

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted in the Colombo district with the primary objective of determining the prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding for and beyond four months, its relation to growth and incidence of respiratory tract and diarrhoeal infection. It was also intended to identify factors favouring exclusive breastfeeding for beyond four months.

The exclusive breastfeeding rate of four months and beyond was 52.1%, with only 3.6% being exclusively breastfed for five months and none for six. A higher percentage (61%) attending the well baby clinics of hospitals were exclusively breastfed for four months and beyond compared to those at the community clinics (42%).

The factors that favoured exclusive breastfeeding of four months and beyond were higher level of maternal education, exclusive breastfeeding of the earlier child for four or more months, a greater number of antenatal clinic visits, hearing about the optimal duration of exclusive breastfeeding via the media, being well-instructed on expressed milk and surprisingly, delivery by caesarean section. These factors were all significantly associated with the duration of breastfeeding.

Unexpectedly, there was no significant relationship between maternal employment, time of first breastfeed, incidence of diarrhoea and the duration of exclusive breastfeeding.

Paradoxically, being underweight for age (below the third centile) was significantly associated with longer periods of exclusive breastfeeding, although growth faltering was not. However, 98.6% of infants exclusively breastfed for four months and 85.7% exclusively breastfed for five months had weight appropriate for age.

There was no significant association between the duration of exclusive breastfeeding and the incidence of respiratory tract or diarrhoeal infections.