

Postpartum feeding attitudes, maternal depression, and breastfeeding in Barbados

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Abstract

Maternal feeding attitudes, maternal moods and infant feeding practices during the first 6 months postpartum were assessed in 226 healthy, well-nourished Barbadian mother–infant dyads. Factor analysis of the feeding attitudes questionnaire resulted in six independent factors. The belief that breastfeeding was better than bottle-feeding was associated with higher family income, more information seeking behavior and older maternal age at the time of her first pregnancy. Women who believed that breastfeeding was better at 7 weeks postpartum were also more likely to breastfeed at concurrent and later ages, up to 6 months postpartum. This belief was also associated with less maternal depression at 7 weeks and 6 months. The association between feeding attitudes and actual feeding practices was significant even after correcting for maternal moods and other background variables. Conversely, after controlling for feeding attitudes, maternal mood at 7 weeks was still significantly associated with infant feeding practices at 6 months. Thus, feeding attitudes and maternal moods were closely linked, but each contributed independently and uniquely to different aspects of breastfeeding, especially at 6 months. These findings suggest that early intervention addressing maternal feeding attitudes, may improve the extent of breastfeeding and the health of children in this setting.

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1. Introduction

Although breastfeeding has been recognized as the optimal method of infant feeding for the first 6 months of life, many mothers in both developed and developing countries do not breastfeed (American Academy of Pediatrics Work Group on Breastfeeding, 1997; UNICEF, n.d.; WHO, 2000). Many studies concerning the determinants of breastfeeding are focused on the assessments of socioeconomic and demographic factors, in addition to medical histories (Ryan, Wenjun, & Acosta, 2002). However, feeding attitudes have been recognized as being stronger predictors of the choice and duration of breastfeeding than demographic factors (Baisch, Fox, Whitten, & Pajewski, 1989; Hill, 1988; Scott, Shaker, & Reid, 2004). Thus, investigators considering the psychosocial aspects of breastfeeding and reasons for its

Abbreviations: HE, home environment; SES, socioeconomic status

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early termination among low-income women, in particular, have recognized the important role of maternal perceptions and views about the benefits and social acceptance of breastfeeding (Baranowski, Rassin, Richardson, Brown, & Bee, 1986; Guttman & Zimmerman, 2000). In a series of studies in low-income U.S. women, feeding attitudes were found to predict breastfeeding intention, irrespective of parity or prior breastfeeding experience (Kloeben-Tarver, Thompson, & Miner, 2002). In Western countries, the literature has generally confirmed that feeding intention is closely associated with actual feeding practices (Caulfield, Gross, & Bentley, 1998; Kessler, Gielen, & Diener-West, 1995). There are few studies with detailed information regarding the relationship between feeding attitudes and their impact on breastfeeding in other cultures, where breastfeeding may be even more important to the health and well-being of infants in societies where economic and medical resources are less readily available. A recent survey of feeding attitudes among South African women reports that health benefits to the infant was the major reason for breastfeeding (Sibeko, Dhansay, Charlton, Johns, & Gray-Donald, 2005).

The purpose of the current study, performed in Barbados, West Indies, was to document feeding attitudes at 7 weeks postpartum and concurrent and later feeding practices in a population of healthy mothers and infants over the first 6 months of life. In the early 1980's, Barbados had been recognized by UNICEF as having one of the lowest rates of breastfeeding in a developing country (UNICEF, 1980). Determining psychosocial factors which contributed to breastfeeding success and improved infant outcomes on this island was the major aim of our series of studies. In previous papers, we described the association of infant feeding practices and postpartum maternal moods on the growth and development of 226 well-nourished children during their first 6 months of life and at 11 years of age. Breastfeeding positively impacted the physical growth of Barbadian children (Galler, Ramsey, Harrison, Brooks, & Weiskopf-Bock, 1998). Although breastfeeding per se was not associated with performance on the Griffiths Developmental Scale (Griffiths, 1954) in the first 6 months of life (Galler, Harrison, Ramsey, Forde, & Butler, 2000), infant length, which was closely associated with the amount of breastfeeding, was significantly correlated with cognitive performance at 11 years (Galler, Ramsey, et al., 2004). In contrast, maternal depressive symptoms were significantly and independently associated with reduced breastfeeding preference in this population (Galler, Harrison, Biggs, Ramsey, & Forde, 1999), delayed infant social, cognitive and motor development in the first 6 months of life (Galler et al., 2000), difficult infant temperament at 6 months (Galler, Harrison, Ramsey, Butler, & Forde, 2004) and lower scores on a national high school entrance examination at 11 years of age (Galler, Ramsey, et al., 2004). Maternal depression has been recognized in other studies as influencing maternal feeding attitudes (Tamminen, 1988) and also the duration of breastfeeding (e.g. Cooper, Murray, & Stein, 1993; Faleceto, Giugliano, & Fernandes, 2004).

In the current study, we extend our earlier observations by describing feeding attitudes of mothers at 7 weeks postpartum and relating these views to maternal moods and feeding practices at 7 weeks, 3 months and 6 months postpartum. A prospective design was used to identify concurrent and predictive relationships over the first 6 months of life, when breastfeeding has been recognized as being especially important. The study addressed four major hypotheses: we predicted that (1) socioeconomic and demographic features would be closely associated with feeding attitudes; (2) feeding attitudes would be closely associated with maternal mood; (3) feeding attitudes would impact feeding practices in the first 6 months of life; and (4) mood and feeding attitudes would each contribute independently to breastfeeding. The early identification of factors associated with breastfeeding performance may serve as a basis for developing interventions aimed at increasing the number of mothers who breastfeed their infants in this setting.

2. Methods

2.1. Site

Barbados, a Caribbean island, is 21 miles long by 14 miles wide and generally flat, making all parts of the island easily accessible. The population of Barbados is 260,000. The island is divided into 11 parishes with Bridgetown, the capital, containing approximately 40% of the population. The ethnic composition of the population is 92% Afro-Barbadian, 4% Caucasian, and the remainder mainly Asian, Lebanese, and Syrian and the majority are lower middle class. Barbados has always had a stable government within the British Commonwealth, and its economy depends primarily on tourism, sugar exportation, information services, and light industrial development. Health care and education have long been a national priority and are available to all residents at no cost. From 1970 to 2002, infant mortality declined from 46 to 12 deaths per 1000 live births (UNDP, 2004). However, moderate-to-severe cases of malnutrition are present at the rate of 6–7% of children on the island (UNDP, have now been virtually eliminated from the

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