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CULTURAL MISCONCEPTIONS AND MYTHS ABOUT BREASTFEEDING: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Strong evidences indicate Breastfeeding (BF) as the key method for achieving a normal development and growth of the baby. The benefits of BF are well known phenomena to many women in today's century. Yet few false beliefs and misconception have not only effects the growth and development of a child but affect the family, society, and country at large. This review aimed to identify the common myths and misconception related to breastfeeding available in the literature. A total of 11 articles (both quantitative and qualitative) were selected for review considering as more relevant and time limitation.

Insufficient production of milk in initial days, colostrum is dirty; the milk is stopped if she gets an evil eye etc. were the common myths. Cultural norms, myths and misconceptions have a powerful influence and are obstacle to optimal breastfeeding. At the antenatal stage, the breastfeeding counseling session should be arranged for the pregnant women at MCH centers.

Keywords: Breast feeding, Colostrums, Cultural misconceptions, Myths, Norms

INTRODUCTION

Strong evidence indicates that the key method for achieving a normal development and growth of the baby is breastfeeding. The WHO report estimates only 40% of infants under the age of six months are taking exclusive breastfeeding globally (1). While in Pakistan, early initiation of breastfeeding is only 18% and 37.7% of mothers' practices exclusive breastfeeding for six months (2). And, Statistically 44% of Pakistani children are stunted (Lower height than normal age, having poor recognition and millstones). Breastfeeding practices of infants and children have been the prime concern in all countries. Since societies have begun, the Myths and misconceptions have existed. Fallacies about current breastfeeding are frequently heard in the cultures of developing countries.

Though, due to cultural stereotypes, false beliefs, and misconceptions, the significance of breastfeeding is undervalued, and children remain deprived of their basic right to breast milk, leaving them vulnerable to infections and, thus, increasing the burden of disease (3, 4). One can estimate the fact from a survey that merely 10.6% of mothers' breastfed their newborns within one hour of their birth and only 17% of children were exclusively breastfed in Punjab in 2013 (5).

Different studies and experiences of nursing mothers have shown the number of Myths related to breastfeeding: Colostrum is dirty, poisonous, and indigestible, babies need water also apart from breast milk, the mothers felt their milk production is not enough, it is a painful practice, it changes the size and shape of breasts, the mother should not breastfeed if suffering from cold, the women's milk stops when exposed to the evil eye, and mother belief that baby is regretting the breast milk (6-8).

This review article aimed to identify the common myths and misconception related to breastfeeding available in the literature.



METHODOLOGY

The aim of our article was to review the available evidence related to breastfeeding misconception and false believes in our society. The main databases including PubMed, Google scholar, and Science Direct were researched to obtain the original papers related to myths and misconception of breastfeeding. The main terms used to literature search were "Breastfeeding myths", "misconception", and "Breastfeeding practices". A total of 10 articles (both quantitative and qualitative) were selected for review considering as more relevant.

DISCUSSION

A study from Indonesia conducted by Inayati et al. 2012 reported that 17% mothers discard colostrum in the initial days (8). The colostrum is discarded. The reasons behind not to feed colostrum is the misconception that colostrum is dirty, indigestible, and the babies will suffer from heartburn. Sustained to this myth, the role of older family member, particularly the grandmother is significant that prohibit the feeding of colostrum to newborns and it has been continued in many generations in the study area. The similar disbelief was found in the various parts of Pakistani, Indian, and Philippines literature. Some of the mothers' perceived colostrum that contains germs and impurities. They thought that it became decomposed due to its long stay in the breast during pregnancy (6, 9).

Studies from Pakistan, India, and Indonesia reported the myth on less production of milk. On being asked from the participants why they had given extraneous milk to newborn, the commonest response was they felt their milk production was insufficient in quantity or some mothers did not have any milk at all. Moreover, 12.9% of the mothers believed that there is no breast milk in first three (Fig. 1.) (6, 10, 11). This misconception we as nurses also observed during clinical and community experience in our society that various mothers said we do not have enough milk to feed our baby.

Another related cultural myth of evil eye was reported in the literature and also observed in local community. The Egyptian study in 2015 evident various myths but the common misconception was that the milk is stopped if she gets an evil eye on her (10).

Moreover, some of the other most common myths were found to be significant in observations and experience that includes; painful breast during feed, changing the size and shape of the breast, and stop breastfeed if mothers gets infection like cold.

