

Effects of breastfeeding promotion and support programs on breastfeeding initiation, duration, and exclusive breastfeeding rates

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Abstract:

Background: Breastfeeding is universally recognized as the optimal source of nutrition for infants, offering numerous health benefits to both infants and mothers. Despite these advantages, global breastfeeding rates remain suboptimal, prompting the implementation of various breastfeeding promotion and support programs. Understanding the effects of these programs is crucial for enhancing maternal and child health outcomes.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted in diverse healthcare settings, including hospitals, clinics, and community health centers. Convenience sampling was utilized to recruit 100 eligible mothers who had given birth within the past year. Data on participant demographics, breastfeeding practices, exposure to breastfeeding promotion programs, and relevant covariates were collected using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, bivariate, and multivariate analyses were performed to examine the association between exposure to breastfeeding promotion programs and breastfeeding initiation rates, while controlling for potential confounding variables.

Results: The study found that 80% of mothers initiated breastfeeding, with 60% exclusively breastfeeding at discharge and a mean breastfeeding duration of 6.5 months. Factors influencing breastfeeding initiation included support from healthcare providers, participation in breastfeeding education classes, and social support from family and friends. Forty-five percent of mothers were exposed to breastfeeding promotion programs, with reported effectiveness ratings of 40%. Bivariate and multivariate analyses revealed a significant association between exposure to breastfeeding promotion programs and breastfeeding initiation rates, even after controlling for confounders.

Conclusion: This study contributes to the evidence base supporting the effectiveness of breastfeeding promotion programs in enhancing breastfeeding initiation rates among mothers. By identifying effective interventions and understanding their mechanisms, policymakers and healthcare providers can develop targeted strategies to promote breastfeeding and improve maternal and child health outcomes globally.

Introduction:

Breastfeeding is widely acknowledged as the optimal source of nutrition for infants, providing numerous health benefits for both the baby and the mother. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, followed by continued breastfeeding alongside appropriate complementary foods for up to two years or beyond. Despite the well-documented advantages of breastfeeding, global rates remain below optimal levels, with many mothers facing barriers to initiating and sustaining breastfeeding.[1]

The promotion and support of breastfeeding through various programs and interventions have emerged as crucial strategies to address the disparities in breastfeeding initiation, duration, and exclusive breastfeeding rates. Understanding the effects of these programs is essential for informing policy and practice aimed at improving maternal and child health outcomes. Breastfeeding offers a multitude of health benefits for both infants and mothers. Breast milk contains essential nutrients and antibodies that protect infants against infections, allergies, and chronic diseases.[2] For mothers, breastfeeding reduces the risk of postpartum hemorrhage, breast and ovarian cancers, and promotes faster postpartum weight loss. Therefore, interventions aimed at promoting breastfeeding have the potential to positively impact public health by reducing the burden of disease. Socioeconomic status significantly influences breastfeeding practices. Mothers from disadvantaged backgrounds often face barriers such as lack of access to support services, limited maternity leave, and aggressive marketing

of infant formula. Breastfeeding promotion and support programs can help mitigate these disparities by providing education, counseling, and practical assistance to mothers, irrespective of their socioeconomic status.[3]

Cultural beliefs and societal norms play a significant role in shaping breastfeeding practices. In some communities, breastfeeding may be stigmatized, leading to early cessation or avoidance of breastfeeding altogether. Breastfeeding promotion programs tailored to cultural sensitivities can help challenge these norms and promote breastfeeding as a socially acceptable and valued practice. The healthcare system plays a vital role in supporting breastfeeding initiation and continuation. Access to skilled lactation support, breastfeeding-friendly environments, and evidence-based guidance from healthcare providers are essential components of successful breastfeeding programs. Evaluating the effectiveness of breastfeeding promotion interventions within healthcare settings can inform strategies for strengthening support systems and improving breastfeeding outcomes.[4]

In light of these considerations, exploring the effects of breastfeeding promotion and support programs on breastfeeding initiation, duration, and exclusive breastfeeding rates is critical for advancing maternal and child health agendas. By identifying effective interventions and understanding the mechanisms through which they operate, policymakers, healthcare providers, and public health professionals can develop targeted strategies to promote and protect breastfeeding, ultimately improving the health and well-being of infants and mothers worldwide.

Objective:

- To assess the impact of breastfeeding promotion and support programs on breastfeeding initiation rates among mothers within diverse socio-demographic backgrounds.

Methods:

Study Design: A cross-sectional study

Study Setting: The study was conducted in diverse healthcare settings, including hospitals, clinics, and community health centers, to capture a representative sample of mothers from different socio-demographic backgrounds.

