



Understanding the Influence on Breastfeeding Practices and Infant Health Outcomes

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the beliefs and practices related to breastfeeding in Pangangan Island, Calape, Bohol, to understand why some mothers do not exclusively breastfeed their babies for the first six months and why they discontinue breastfeeding up to two years. Despite extensive government campaigns promoting exclusive breastfeeding, observations reveal that formula milk is still used in public places. The survey data analysis indicates that age, education, and occupation do not significantly impact physiological and psychological breastfeeding beliefs, but they do influence socio-cultural beliefs. Tailored interventions are crucial to provide appropriate support based on the socio-cultural context. The study aims to increase awareness of the benefits of breastfeeding, address misconceptions, and promote breastfeeding for better infant health. Recommendations will be formulated to enhance maternal breastfeeding beliefs and practices in Pangangan Island and beyond.

Keywords: breastfeeding, beliefs, formula milk, psychological, physiological

INTRODUCTION

Breast milk is widely recognized as the best option for babies up to two years old, a message frequently conveyed in formula milk commercials on TV and in print media (Galarpe, 2006). Despite the well-established health benefits of breastfeeding, many mothers remain unconvinced and opt for early introduction of formula. Feeding practices vary significantly across divergent countries, reflecting a multitude of beliefs and traditions related to breastfeeding. While some beliefs encourage breastfeeding, others may deter mothers from adopting this practice. To effectively support breastfeeding mothers, it is essential to understand local beliefs, customs, and traditions surrounding breastfeeding, empowering healthcare providers and advocates to offer more appropriate and tailored counseling.

The National Demographic Health Survey (NDHS) in the Philippines has revealed concerning statistics regarding breastfeeding practices. Only 54 percent of infants were initiated to breastfeeding within an hour after birth, and merely 33.5 percent of infants under 6 months old were exclusively breastfed. Shockingly, the average duration of exclusive breastfeeding was less than a month, while the practice of breastfeeding a young child lasted for only 14 months.

Specifically focusing on Bohol, data provided by the Provincial Health Office in 2008 showed that a mere 10 percent of Boholano mothers practiced exclusive breastfeeding up to six months of age, falling

significantly short of the target rate of 60 percent. This alarming data raises concerns among the Boholano community.

The significance of addressing these issues is underscored by the impact on long-term economic development. The government's efforts to accelerate economic growth may be hindered without ensuring optimal child growth and development through appropriate feeding practices (WHO/Unicef, 2000). Prominent health expert Duque attests that implementing exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of a child's life, introducing appropriate complementary feedings at six months, and continuing breastfeeding for at least two years could prevent many infant deaths (Duque, 2008).

To improve the situation in Bohol and the Philippines at large, there is a critical need to focus on enhancing breastfeeding practices, emphasizing the importance of proper child nutrition, and implementing supportive measures to ensure better child health and development.

This study is rooted in Ramona T. Mercer's Theory of Maternal Role Attainment, which emphasizes the gradual and transformative process through which mothers develop attachment to their infants, acquire caregiving competence, and derive satisfaction from their role. The ultimate goal is maternal identity, a state of harmony, confidence, and proficiency in fulfilling the role of a mother (Alligood, 2006).

Breastfeeding is one significant pathway to achieve maternal role attainment, as it involves skin-to-skin contact between mothers and infants, fostering warmth and establishing a vital mother-child attachment. Attachment, as explained by Papalia (1989), serves an adaptive function, evolving from parents fulfilling the immediate physical needs of the baby, such as hunger and thirst. Early literature further supports the crucial role of the mother-infant bond, suggesting that a disrupted connection during the first hours after birth may impede normal development. A weakened maternal urge and potential jeopardy to the baby's future development could result from such separation.

By delving into the link between maternal role attainment and breastfeeding, this study seeks to better understand the significance of attachment and early mother-infant bonding in nurturing a healthy and thriving mother-child relationship. The findings can provide valuable insights for healthcare professionals, policymakers, and families, promoting optimal maternal role attainment and fostering positive mother-infant interactions, ultimately contributing to improved child development outcomes.

OBJECTIVE

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the factors influencing maternal decisions regarding exclusive breastfeeding from birth to six months and the continuation of breastfeeding up to two years. By exploring the reasons behind mothers' hesitancy in embracing exclusive breastfeeding practices, this research aims to shed light on barriers and misconceptions that may hinder optimal breastfeeding behaviors.

Furthermore, the study seeks to understand the diverse breastfeeding beliefs prevalent in Pangangan, Calape, Bohol. By delving into the cultural, social, and personal perspectives that shape these beliefs, the research aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing breastfeeding practices in the local community.

METHODS

This study employed the descriptive survey method, a research design selected to provide a comprehensive depiction of the current state of the mothers' characteristics and their breastfeeding beliefs. The descriptive survey method is well-suited for capturing a detailed snapshot of the existing situation without manipulating variables, enabling researchers to observe and analyze the phenomenon in its natural context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Beliefs about breastfeeding among mothers were found to be influenced by various factors, resulting in the classification of these beliefs into three main categories: physiological, psychological, and socio-cultural.

Physiological beliefs predominantly revolved around the economic benefits of breastfeeding. Mothers perceived breast milk as a cost-effective option since it eliminates the need to purchase commercial milk.

This natural nourishment is readily available without additional expenses, and there is no requirement for sterilization or the use of mineral water and feeding bottles. Another significant physiological belief was that breast milk contains natural antibodies, contributing to healthier babies. Many mothers reported that their infants rarely experienced common childhood diseases such as diarrhea and pneumonia, which they attributed to the protective properties of breast milk.

Psychological beliefs centered on the emotional satisfaction and fulfillment experienced by mothers in witnessing their babies grow healthy and strong. Being the primary source of nourishment for their infants evoked feelings of happiness and pride in mothers. Additionally, mothers strongly believed that breastfeeding is the best option for babies up to the age of two years, affirming their commitment to this natural feeding practice.

In terms of socio-cultural beliefs, mothers viewed breastfeeding as a means to soothe and put their babies to sleep. This belief highlights the bonding aspect of breastfeeding, indicating that it serves as a comforting experience for both mother and child. However, it is noteworthy that some mothers expressed the perception that breastfeeding can be challenging to perform.

The findings demonstrate a complex interplay between physiological, psychological, and socio-cultural beliefs regarding breastfeeding. The economic advantages, health benefits, emotional fulfillment, and cultural norms all contribute to the unique perspectives held by mothers on this fundamental aspect of infant care. Understanding and respecting these multifaceted beliefs are essential for healthcare providers and breastfeeding advocates to offer appropriate support and counseling to mothers.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study's findings suggest that age, educational attainment, and occupation do not significantly impact physiological and psychological breastfeeding beliefs. Nevertheless, they do play a role in shaping mothers' responses regarding socio-cultural beliefs. It is evident that the aspects of physiological, psychological, and socio-cultural beliefs are interrelated, and they mutually influence one another. These results highlight the complexity of breastfeeding beliefs and underscore the need for a comprehensive approach in understanding and supporting breastfeeding practices. Healthcare providers, policymakers, and breastfeeding advocates should recognize the interconnectedness of these beliefs to

effectively tailor interventions and support systems that address the unique challenges faced by mothers in different demographic contexts.

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