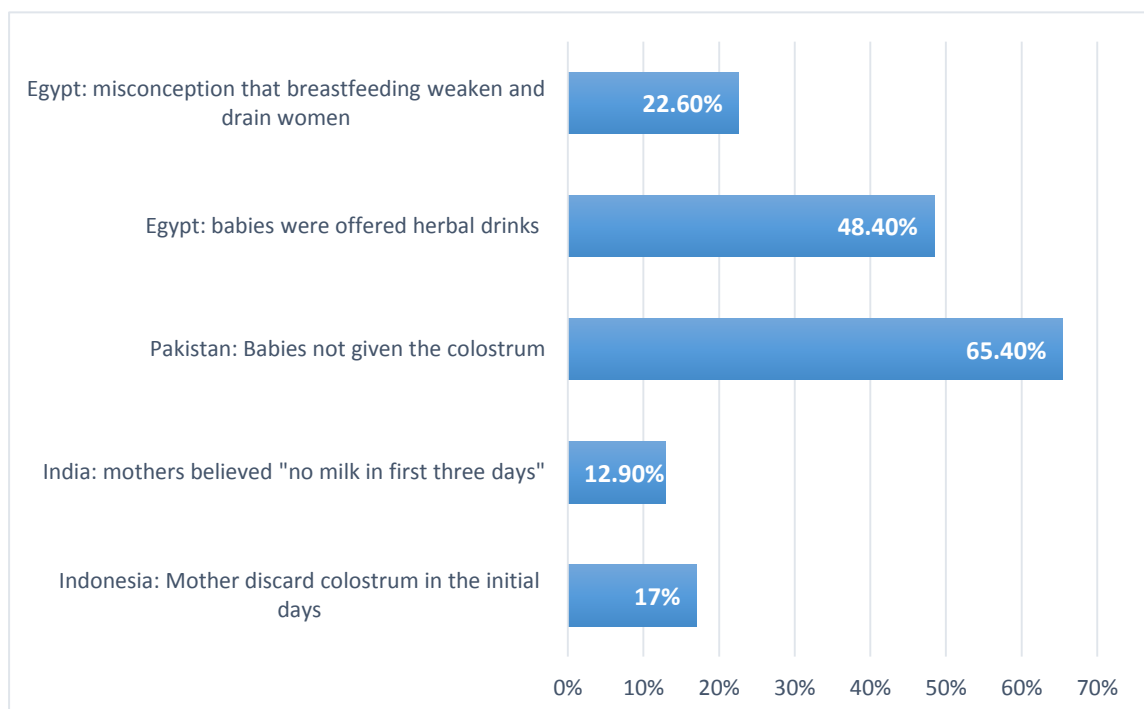


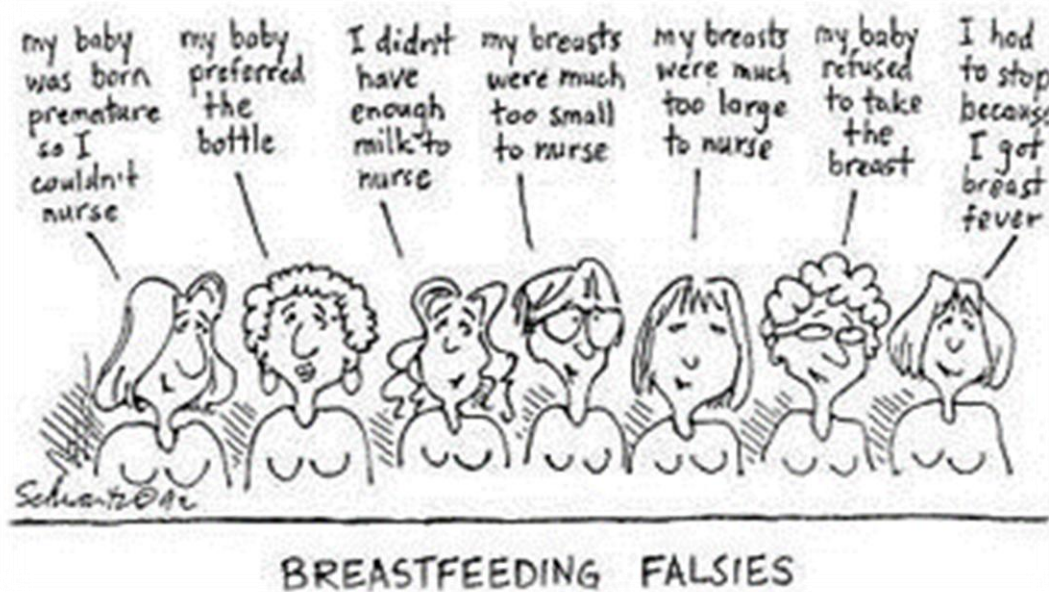
Fig. 1. Myths and misconceptions regarding breastfeeding

CONCLUSION

From the above evidence it can be inferred that cultural norms, myths, and misconceptions have a powerful influence and are the obstacles to optimal breastfeeding. It can also be the probable causes of poor breastfeeding practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Some recommendations can be made on the basis of review of literature. At the antenatal stage, the breastfeeding counseling session should be arranged for the pregnant women at MCH Centers. The government must implement the protection of breast-feeding and child nutrition ordinance, 2002. The literature is limited as evident so more researches should be done at gross root level for further exploration. Every healthcare professional should be involved to advocate breastfeeding to mothers and family members. The literature is limited as evident, so more researches should be done at gross root level for further exploration.



<https://www.google.com.pk/search/breastfeeding+myths+cartoon>

Conflict of interest:

There is no conflict of interest.

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