

Fathers And Breastfeeding Process: Determining Their Role And Attitudes

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Abstract

Breastfeeding is a vital for infants during their early stage of life and it is considered that fathers have an important role to make this process succeed; this study was done to determine father's attitudes and involvement in the breastfeeding process. A study survey instrument designed to measure father's attitudes regarding breastfeeding process, the degree of their involvement and fathers` surrounded cultural effect on their involvement. Instrument were piloted with 22 fathers who met the inclusion criteria and Cronbach's alpha was 0.73 for both measures : fathers` attitudes regarding breastfeeding and fathers` involvement in the process. Then a total of 198 fathers in King Abdullah University Hospital (KAUH) in Jordan completed a self-administered questionnaire. Means and standard deviations were calculated for the measures of fathers` breastfeeding attitudes and involvement, then Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted with an alpha level of 0.05 between the measure of fathers` involvement in breastfeeding process and surrounded cultural effect on their involvement. Result shows that fathers in had a negative attitudes and poor involvement in the breastfeeding process, and a significant correlation found between fathers` involvement in the breastfeeding process and surrounded cultural effect regarding this role (P- value = 0.01). Father may play an important role to positively influence a mother's decision to initiate and continue breastfeeding. Therefore, efforts to increase breastfeeding rates should focus on involving fathers in interventions and programs to change their attitudes and make them aware regarding their role in the breastfeeding process.

Keywords: Fathers, Breastfeeding, Jordan, Attitudes, Involvement

Introduction

Breastfeeding is considered as a powerful source for infancy nutrition as a global recommendation (World health Organization (WHO), 2012). Despite its superiority, current Breastfeeding rates worldwide including Jordan fail to meet the WHO recommendation (WHO Global Data Bank and young child feeding (IYCF), 2012; Jordan population and family health survey (JPFHS), 2012).

Recently, there is an increasing evidence that fathers could affect breastfeeding initiation and continuation (Yen-Ju Ho and Jacqueline, 2011; Ku. and Chow, 2010, Johnson et al., 2013). A growing body of literature suggests that fathers play a vital role in their wives' breastfeeding decision and behaviors (Harwood, 2011; Bonia et al., 2013; Moore and Rempel, 2010; Swarts, Salome, Kruger and Robin, 2010; Solomon, 2010; Gage et al., 2012).

Worldwide, several studies have put emphasis that fathers` attitudes considered as a strong predictor for breastfeeding process (Avery and Magnus, 2011; Mitchell-Box and Braun, 2012; Tas-pınar, Coban, Kucuk and Sirin, 2012). Also, it have been found that mothers` attitude regarding breastfeeding were significantly correlated with their partners` attitude (Scott, Shaker and Reid, 2004; Karande and Perker, 2012).

Some studies showed the positive attitudes of the fathers regarding breastfeeding (Avery and Magnus, 2011; Tas-pınar et al., 2012) while other studies showed a fathers` negative attitudes regarding breastfeeding in public (Laantera et al., 2010; Chang, Valliant and Bomba, 2012) and regarding the convenience of it (Mitchell-Box and Braun, 2012). Moreover, a study in Egypt showed the passive breastfeeding attitudes among the participants including males (Ahmed and EL-Guindy, 2011).

There is a common agreement in the literature that fathers` involvement and support in breastfeeding affect process success (Tohotoa et al., 2012; Sweden, Flacking, Dykes and Ewald, 2010). Women in some studies emphasized the significant role of their partners` in breastfeeding support (Al-Akour et al., 2010; Oweis et al., 2009; Nesbitt et al, 2012; Nickerson et al., 2012).

Despite the previous evidences, a growing body of literature argued the fathers believes of considering breastfeeding as not of their responsibilities (Avery and Magnus, 2011; Henderson et al., 2011; Sherriff et al., 2009; Sherriff and Hall, 2011; Ito, Fujiwara and Barr, 2013). Fathers considered breastfeeding as a challenge for them and child caring issues still thought to be as outside of the fathers domains (Februhartanty, Muslimatun and Septiari, 2007).

Moreover, Moore and Rempel (2010) stated the effect of fathers` surrounded culture on their involvement and support for breastfeeding

process; they focused on the effect of fathers` significant others approval on the involvement role, which finally affect women`s decision to initiate and continue breastfeeding.

Study objective

The objective of the present study was to determine breastfeeding attitudes and involvement among fathers in northern Jordan who have a recent experience with a breastfeeding wives. Also, to determine the effect of fathers` surrounded culture on their involvement role in breastfeeding process.

Methods and subjects

Study design and setting

A cross sectional study design was selected to collect data from participants.

