

Topic Factors influencing maternal choice during early initiation of infant feeding in a private hospital, Gauteng Province

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Background:

Breast is best... but not all mothers agree and choose breastfeeding as an option. The mother is ultimately responsible for the choice of infant feeding (breastfeeding, formula feeding or mixed feeding) after birth. Based on the mothers' choices it appears as if there are various factors that influence the mothers' choices of feeding for their infants.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe the factors influencing the mothers' choices of infant feeding; breastfeeding, formula feeding or mixed feeding.

Methods

A quantitative descriptive design was used. Data was collected with a semi-structured questionnaire to describe factors influencing mothers' choices of infant feeding (breastfeeding, formula feeding or mixed feeding) during the first few days after birth. The population was mothers who delivered in the private hospital and were admitted in the post-natal ward. Non-probability convenience sampling was used to include 300 respondents within the first three days of their delivery, as they had already chosen their feeding methods and it was prior to discharge irrespective if they had a normal delivery or delivered by caesarean section, or if their infant was healthy or admitted in the neonatal intensive care unit. The data was collected over a period of 4 months, was analysed and reported using descriptive statistics to describe factors influencing choice of infant feeding in frequency, percentages and means.

Results

The majority (65.67%) of the respondents chose breastfeeding and a major source of information that influenced their decision to breastfeed was family and friends. Furthermore 14.67% chose formula feeding based on information in pictures and information in doctors' rooms, and 27.27% mother chose formula feeding based on themselves having a medical condition. Mixed feeding respondents represented 16% of the responses, with their major source of information being family and friends or the perception of having insufficient milk supply.

Conclusion

Although the majority of respondents chose breastfeeding, many more babies should be breastfed, as factors influencing the mothers' decision not to breastfeed are mostly unscientific.

Implications

The results of the study were utilised for strategies to improve the choice of infant feeding and to address the challenges or reasons why formula or mixed feeding were chosen. The emphasis shifted to education to healthcare providers as well as parents to ultimately enhance breastfeeding of infants in the neonatal period and beyond.

keywords: Mother and child health, breastfeeding, choice of infant feeding

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to the following people and institutions for their contributions to this research:

- Dr C. Maree and Dr M. Yazbek, my supervisors, for their patience, guidance and endless motivation during my study;
- Mr M.T. Loots for his input and time regarding the statistical analysis of the data;
- Mr D. van Spuy for assisting with the editing;
- The hospital management where the study was conducted for their support;
- For my colleagues and friends for their support and motivations;

And my family for their endless support and motivation

Ethics approval

Ethical principles were adhered to, including obtaining the necessary Institutional and Ethics Committees' approval