

Maternity clinic practices and exclusive breastfeeding in Cyprus: BrEaST start in life study

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Background

While the effectiveness of the Baby-Friendly Hospital (BFH) Initiative's "Ten Steps for Successful Breastfeeding" has been documented, there is often suboptimal implementation. In Cyprus, there are no BFH and rates of exclusively breastfeeding are low.

Methods

Implementation of the 10 steps across all public (N = 5) and 29 (of 35) private maternity clinics was assessed based on the self-reported experience of a consecutive stratified sample of 568 mothers (response 70.8%) using the WHO/UNICEF BFH Initiative's self-assessment questionnaire. Odds ratio for breastfeeding (BF) and exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) while at the clinic and subsequently at the 1st, 4th and 6th month according to mothers' experience of the 10 steps were estimated in logistic regression models.

Results

Predictors of BF in stepwise models were holding the baby within one hour (reported by 71% of participating mothers), practical assistance (reported by 85%), implementation of the marketing code (reported by 82%), no use of pacifiers (reported by 42%) and guidance for community support (reported by 25%). For EBF, the strongest predictors were holding the baby within one hour, no use of pacifiers as well as skin-to-skin (26%), rooming-in (34%) and prenatal information (35%). Mothers who practiced skin-to-skin and did not use pacifiers were 3-4 times more likely to EBF in the long term. In contrast to the use of pacifiers, associations with skin-to-skin did not attenuate after adjustment for mode of birth, parity, education, income and employment status.

Conclusions

The experience of BF-friendly practices may to some extent be attributed to the intention of mothers to exclusively breastfeed. Against a backdrop of fragmented practices, the association of EBF with some of the least practiced steps in Cypriot clinics highlight the need for a national breastfeeding strategy, including clinic as well as population level measures to reverse the currently low BF rates in Cyprus.

Key messages:

- Fragmented implementation of the "10 steps" in maternity clinics.
- Some of the least practiced steps are the strongest predictors of exclusive breastfeeding while at the clinic and in the long run.