

## BREASTFEEDING DURING MONTH OF RAMADAN; A COMMUNITY BASED STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To study breastfeeding practices during month of Ramadan.

**Study Design:** Descriptive study

**Place and duration:** It was a community based study in research area of the department of Social & Preventive Paediatrics, King Edward Medical University/ Mayo hospital, Lahore and was conducted in four weeks, Month of Ramadan 2008/1429 Hijri.

**Subjects and Methods:** Total of 734 mothers were present in study area during study period. Among them, 137 lactating mothers with children of age 24 months or younger were interviewed.

**Results:** Most mothers had infants aged 12 months or younger (77%). Sixty one percent were male. Sixty one percent mothers were older than 25 years of age. Majority were educated upto higher secondary level (66%). Among infants younger than 6 months of age, 69% were exclusively breastfed. Fifty seven percent mothers were fasting. Among these, most mothers (59%) felt that fasting would decrease the quantity of milk. Fifty nine percent of lactating mothers during fast felt thirst, weakness and dizziness (without any other associated medical illness). Among nonfasting mothers (43%), 61% did not fast due to lactation. Eighty seven percent of the total mothers had the knowledge about relaxation given by Islam regarding breastfeeding during the holy month of Ramadan.

**Conclusion:** Overwhelming majority of breast feeding mothers knew about religious relaxation for fasting during lactation but they preferred to observe it as their religious duty. Majority of lactating women had subjective feeling of thirst, weakness or dizziness.

**Keywords:** Ramadan Breastfeeding Lactation Fasting.

### INTRODUCTION

Breastfeeding is a universal practice common to all cultures. In last two decades, there is universal awareness of advantages of breastfeeding<sup>1</sup>. Ramadan is the ninth lunar month in the Islamic calendar. Fasting in this month is one of the five pillars of Islam<sup>2</sup>. According to Islam, those who are ill, traveling, pregnant or nursing, menstruating, suffering life-threatening conditions because of hunger and thirst, threatened brutally to stop fasting, soldiers in war whose fasting may harm others or may prevent them from saving a life need not fast during Ramadan<sup>3</sup>.

Studies on breastfeeding mother's attitudes to fasting in Ramadan are lacking. The objective of this study was to document breastfeeding practices during the month of Ramadan.

### SUBJECT AND METHODS

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Paediatrics, King Edward Medical University, Mayo Hospital, Lahore is one of the oldest unit engaged in community and outreach health care of mothers and children in the province of Punjab. This study was conducted in the community area in the periphery of Mayo hospital, Lahore. This area is attached to the department for research purpose. It was a descriptive study and was conducted in the month of Ramadan (four weeks). Sample was collected by convenient sampling technique. During study period, a total of 734 mothers were present in the area among which 137 lactating mothers were included in the study. Consent was taken and confidentiality was assured. They were interviewed by using a pretested structured proforma. Data was entered in SPSS version 13 and was analyzed for statistical analysis.

### RESULTS

Out of total 734 mothers present in study area during the study period, 137 breastfeeding mothers participated in the study. Most

mothers had infants aged 12 months or younger (77%). Sixty one percent of children were male. Most mothers were older than 25 years of age (61%), majority among them were having higher secondary education (66%). Among 62 infants younger than 6 months of age, 69% were being exclusively breastfed (Table-1).

Approximately more than half of the mothers (57%) were fasting. Among these, 46 mothers (59%) felt that fasting would decrease the quantity of milk. Forty six (59%) of lactating mothers during fast felt thirst, weakness and dizziness (without any other associated medical illness) while 9% had no such feeling. Among 59 nonfasting mothers, 36(61%) did not fast due to lactation and 23(39%) did not fast due to gynaecological or other medical problem. One hundred and ninety (87%) of the total mothers had knowledge about relaxation given by Islam regarding breastfeeding during the holy month of Ramadan. (Table-2)

**Table-1: Sociodemographic characteristics**

Variable	n (%)
<b>Age distribution of the mothers (n=137)</b>	
18-25 years	55(40)
26-35 years	78(57)
36-45 years	4(3)
<b>Mother's education (n=137)</b>	
Primary grade	8(6)
Secondary grade	29(21)
Higher secondary grade	91(66)
Graduation & above	9(7)
<b>Age distribution of the children (n=137)</b>	
0- 6 months	62(45)
7-12 months	43(32)
12-24 months	32(23)
<b>Sex distribution of the children (n=137)</b>	
Male	83(61)
Female	54(39)
<b>Distribution of children of &lt;6 months (n=62)</b>	
Exclusive breastfed	43(69)
Partially exclusive breastfed	19(31)

## DISCUSSION

The Islamic religion orders fasting from sunrise to sunset during the month of Ramadan. Muslims are otherwise allowed to eat and drink during the remaining hours<sup>4</sup>. Islam gives relaxation to the lactating mothers but most of the muslim women prefer to fast

while breastfeeding their children inspite of having religious relaxation. Present study had sample size of 137 lactating mothers of infants younger than 24 months of age. We found that fasting in the month of Ramadan by breastfeeding mothers is common. In our study, 57% of the mothers were fasting during lactation. This study had 77% of children aged less than one year and 61% were male. Results of present study are consistent with previous similar study<sup>3</sup>.

Many factors affect the volume and composition of breast milk. One of them is maternal diet. Although nutritional status of the women is affected by fasting, studies have shown that there is no significant difference on macronutrient composition of breast milk and consequently on growth of the infant<sup>5</sup>. According to most of the mothers (59%) they felt difference in quantity of milk while others (41%) stated that they do not feel the difference.

**Table-2: Variables Associated with Fasting**

Variable	n (%)
<b>Fasting and breastfeeding (n=137)</b>	
Fasting	78(57)
Not fasting	59(43)
<b>Reason for not fasting during breastfeeding (n=59)</b>	
Lactation	36(61)
Gynecological problem	15(25)
Any medical illness	8(14)
<b>Feeling that fast reduces quantity of milk (n=78)</b>	
Felt	46(59)
Not felt	32(41)
<b>Subjective Feeling of lactating mother during fast(n=78)</b>	
Thirsty, weakness, dizziness	46(59)
Thirsty & weakness	15(19)
Dizziness	10(13)
No symptoms	7(9)
<b>Knowledge of mothers about relaxation during fasting (n=137)</b>	
Had knowledge	119(87)
Had no knowledge	18(13)

Results of present study are in contrast to the study where authors found it as 21%<sup>3</sup>.

There may be some physical symptoms felt by the lactating mothers during fast<sup>6</sup>. Many mothers (59%) faced physical symptoms of feeling thirsty, weak and vertigo while 9% had no symptoms. The mothers, who did not fast

while breastfeeding, mentioned different constraints. Majority of them (61%) did not fast because of lactation while some did not fast having some gynecological problem (25%). Results revealed the fact that most of lactating mothers know that Islam gives relaxation to the lactating mothers. In present study, 87% of the lactating mothers had the knowledge about this relaxation given by Islam. Other study showed 65.2% of believers having the same concept<sup>3</sup>.

### CONCLUSION

Majority of breast feeding mothers knew about religious relaxation for fasting during lactation but they preferred to observe it as their religious duty. Majority of lactating

women had subjective feeling of thirst, weakness or dizziness.

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