

Breastfeeding practices and its associated factors among female schoolteachers in the Jaffna Education Zone

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Background and objective: The rate of exclusive breastfeeding is low in Jaffna (64.4%) compared to the national average (75%) (2014 data). Studies reveal that mothers who return to work tend to abandon breastfeeding partially or completely for many reasons. Limited research has been done to assess breastfeeding practices among working mothers in Sri Lanka. This study aims to describe breastfeeding practices and their associated factors among female schoolteachers with children under 3 years of age in the Jaffna Education Zone.

Methods: This was a school-based descriptive cross-sectional study carried out among all female schoolteachers with children under 3 years of age in the Jaffna Education Zone. The study was carried out between December 2018 and February 2020. No sampling methods were used as the estimated sample size exceeded the study population. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data. Data entry and analysis were done with SPSS 21.

Results: Among 126 teachers, 50.8% (n=64) practiced exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months, and 24.6% (n=17) teachers continued breastfeeding beyond 2 years. The majority reported reduced breast milk after returning to school (77.8%, n=98) and used formula milk for their children (86.5%, n=109). More mothers from nuclear families (60.0%) practiced exclusive breastfeeding compared to mothers from extended families (42.4%) and this difference was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Age, educational qualification, religion, monthly family income, teaching activities at school during weekends, maternity leave, isolated nursing room facility in school, refrigerator facility in school, and adjustment of timetable during school hours were not associated with the breastfeeding practices of teachers.

Conclusion: Most teachers in Jaffna are not practicing exclusive breastfeeding for six months. Exclusive breastfeeding is influenced by the type of the family of the teacher.

Keywords: Exclusive Breastfeeding, Formula Milk, Nuclear Families, Maternity Leave