



# Factors influencing maternal choice during early initiation of infant feeding in a private Hospital, Gauteng province

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## Summary

In spite of evidence available on the advantages of breastfeeding, many mothers who delivered in a private hospital chose formula or mixed feeding for their infant. This study used a descriptive quantitative design to describe factors influencing mothers' choices of feeding within the first three days after delivery. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data. Factors that were identified included information obtained from family and friends, pamphlets in doctor's rooms, and support from healthcare providers, lactation specialists and partners.

## Introduction / 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.

Breastfeeding has protective effects for infants against respiratory tract infections, acute otitis media, gastrointestinal tract infections, necrotizing enterocolitis, celiac disease, inflammatory bowel disease, sudden infant death syndrome, allergic disease, obesity, diabetes, childhood leukaemia and lymphoma, and retinopathy of prematurity. Breastfeeding is further known for contributing to cognitive development, oral health, feeding tolerance, self regulation and bonding.

Advantages for the mother include postpartum weight loss, lactation amenorrhea and a reduced risk for postpartum bleeding, diabetes, metabolic and cardiovascular disease, reproductive organ cancer and osteoporosis.

In spite of the advantages there was a trend for mothers to choose formula feeding instead of breastfeeding in a particular private hospital in Gauteng. Based on the mothers' choices it appeared as if there were various factors that influence the mothers' choices of feeding for their infants.

The purpose of this study was therefore to describe the factors influencing the mothers' choices of infant feeding; breastfeeding, formula feeding or mixed feeding. Nursing staff then might build on the factors that support breastfeeding, and / or address the challenges that lead to choosing formula feeding.



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## Methods

A descriptive quantitative design was used. The tool to collect data was 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 questionnaire was in English, as it is the language of communication in the hospital.

The study was done in the particular hospital, as that was the context where the problem regarding choice of feeding was identified and the purpose of the study was not generalisation. The population was therefore the mothers who delivered in the private hospital, irrespective of the mode of delivery. Non-probability convenience sampling was used as the sampling method. Data was collected within the first three days of their delivery, as they had already chosen their feeding methods and it was prior to discharge whether they had a normal delivery or delivered by caesarean section. Mothers of the infants admitted in the neonatal intensive care unit were also invited to participate, as they also had to choose what feeding their infants would receive. The data was collected over a period of 4 months to obtain a sample size of 288 respondents to enhance validity and reliability.

## Results

The majority, 65.67%, of the respondents chose breastfeeding. A major source of information that influenced their decision to breastfeed was family and friends. Other factors included health literacy, attending antenatal classes, support from a lactation specialist or other healthcare providers, and support of their partners.

Furthermore, 14.67% of the respondents chose formula feeding for their infants. Their major source of information was the pictures and information in doctors' rooms, or they were mothers with a medical condition such as being HIV-infected, who chose formula feeding based on the belief that breastfeeding was unsafe for their infants, and formula feeding was the best solution.

Respondents who chose mixed feeding (to combine breastfeeding and formula feeding) represented 16% of the responses. The major source of information that influenced their decision was family and friends. The perception that they had insufficient milk supply was also one of the most common reasons women gave for choosing mixed feeding. Additional factors that influenced their choices included lifestyle choices and challenges with breastfeeding.



## Conclusion

In spite of the advantages of breastfeeding, the reality is that there are multiple factors influencing a mother's decision on what to feed her newborn infant. Healthcare professionals can play an important role in influencing this decision.

## Implications / Take away message

- Healthcare professionals need to be knowledgeable about breastfeeding, formula feeding and mixed feeding for newborns to provide mothers with the best advice and influence their choices to the advantage of the infants.
- The interprofessional team need to talk the same language when providing mothers with information.

## Questions I would like audience to respond to

- How can we ensure that the interprofessional team members are consistent in their message about feeding choices?

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## References

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