

Background: Breast feeding is the ideal way of providing young infants with nutrients they need for healthy growth and development. One in 3 infants is exclusively breastfed during the first 6 months of life. Unfortunately, compliance with breastfeeding recommendations in developing countries is low.

Objective: To assess the trends and attitudes of Kurdish mothers in Duhok towards breastfeeding, the main factors determining them and the reasons for not exclusively breastfeeding in the first 6 months.

Methods: A cross-sectional study carried out in Heevi Pediatric Hospital and 2 Health Care centers in Duhok, North of Iraq in the period between November 2012 and August 2013. A pre-coded questionnaire was used that included: Age of the mother, education, employment, Types of feeding in the first 6 months, mode of delivery, parity, gender of the baby and the reason for not exclusively breastfeeding. Data were analyzed using SPSS 18. Chi-square and Fischer's exact tests, the level of significance is 0.05.

Results: The study included 588 mothers. The type of feeding they used in the first 6 months was exclusive breastfeeding in 8% cases only. Most of mothers who are not only breastfeeding (58.93%) fell within the age group between 20-29 years. Most mothers who were only breastfeeding (37.77% for each) were uneducated or had primary school education while 34.43% of those who were not only breastfeeding in the first 6 months were uneducated. Most mothers were unemployed. Multiparity was present in 66.66% of mothers who were only breastfeeding and 78.64% of those who were not only breastfeeding. Normal spontaneous vaginal birth was the most common mode of delivery Females babies predominate in those who are only breastfed (53.34%) while males predominate in the other group (56.16%) The most common reasons for not only breastfeeding in the first 6 months were not enough breast milk (51.56%), illness of the baby(16.57%) and illness of the mother(12.52%).

Conclusion: Most Kurdish mothers in Duhok do not exclusively breastfeed their babies in the first 6 months. The main reason is thinking that breast milk is not enough. Most of them were aged 20-29 years, had male babies, were uneducated, unemployed and fed their babies solids but none of these variables was found significant. Spontaneous vaginal delivery was significantly associated with exclusive breastfeeding. Health care providers should be encouraged to educate mothers of young infants on the benefits of breastfeeding and give them motivation to continue with breastfeeding for at least 6 months.