

Breastfeeding



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Exclusive breastfeeding is providing an infant with the mother's breast milk directly from the breast instead of a baby bottle (Ehiri 2009). Infants have no problem doing this because they are born with a natural suckling reflex. Mothers are advised to do exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months without feeding the infant any supplements. Is exclusive breastfeeding important for infants?

Purpose of the study: Breast milk is the healthiest form of milk babies could have. The World Health Organization has endorsed breastfeeding as the best way of feeding infants. Years of research have shown that there are not just benefits for the infants, but for the mothers as well (Kakuma 2002). For the infants, breast milk protects against acute and chronic diseases and supports optimal development. It also promotes a psychological attachment with the mother, which is very important for them as they grow. For the mothers, breastfeeding helps them not only recover from the pregnancy and childbirth experience, but also has some lifelong health advantages (Aarts 2001). In this research, I will explore some of these benefits. In particular, I will look at the advantages of exclusive breastfeeding to infants, and the downside of not breastfeeding. I will also investigate how the growth of infants is impacted, or not impacted, by exclusive breastfeeding over the first 6 months of development. This study will give insights into why breast milk is so beneficial for the optimal growth and development of infants, and the level of knowledge concerning breastfeeding that most mothers have.

Background: I will conduct my study in a team that is within XXX Division within the XXX City Council that is close to me. I will identify four hospitals within this location and select two new mothers from each hospital for my

study. I will follow up on the mothers for a short session over a period of 6 months. Over this time, I will be interested in observing the general development of the babies and the attitude of the mothers toward breastfeeding. I will also be keen to note their thoughts regarding the progress of their babies and whether they think anything else other than the breast milk could be incorporated. I will also be careful to observe the weight of the infants over this period and try to find out if there is any connection to exclusive breastfeeding.

Scope: My study is going to have eight participants. I will engage non-participant observation over the first half of my observation period, starting from 18 February to 18 May. I will observe the mothers breast-feeding the infants. In addition, I will accompany the mothers for clinic checkups and record the weight of infants and their general growth. During this time, I will also observe the relationship between mothers and their infants since breastfeeding has been shown to enhance the mother-child relationship. Observation times will usually range from morning hours until evening. Over the next half of my study period, I will incorporate interviews, using open-ended questionnaires to gather the data I need. This will take place from 18 May to 18 August. I expect to conduct two interviews at the beginning and at the end of each month, making 48 interviews. Here I will interview both mothers and doctors in case any of the infants develops complications and is hospitalized.

Theoretical framework: My study is mostly going to be guided by Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Theory of Development. He believed development occurs throughout the lifespan, and his theory provides new light into the

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formulation of a healthy personality (Ding and Littleton 2005). His theory includes eight stages and at each stage, conflict or crisis occurs. This study focuses on the first stage, Trust vs. Mistrust, which occurs during the first eighteen months of life. At this stage, children learn to trust or mistrust the environment where they are in and to trust it, they need to have warm, consistent, predictable and attentive care (Ding and Littleton 2005). They need living physical contact and nourishment. Mistrust occurs when the infant is handled harshly and experiences an unpredictable world. The psychosocial theory will guide me in finding out if exclusive breastfeeding plays any role in the wholesome personal development of infants.

Method: To start with, I will conduct literature on psychosocial development and exclusive breastfeeding of infants. Next, I will observe the group for one hour, and try to note down any indicators of development after which I will interview both mothers and doctors where they receive healthcare. The questions will be open-ended to allow me get an insight into the issue as opposed to asking close-ended questions.