



## Perceptions and Practices of Breastfeeding among Mothers in an Urban Slum of Kolkata

**Running Title:** Perceptions and Practices of Breastfeeding among Mothers

**Sujan Pratihar<sup>1</sup>, Tanmay Kumar Bose<sup>2</sup>, Dr Senthil Kumar N<sup>3</sup>**

1. PhD Research Scholar, Saveetha College of Physiotherapy, Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India
2. PhD Research Scholar, Saveetha College of Physiotherapy, Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India
3. Assistant Professor, PhD, Saveetha College of Physiotherapy, Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

**\* Corresponding Author: Sujan Pratihar**

PhD Research Scholar

Saveetha College of Physiotherapy

Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

Mobile No.: +91 8336070248

Email: [sujanpratihar@gmail.com](mailto:sujanpratihar@gmail.com)

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### Abstract:

**Background :** Breastfeeding is the natural way of providing young infants with the optimal nutrients needed for healthy growth and development of infants. The main obstacle in raising the exclusive breastfeeding rate is lack of awareness, false belief and customs.

**Objective:** The current study was designed to assess perceptions and practices of breastfeeding among mothers in an urban slum of Kolkata.

**Materials and methods:** A Community based, Cross- sectional study using pre-designed and pre- tested schedule was conducted in Tangra, urban slum of Kolkata between January 2024 –March 2024. Total 100 lactating mother were included in the study after meeting inclusion and exclusion criteria. Statistical data were analysed by using Microsoft Excel and SPSS V.20 software

**Results:** Around 72% of the mothers were aware about the time of initiation of breast feeding, 54% knew about advantage of breast feeding and 68% of the mothers were aware of exclusive breast feeding. Attitude of the mothers towards breast feeding is favourable. Only 38% of the mother knew that breast feeding should be continued till 2 years. Majority i.e. 88% of the mothers were not aware regarding the breast feeding advantage to the mother.

**Conclusions:** The attitude of the study population towards exclusive breastfeeding was however found to be positive in general.

**Keywords:** Breast feeding, Knowledge, Lactating mothers, Perception, Practices

**Introduction:**

Early initiation and exclusive breast feeding help ensure young children the best start of life. Exclusive breastfeeding means that the infant receives only breast milk. No other liquids or solids are given – not even water – with the exception of oral rehydration solution, or drops/syrups of vitamins, minerals or medicines. Infants should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life to achieve optimal growth, development and health.<sup>1</sup>

The fourth and fifth Millennium Development Goals aimed at reducing child and maternal mortality by 2015.<sup>2</sup> Child survival has shown substantial improvement globally, but progress has been slow for maternal, perinatal and neonatal health.<sup>3,4</sup> Birthing is a natural phenomenon but is accompanied with danger for both mother as well as newborn especially in developing countries. Newborn period is the crucial period in laying the foundation of good health. At this time specific biological and psychological needs must be met to ensure the survival and healthy development of the child into a future adult.<sup>5</sup> About 1.2 million neonates die annually in India alone accounting for about 1/4th of global neonatal deaths.<sup>6</sup>

Breastfeeding is the natural way of providing young infants with the nutrients they need for healthy growth and development. Following delivery, routine newborn care procedures that separate mother and baby should be delayed for at least first hour to allow mother and newborn to be in uninterrupted skin-to-skin contact to encourage and promote initiation of breastfeeding within the first hour.<sup>7</sup> National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-4 shows children under 3 years breastfed within one hour of birth was 40.1%.<sup>8</sup> Breastfeeding has well-established short-term benefits, particularly the reduction of morbidity and mortality due to infectious diseases in childhood. The importance of breastfeeding for infant nutrition and the prevention of infant morbidity and mortality as well as the prevention of long-term chronic diseases are well established, and thus breastfeeding is an essential component of infant and child survival and health programs.<sup>9</sup>

The present study aims assess perceptions and practices of breastfeeding among mothers in an urban slum of Kolkata.

**Materials and methods:**

This was a community based, cross sectional study undertaken in the Tangra, urban slum of Kolkata between January 2024 –March 2024.

Total 100 lactating women who has a child of more than 6 months were recruited for the study in the two months period were interviewed after applying inclusion and exclusion criteria.

**Inclusion Criteria :** Lactating women who has a child of 6 months to one year and agreed to participate in the study.

**Exclusion Criteria :** Those who not willing to participate in the study.

Detailed information was collected using pre-tested semi- structured proforma by interview method. Sociodemographic profile like age, education, occupation, type of family etc was taken. To assess knowledge initiation of breast feeding, advantage of colostrum, frequency of feeding, type and time of complementary food was assessed. The 5 point Likert scale was used to assess the attitude

**Statistical analysis :** The data were tabulated in Microsoft Excel 2007 and analyzed by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 software for proportions and chi-square tests as test of significance.

