

FEEDING PRACTICES OF MOTHERS IN A NURSE HOME VISITATION PROGRAM

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Background: Maternal decisions regarding what and how to feed their children have numerous health implications. The early introduction to solid foods, excessive amounts of juice, and extended bottle use have been related to poor health outcomes such as failure to thrive, tooth decay, and obesity. Breastfeeding has been noted to protect against allergic diseases, sudden infant death syndrome, and obesity. However, prior studies indicate that young, low-income, ethnic minority women are noted to breastfeed less often and feed their young children inappropriately, when compared to their older, Caucasian counterparts. Further research is needed to understand the feeding practices of low-income, minority women, the variables related to those decisions, and the health outcomes for children.

Purpose: The purpose of this project was to investigate the infant feeding practices of low-income mothers who breastfeed compared to those who bottle-feed, among women who are enrolled in a nurse home visitation program.

Method: This is a retrospective, descriptive correlational study of women enrolled in a nurse home visitation program. A chart review was conducted, using the computerized charting system maintained by the visitation program. For the purposes of analysis, mothers who breastfed were randomly chosen and compared to mothers who did not. An initial power analysis determined that a total of 45 mothers per group were needed to detect effect sizes of .60, with the alpha level set at .05 and power at .80. Women enrolled within the program were excluded from the analysis if their infant was considered extremely medically fragile, had a medical condition that significantly influenced feeding (e.g., cleft palate), or if the mother had a development disability and/or mental health disorder. The sample of mothers consist of primarily low-income, mothers of multiple ethnicities.

Findings: Similar to findings in the literature, initial findings suggest that few mothers reported exclusive, long term breastfeeding of their children. Furthermore, many mothers were found to feed their children large amounts of juice, cereal, and solid foods sooner than recommended. Further data analysis is being completed to examine differences between the groups of mothers and the key variables that are related to breastfeeding and other maternal feeding practices.

Discussion: Findings from this study have numerous implications related to practice and research for nurses and other healthcare professionals. Understanding the feeding practices of low-income women will enable clinicians and researchers to develop, test, and implement interventions to promote breastfeeding and appropriate feeding practices. Finally, the findings of this study should be used to advance education of healthcare providers of the need for promotion of breastfeeding and other healthy infant feeding behaviors.

