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Knowledge, attitudes and practices of mothers regarding infant feeding in the Pannala MOH area

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Child nutritional problems remain as one of the public health problems in Sri Lanka. The Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) of mothers on infant feeding is very important to provide proper nutrients for infants. The present study was conducted to assess the KAP of mothers towards infant feeding.

This cross-sectional study was conducted among mothers of infants who were attending Maternal and Child Health (MCH) clinics during the study period and willing to participate in the study. Permission for the study was obtained from the MOH at Pannala and informed consent was obtained after briefing the mothers about the study. A total of 100 mothers were interviewed using a pre- tested interviewer administrated questionnaire. The knowledge, attitude and practice levels were evaluated by scales of 0 to 20, 0 to 15 and 0 to 17 respectively. Scores were given on the basis of the response of subjects to each question. Each positive/correct answer was given 1 mark and negative/incorrect answer was given 0 marks. The mean value of the total score was calculated and according to these mean values, the scores were divided as low and high for knowledge, positive and negative for attitudes and good and poor for practices. Data was analyzed descriptively and presented as percentages.

The age of the study sample ranged from 20 to 42 years with a mean age of 28.62 ± 4.57 years. Out of the total, there were no illiterate mothers and 42% were educated up to A/L. The majority (90%) of mothers were unemployed and 56 % of mothers had 2-3 children. The results revealed that all mothers knew about the Exclusive Breast Feeding (EBF) period as being up to 6 months but only 73% of them practiced EBF. A majority (97%) thought that colostrum is good for the baby and 96% fed colostrum. Only 22% of mothers have given other feeds during EBF period. 74% had knowledge about the duration of breast feeding as being up to 24 months. 80% knew and practiced the initiation of complementary foods after 6 months. 67% and 27% of mothers introduced mashed food and semi-solid foods as initial complementary feeding respectively. 90% said that family foods should be introduced after 1 year and 87% said sugar and salt should be introduced after 1 year. However, 76% introduced sugar and salt before one year and 93% of mothers did not keep left over food for the next feeding. 92% have changed the feeding pattern when the mother or the child was ill, and among them 67.4% increased the quantity fed. Most of the mothers had positive attitudes regarding infant feeding such as breast milk is the best food for infant, first milk is good (98%), exclusive breast feeding should be practiced up to the first six months. Similarly 87% of mothers accepted that demand feeding is important, 90% mothers knew that they should take extra food during lactation. 35% of mothers said that they did not avoid any foods due to traditional beliefs during the lactation period. This study concludes that the mothers had good knowledge, positive attitudes and appropriate practices regarding infant feeding.

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