Sampling Method: Convenience sampling was utilized to recruit participants from antenatal clinics, postnatal wards, and community outreach programs.

Sample Size: 100

Eligibility Criteria: Mothers who have given birth within the past year were eligible to participate in the study.

Data Collection:

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data on participant demographics, breastfeeding practices, exposure to breastfeeding promotion and support programs, and relevant covariates (e.g., maternal age, education level, parity).

Data Collection Process: Trained interviewers administer the questionnaire to participants through face-to-face interviews or self-administered surveys, depending on participant preference and literacy level. Data collection will be conducted privately and confidentially to ensure participant comfort and confidentiality.

Descriptive Analysis: Descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, percentages, means) will be used to summarize participant characteristics, breastfeeding practices, and exposure to breastfeeding promotion programs. Bivariate and multivariate analyses (e.g., chi-square tests, and logistic regression) will be conducted to examine the association between exposure to breastfeeding promotion programs and breastfeeding initiation rates while controlling for potential confounding variables. Subgroup analyses will be performed to explore variations in the relationship between breastfeeding promotion programs and breastfeeding initiation rates across different demographic and socio-economic strata. Data analysis was conducted using appropriate statistical software (e.g., SPSS version 26.0), with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$.

Results:

The breastfeeding initiation rate of 80% indicates that the majority of mothers in the study sample initiated breastfeeding, reflecting a positive trend toward breastfeeding uptake in the population studied.

Table 1: Baseline Characteristics

Parameter	Total no of participants n=100 (%)
The mean age of the participants	28 years (SD = 4.5)
Distribution of education level	
High school or less	40%
Some college or vocational training	30%
Bachelor's degree or higher	30%
Distribution of parity	
Primiparous	50%
Multiparous	50%

The exclusive breastfeeding rate of 60% at discharge suggests that a substantial proportion of mothers were exclusively breastfeeding their infants, which is consistent with recommendations for optimal infant feeding practices during the early postpartum period. The mean duration of breastfeeding of 6.5 months indicates that, on average, mothers in the study continued breastfeeding for a relatively extended period, which is favorable for both infant health and maternal well-being. The reported factors influencing breastfeeding initiation, such as support from healthcare providers, participation in breastfeeding education classes, and social support from family and friends, highlight the multifaceted nature of influences on maternal breastfeeding decisions.

Table 2: Breastfeeding Practices

Parameter	Total no of participants n=100 (%)
Breastfeeding initiation rate	80%
Exclusive breastfeeding rate at discharge	60%
The mean duration of breastfeeding	6.5 months (SD = 2.2)
Factors Influencing Breastfeeding Initiation	
Support from healthcare providers	70%
Participation in breastfeeding education classes	50%
Social support from family and friends	60%

Exposure to Breastfeeding Promotion Programs: The finding that 45% of mothers were exposed to breastfeeding promotion programs suggests a moderate level of engagement with such interventions in the study population. The distribution of program types attended provides insight into the diversity of approaches used to promote breastfeeding. The perceived effectiveness of breastfeeding promotion programs, with 40% of mothers rating them as very effective, suggests that these interventions are generally well-received and valued by participants.

Table 3: Exposure to Breastfeeding Promotion Programs

Parameter	Total no of participants n=100 (%)
Percentage of mothers exposed to breastfeeding promotion programs	45%
Types of programs attended	
Hospital-based breastfeeding support groups	25%
Community breastfeeding workshops	20%
Individual lactation consultations	15%
Reported effectiveness of programs in promoting breastfeeding initiation	
Very effective	40%
Moderately effective	35%
Not effective	25%

The significant association found in both bivariate and multivariate analyses between exposure to breastfeeding promotion programs and breastfeeding initiation indicates that mothers who participated in such programs were more likely to initiate breastfeeding compared to those who did not. This finding underscores the importance of breastfeeding promotion interventions in influencing maternal breastfeeding decisions.

Association Between Exposure to Breastfeeding Promotion Programs and Breastfeeding Initiation

Bivariate analysis:

Mothers exposed to breastfeeding promotion programs were significantly more likely to initiate breastfeeding compared to those not exposed ($p < 0.05$).

Multivariate analysis:

After controlling for maternal age, education level, and parity, exposure to breastfeeding promotion programs remained a significant predictor of breastfeeding initiation (adjusted odds ratio = 2.5, 95% CI: 1.2-5.1, $p < 0.05$).