Study Population and Sample:

The study population represented all fathers in northern Jordan who have a recent experience with a breastfeeding wives and the last contact with the breastfeeding process not exceed 5 years.

Study Instrument

Validity and reliability

Instrument were piloted with 22 fathers who met the inclusion criteria. Reliability was calculated by Cronbach's alpha and it was 0.73 for both measures : fathers` attitudes regarding breastfeeding and fathers` involvement in the process. Content validity was assessed by a panel of three experts who reviewed the items for clarity, relevance and comprehensiveness.

Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from participants.

Breastfeeding questionnaire among fathers consists of three dimensions:

Dimension one: father`s attitudes regarding breastfeeding (14 items)

Dimension tow: father`s involvement in the breastfeeding process (14 items)

Dimension three: cultural effect and significant others approval (father, mother and friends) for father`s involvement in the breastfeeding process

Data Analysis

Means and standard deviations were calculated for the measures of fathers` attitudes regarding breastfeeding and fathers` involvement in the process. Total mean scores were counted for both measures, then a cut-off scores were calculated using the total mean score plus one standard deviation; results above the cut-off score reflecting positive attitude and involvement in breastfeeding process, while results below the cut-off score reflecting negative attitude and involvement.

Also, relationship between fathers` involvement in the breastfeeding process and cultural effect on this role were examined using Pearson`s correlation analysis with an alpha level of 0.05.

Study results

Fathers` attitudes regarding breastfeeding

The total possible score for the instrument was 70 and scores of ≥ 58 indicated positive attitudes regarding breastfeeding while scores < 58 indicated the negative attitudes. This cut-off score was calculated using the total mean score (51.66) plus one standard deviation ($SD \pm 6.38$, 2.17 – 4.73).

As shown in table 1, results indicated that the majority of fathers (scored < 58) represent a negative attitudes regarding breastfeeding (81.3%, n= 161).

Also, it has been found that the mean score of the item (I am embarrassed when a woman who I do not know breastfeeds in front of me) was (2.17) which represents the least mean among the attitude items.

Table 1: Fathers` attitudes regarding breastfeeding

Item No.	Fathers` attitudes regarding breastfeeding	Mean	S.D
	Breastfeeding is more convenient than formula feeding.	4.28	0.91
	A mother cannot breastfeed her baby and works outside the home	2.97	1.20
	Most mothers have sufficient breast milk.	3.71	1.14
	Formula is as healthy for an infant as breast milk.	3.93	1.12
	Breast milk is more easily digested than formula milk.	4.40	0.89
	Breastfeeding could negatively affect marital relationship	3.82	1.08
	the woman loss her attractiveness because of breastfeeding	3.80	1.11
	Breastfeeding is beneficial to mother's health.	4.44	0.82
	Breastfeeding is the responsibility of the mother and the father hasn't any role in it.	3.22	1.33
	Breastfeeding saves mother's time more than formula feeding.	3.53	1.22
	Breastfeeding will tie a mother down and interfere too much with her social life.	3.08	1.22
	I am embarrassed when a woman who I do not know breastfeeds in front of me.	2.17	1.25
	Breastfeeding protects baby from the diseases.	4.73	0.61
	Fathers feel left out, if a mother breastfeed	3.61	1.15
	Total mean score	51.66	6.38

Fathers` involvement in the breastfeeding process

The total possible score for the instrument was 70 and scores of ≥ 58 indicated good involvement in the breastfeeding process while scores < 58 indicated poor involvement. This cut-off score was calculated using the total mean score (51.83) plus one standard deviation ($SD \pm 6.54$).

As shown in table 2, results indicated that the majority of fathers (scored < 58) represented a poor involvement in the breastfeeding process (81.3%, $n= 161$).

Also, it has been found that the mean score of the item (made it easy for your wife to breastfeed while visiting others) was (2.88) which was the least among involvement items reflecting a negative involvement regarding acceptance of the wives to breastfeed in front of others.

