F Savino et al., 2003). High percentage of mothers (78.4%) believed that formula feeding is expensive and may transit infection, more than half of mothers (64.5%) perceived that bottle feeding is less convenient during midnight and (47.6%) of mothers mentioned the absence of antibodies in formula feeding. A study demonstrated that formula feeding can be easily prepared but it lacks the antibodies that are found in the breast milk, expensive and gas and constipation producing and, in all cases, it cannot match the complexity of breast milk. In addition, asthma, atopic dermatitis and allergic rhinitis are widely associated with formula feeding rather than breast feeding (Perinat J (2017). So many disadvantages are reported for formula feeding and seem to be similar to previously reported cases (Pairman et al., 2006).

Results showed perception level about the disadvantages of bottle feeding among working women and housewives; Most working women (60.5%) think that bottle feeding loosing bond between mother and child, In converse; (11.6%) of housewives think that. Most of working women and housewives think that bottle feeding affecting digestive system (98.4% and 88% respectively).

Working mothers are more likely to end breastfeeding prematurely compared with non-working mothers (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008; Hendricks et al., 2006; Kimbro, 2006; Ogbuanu et al., 2011; Ryan et al., 2006). In contrast to our study, baby age at weaning among working mothers was 19.11 months, while in housewives was 12.56 months. It is likely that working mothers who aim for prolonged breastfeeding are distinct in their socio-economic and educational backgrounds as well as their self-confidence and aspirations. They might also have different job prospects, with different working conditions and work flexibility, and different patterns of return to work and of maternity leave take-up. This has previously been observed in research looking at breastfeeding patterns in Scotland. Clearly, variables measuring social class or education are highly collinear, and are proxy measures for broader differences in human capital which nourish differences in breastfeeding trends (Dex, 2008; Skafida, 2009).

# Conclusion

The study concluded that (22.6%) of the studied women had poor breastfeeding practice, illiterate/primary educated and women of low socio-economic class were more likely to have poor practice level (OR, 3.3; 95% CI, 1.71-6.35 and 2.67; 95% CI, 1.12-6.35 respectively). The most common barriers for exclusive breast-feeding were lactation problems (60%) and returning to work (24.2%).

Older women (OR, 1.1; 95% CI, 1.05-1.15) and working women (OR, 13.08; 95% CI, 7.37-23.22) had satisfactory knowledge about the advantages and benefits of breastfeeding for child and mother.

### Recommendations

Develop successful awareness programs about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding should be directed for young, first-time mothers, less educated and women of low socio-economic class. There is need for improving strategies for maternal care during the antenatal and postnatal periods. Supporting working women in work place by providing nursery time, suitable nursery place and enough maternity leave period.

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