**Results**

**Table 1: Distribution of study subjects based on sociodemographic profile**

Sl.	Variables		Frequency (%)
1	Age	<20	26 (26%)
		21-30	68 (68%)
		>30	6 (6%)
2	Education	Illiterate	18 (18%)
		High school	34 (34%)
		Pre-university	26 (26%)
		Graduate	22 (22%)
3	Employment	Employed	28 (28%)
		Housewife	72 (72%)
4	Religion	Hindu	66 (66%)
		Muslim	34 (34%)
5	Type of family	Nuclear	58 (58%)
		Joint	42 (42%)

A total of 100 lactating mothers participated in the study. The sociodemographic profile of study subjects depicted in table 1. The age range of study subjects varies between 19-36 years with mean of 26 years with SD of ±3.64. Majority (68%) belong to age group of 21-30 years. 34% mothers were studied upto high school. 72% mothers were housewife. Majority of them (58) delivered in a private medical college and majority (57) by normal delivery.

**Table 2: Knowledge of study subjects regarding breast feeding.**

Sl. No	Questions		Percentage (%)
1	Time of initiation of feeding	Within 1 hr	72
		Between 1-24 hr	18
		Don't know	10
2	Colostrum advantage	Don't know	40
		Decreases diarrhoea	54
		Not digestible	06
3	Duration of exclusive breast feeding	<6 months	22
		6 months	68
		>6 months	10
4	Type of weaning food to start	Semisolid	16
		Liquid	72
		Semi liquid	12
5	Breast feeding advantage to the mother	Don't know	88
		Contraceptive	04
		Decreases weight	08
6	Source of information	Health worker	72
		Friends/relatives	22
		Mass media	06

Knowledge of mothers regarding breast feeding is depicted in table 2. Most of the mothers knew that human milk is the best milk for their baby. Around 72% of the mothers were aware

about the time of initiation of breast feeding, 54% knew about advantage of breast feeding and 68% of the mothers were aware of exclusive breast feeding. Majority (88%) of the mother were not aware of the breast feeding advantage to the mother. Source of information regarding breast feeding was mostly from health workers (72%).

**Table 3: Attitude of study subjects regarding breast feeding.**

Sl. No.	Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Breast milk is healthier than cow's milk.	88	12	-	-	-
2	Three months of breast feeding is long enough.	04	08	-	22	66
3	Breast feeding is difficult than artificial feeding.	14	04	06	16	60
4	Prelacteal feed should be given before initiation of breast milk.	22	12	8	14	44
5	Breast feeding increases the intelligence of the baby.	78	16	2	-	04
6	Breast feeding should be continued with weaning foods.	72	28	-	-	-

In the study attitude regarding breast feeding was assessed using 5 point Likert scale. Attitude of the mother regarding exclusive breast feeding is found favourable. (Table 3)

**Discussion:**

Breastfeeding is the normal way of providing young infants with the nutrients they need for healthy growth and development. Over the past decades, evidence for the health advantages of breastfeeding and recommendations for practice have continued to increase. WHO can now say with full confidence that breastfeeding reduces child mortality and has health benefits that extend into adulthood. On a population basis, exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life is the recommended way of feeding infants, followed by continued breastfeeding with appropriate complementary foods for up to two years or beyond.<sup>10</sup> Virtually all mothers can breastfeed, provided they have accurate information, and the support of their family.<sup>11</sup>

Majority of the mother (72%) knew about time of initiation of breast feeding. But in a study conducted by Chaudary only 10% of the mother knew about the initiation of breast feeding within one hour.<sup>12</sup>

Around 54% knew about the advantage of colostrums in comparison to study done by Pansari 88% were aware of the advantage of colostrums.<sup>13</sup>

Most of the mothers i.e. 68% knew about the duration of exclusive breast feeding is 6 months. According to study in Puducherry, Maheshwaran et al study, only 38% of post natal mother knew about exclusive breast feeding.<sup>14</sup> According to study in West Bengal, 70% of the mother exclusively breast fed their baby.<sup>15</sup>

72% aware about the type of weaning food. Most of them got all these information from the health worker and in a study done by Okolo 33% of the mother received information from the health worker.<sup>16</sup> But majority not aware about the breast feeding benefits the mother.

Only 38% of the mother knew that breast feeding should be continued till 2 years but in a study done by Vijayalakshmi, 68% knew about the breast feeding should be continued till 2

years and in a rural study by Kishore 27% of the mother felt that breast feeding should be continued till 2 years.<sup>17,18</sup> Attitude of the mother towards breast feeding is favorable.

### Conclusion:

There is an urgent need to make the community aware of advantages and promotion of institutional deliveries along with a need to improve breastfeeding practices both in hospitals as well as in home. This study reveals that there is lack of knowledge about breast feeding benefits to the mother and continuation of breast feeding till two years among lactating mothers. So training of health workers to promote breast feeding and Pre natal education to mothers on breast feeding should be strengthened.

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