Table 2: Fathers` involvement in the breastfeeding process

Item No.	Fathers` attitudes regarding breastfeeding	Mean	S.D
	Discussed with your wife about how long to continue breastfeeding	3.43	1.21
	Made it easy for your wife to breastfeed while visiting others.	2.88	1.25
	Discussed with your wife ideas for trying to solve breastfeeding problems.	3.53	1.09
	Took care with other children or other house responsibilities while your wife breastfeed.	3.82	1.12
	Helped your wife with house works and taking care of other baby's tasks like responding to the baby's cries, help in bathing the baby...etc.	3.88	1.08
	When your wife had been started breastfeeding you got things such as a pillow to comfort her or bring a glass of water or open the T.V for her...etc	4.06	0.93
	Responded positively to your wife's disturbed sleeping or discomforts that related to milk fullness in her breasts during the sexual activity.	3.99	0.98
	Allowed your baby to sleep in the same room without objections.	4.24	0.91
	Agreed with your wife's desire to stop breastfeeding.	2.94	1.32
	Showed acceptance regarding formula feeding.	3.22	1.23
	Gave your wife a break from the baby like taking care for the baby while she can sleep for a pit of time.	3.79	1.00
	Got upset if the other housework not done during the breastfeeding period	3.64	1.20
	Showed pleasure and satisfaction while your wife was breastfeeding (smile, watch, hold her...)	4.15	0.80
	Provided your wife with the benefits that breastfeeding has for her or for the baby.	4.25	0.79
	Total mean score	51.83	6.54

Relationship Between Fathers` Involvement in the Breastfeeding Process and cultural effect on this Role

Pearson`s correlation analysis was conducted with an alpha level of 0.05 between the measure of fathers` involvement in the breastfeeding

process and surrounded cultural effect on their involvement. Total correlation was measured for the tool items of significant others approval (mother, father and friends). Results showed that there is a significant correlation between fathers` involvement in the breastfeeding process and cultural effect on this role (P- value = 0.01, correlation coefficient= 0.28).

Discussion

Many studies in Jordan highlighted the mothers in this process but no studies directed to fathers (Al-Akour et al., 2010; Al-Ali et al., 2012; Kassawneh et al., 2006; Oweis et al., 2009). A significant fall in breastfeeding rates was reported by the Jordanian department of statistics and WHO (WHO- IYCF ,2012; JPFHS, 2012). Therefore, we were interested in the present study to identify fathers` attitudes and involvement in the breastfeeding process rather than mothers.

The present study directed to fathers who had a recent experience with the breastfeeding process in northern Jordan. Results indicated that fathers had a negative attitudes and poor involvement in the breastfeeding process. Also, a significant correlation found between fathers` involvement in the breastfeeding process and surrounded cultural effect on this role.

Our study showed the negative attitudes of fathers regarding breastfeeding in public and regarding the convenience of it, Jordanian fathers tend to consider breastfeeding in public as a conflict and this might be related to the conservative nature of Jordanian society. Findings are nearly in consistent with other studies in which Breastfeeding in public is still considered as a problem worldwide (Laantera et al., 2010; Chang, Valliant and Bomba, 2012; Mitchell-Box and Braun, 2012).

Fathers appeared poor in the participation in breastfeeding decision-making, which considered as one of the most important attributes for breastfeeding success. This finding confirmed the findings of several studies in this field; Rempel and Rempel's (2011) and Mitchell-Box and Braun (2012) stated that fathers felt the mother had the final say regarding the decision to breastfeed and they are not being involved in the breastfeeding decision.

In accordance with other studies, fathers considered breastfeeding as the mothers` responsibility and they have not any role in (Avery and Magnus, 2011; Henderson et al., 2011; Sherriff et al., 2009; Sherriff and Hall, 2011; Ito, Fujiwara and Barr, 2013; Februhartanty, Muslमतun, and Septiari, 2007). This in turn could hinder breastfeeding process because of several maternal responsibilities of household tasks and infant care especially employed women.

According to the JPFHS (2009) it has been found that about 15% of married Jordanian women were employed and this percentage is going to rise

over the time. Unfortunately, these facts in Jordan are significantly associated with breastfeeding termination (Al-Akour et al, 2010; Khassawneh et al., 2006).

It is basic that breastfeeding support is considered as a societal principle to provide encouragement for mothers to breastfeed. A positive significant correlation found between fathers` involvement in the breastfeeding process and cultural effect, which indicated that fathers in Jordan are highly affected by the surrounding persons and this could reflected their behaviors in breastfeeding support.

Therefore, an effective comprehensive program and campaigns are needed in Jordan to be directed to fathers to face the continuous decrement of breastfeeding rates.

Conclusion

This research validated the importance of father's role in the breastfeeding process. Findings showed that fathers in northern Jordan had a negative attitudes and poor involvement in the breastfeeding process, results reflected the fathers` negative attitudes regarding breastfeeding in public and regarding the convenience of it. Fathers showed the poor participation in breastfeeding decision-making and consider this process as outside of their domain.

Also, It has been found that fathers in Jordan are highly affected by surrounding persons and this could be reflected in their behaviors in breastfeeding support. Therefore, efforts to increase breastfeeding rates should focus on involving fathers in interventions and programs to change their attitudes and make them aware regarding their role in the breastfeeding process.

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