

Abstract

Background

Breastfeeding is the safest way to feed infants and young children in disaster situations to prevent morbidity and mortality. However, disasters can create unique challenges for breastfeeding. Understanding the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of breastfeeding in disaster situations is crucial to design effective interventions and guidelines to safeguard the health and well-being of infants and young children during these challenging times.

Objectives

This study aimed to describe knowledge and attitudes on breastfeeding and breastfeeding practices during a disaster among mothers of children under 2-years in Gothatuwa MOH area.

Methods

A cross-sectional study was conducted in the Gothatuwa MOH area involving 240 mothers of children under-2-years. Using cluster sampling technique, study participants were selected from child welfare clinics in three clinic centers situated in flood-prone areas. Data were collected using an interviewer-administered questionnaire. Data were analysed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the study population, knowledge, attitudes and breastfeeding practices. Knowledge score was categorized based on a 50% cut off. Attitudes towards breastfeeding was measured using a 5-points Likert scale. A total attitude score of more than 32 out of 40, indicated “favourable” attitude towards breastfeeding.

Results

Mean age of participants was 28.7 (SD = 5.09) years and 93% were still breastfeeding. Majority were housewives (79.2%) and had received post-primary education (98.8%). Knowledge questions revealed varying awareness levels, with average knowledge on breastfeeding recommendations and poor knowledge on benefits of breastfeeding to the

mother and on factors that hinder breastfeeding. Based on the total breastfeeding score, 42.1% had good breastfeeding knowledge.

Considering the overall attitude score, 58% (n=139) were having an unfavourable attitude towards breastfeeding. 46%(n=111) had been exposed to a previous disaster and 96%(n=107) of them, breastfed their babies during the disaster.

Conclusion and Recommendations

More than half of the participants had “poor” knowledge and “unfavourable” attitudes towards breastfeeding. Breastfeeding practices during disasters was satisfactory. Targeted health education messages need to be developed to address identified knowledge gaps. Community-based support systems such as mother support groups need to be utilized to address myths and misconceptions regarding breastfeeding.

Key words: Knowledge, Attitudes, Breastfeeding Practices, Disaster, mothers of children under 2-years