Discussion:

The findings of this cross-sectional study provide valuable insights into the relationship between breastfeeding promotion programs and breastfeeding initiation rates among mothers. The study findings demonstrate a significant association between exposure to breastfeeding promotion programs and higher rates of breastfeeding initiation among mothers. This underscores the effectiveness of such interventions in promoting optimal breastfeeding practices. The positive influence of these programs aligns with existing literature highlighting the importance of education, support, and encouragement in facilitating breastfeeding initiation and continuation. The reported influence of healthcare providers on breastfeeding initiation emphasizes the critical role of healthcare professionals in promoting breastfeeding. Establishing supportive and empowering relationships between healthcare providers and mothers can enhance the likelihood of successful breastfeeding outcomes. Integration of breastfeeding education and support into routine prenatal and postnatal care can further strengthen this partnership.

The study findings underscore the significance of social support networks, including family and friends, in influencing breastfeeding decisions. Cultivating a supportive environment that encourages and normalizes breastfeeding can positively impact maternal breastfeeding practices. Community-based initiatives and peer support groups can serve as valuable resources for mothers seeking guidance and encouragement in their breastfeeding journey. The perceived effectiveness of breastfeeding promotion programs reported by participants highlights the importance of tailoring interventions to meet the diverse needs of mothers. Programs that offer individualized support, culturally sensitive information, and practical assistance are likely to resonate more strongly with participants and yield positive outcomes. Future research should explore the specific components and delivery methods of breastfeeding promotion programs to identify best practices.

Our findings regarding the positive association between exposure to breastfeeding promotion programs and higher rates of breastfeeding initiation are consistent with numerous previous studies. A systematic review by Pérez-Escamilla et al. (2016) found that breastfeeding support interventions, including counseling and education, significantly increased the likelihood of breastfeeding initiation.[5] Our study adds to this body of evidence by providing further support for the effectiveness of such programs in diverse settings and populations. While our study indicates a generally positive perception of breastfeeding promotion programs among participants, it's essential to acknowledge the variability in program effectiveness observed across different studies. For instance, a meta-analysis by Renfrew et al. (2012) found significant heterogeneity in the effects of breastfeeding support interventions on breastfeeding initiation rates, suggesting that program characteristics and implementation strategies may influence outcomes. Further exploration of the factors contributing to program effectiveness is warranted to optimize intervention design and delivery.[6]

Our study highlights the influence of cultural and social factors on breastfeeding practices, echoing findings from other studies emphasizing the importance of cultural sensitivity in breastfeeding promotion efforts. For example, a qualitative study by Tuthill et al. (2016) identified cultural beliefs,

family dynamics, and social norms as critical determinants of breastfeeding initiation and continuation among Latina mothers.[7] Tailoring breastfeeding promotion programs to address cultural preferences and barriers is essential for maximizing their impact and relevance across diverse communities. While our cross-sectional study provides valuable insights into the association between breastfeeding promotion programs and breastfeeding initiation rates, longitudinal evidence is needed to assess the long-term effects of such interventions. Longitudinal studies, such as the PROBIT trial by Kramer et al. (2001), have demonstrated the sustained benefits of breastfeeding promotion interventions on breastfeeding duration and health outcomes.[8] Future research should prioritize longitudinal designs to evaluate the durability and effectiveness of breastfeeding promotion programs over time.

Comparing our study's methodology with similar research highlights methodological strengths and limitations. For instance, a study by Bonuck et al. (2014) utilized a quasi-experimental design to evaluate the impact of a hospital-based breastfeeding promotion program on breastfeeding outcomes, providing insights into program effectiveness under controlled conditions.[9] By considering the strengths and limitations of different study designs, researchers can enhance the rigor and validity of breastfeeding promotion research and contribute to evidence-based practice.[10]

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the study findings. The cross-sectional nature of the study limits causal inference, and the possibility of reverse causality cannot be ruled out. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for recall bias and social desirability bias. The study's convenience sampling approach may also limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Further research employing longitudinal designs and experimental methodologies could provide stronger evidence of the causal relationship between breastfeeding promotion programs and breastfeeding initiation. Long-term follow-up studies are needed to assess the sustainability of breastfeeding outcomes and identify factors influencing breastfeeding continuation beyond the initial postpartum period. Additionally, comparative studies evaluating the effectiveness of different types of breastfeeding promotion interventions can inform the development of targeted and evidence-based strategies.

Conclusion:

This study contributes to our understanding of the impact of breastfeeding promotion programs on breastfeeding initiation rates among mothers. The findings underscore the importance of comprehensive, multifaceted approaches to breastfeeding promotion, involving healthcare providers, social support networks, and community resources. By addressing barriers and enhancing support systems, policymakers and healthcare professionals can empower mothers to make informed decisions about infant feeding and promote the health and well-being of both infants and mothers.

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