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Influence of social network on exclusive breastfeeding practices of lactating mothers

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Abstract

Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life improves the growth and health of the new born child. It also played an important role in the survival of the child. However, many infants in Nigeria are not breastfed exclusively for the recommended duration. This study examines the influence of social network on the breast feeding (BF) practices of lactating mothers. The study was carried out in Osun State of Southwestern Nigeria. Three hundred and forty mothers were randomly selected and interviewed about breastfeeding practices using a structured interview schedule. Breastfeeding practices were examined against initiation, duration, termination of BF, support from various social networks, decision of mothers on BF practices and the influence of various social networks on BF. Data were described and inferences were made with the appropriate statistical tools. Results revealed that most of the mothers were married (92.9%) and between the ages of 25-29 years (38.8%). Majority (82.9%) delivered their children in the hospital and had two children (33.5%). Some had secondary education (38.8%), tertiary education (39.4%) and only 45.9% were traders. Most (98.2%) of the mothers breastfed their infants, 66.5% initiated breastfeeding between 0-9 hours after delivery and breastfed on demand (74.7%). Mothers expressed breast milk for infants (34%) and fed infants with feeding bottles (54.7%). Only 56.4% of mothers had training on breastfeeding practices, 45.9% had their training in the hospital and 5.9% in religious centre but only 24.7% exclusively breastfed their infants. Half (50%) of the mothers care for their children themselves, 21.2% used the crèche and 28.8% were taken care of by the mother in-law. The social network involved in breastfeeding decision were nurses, doctors, mother in-laws, grandmother of the baby, traditional birth attendants (TBA) and friends. However, each of the networks had varied influences on decision for various BF practices. The four major social networks identified in order of influence on decision on breastfeeding practices were nurses, grandmother of baby, mother in-law and friends. However the mother of the infant played a major role especially in the use of feeding bottle (34.4%) and termination of breastfeeding (37.1%). For mothers to exclusively breastfeed their infant they will need the support of the grandmother of infant (76.5%), nurse (100%), mother in-law (59.4%), friends (11.2%), husbands (67.1%) and workplace (54.1%). Mothers need help with household chores and care of the baby. Multivariate analysis revealed that mothers who received support from social networks tend to initiate BF early, feed colostrums, fed expressed breast milk and breastfed exclusively. Correlation analysis shows that educational status ($r = 0.334$), age of mothers ($r = 0.162$), and social network ($r = 0.442$) had positive significant relationship with duration of exclusive breastfeeding at $P < 0.05$.

In conclusion, appropriate breastfeeding practices can be improved when mothers are supported from initiation through the breastfeeding period by various social networks at home, community and workplace. Therefore, intervention program on breastfeeding practices should focus on the mother as well as various social networks for the adoption of appropriate exclusive breastfeeding practices.

Biography

Ogunba Beatrice Olubukola is a nutritionist specializing in Maternal and Child Nutrition. Her area of research has been in breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices in Nigeria. She is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Family, Nutrition and Consumer Sciences, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife Nigeria. She had her Ph.D. in Public Health Nutrition from the University of Ibadan, Ibadan Nigeria in 2007 and she has been working in the University as an academic staff from 1995 to date. Dr. Beatrice Ogunba has 16 published journal articles and 4 conference proceedings. She is a member of 8 professional associations.