

## **Breastfeeding Knowledge, Attitudes and Practice: A Cross-Sectional Study among a Sample of Tunisian Mothers**

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**Abstract :** Background and aims: Breastfeeding is the reference feeding for a child, especially during the first months of life. It is not widespread in many countries due to many factors. There has been a decline in exclusive breastfeeding (EB) practice, particularly in the middle- and low-income countries, i.e., Tunisia. The aim of our study was to describe the knowledge, attitudes, and practice of a sample of Tunisian mothers toward breastfeeding. Methods: It was a descriptive cross-sectional study conducted during the year 2022 over a period of two months in three health structures in the north of Tunisia among mothers of infants aged 2 to 18 months. Levels of mothers' knowledge (low/moderate/high) were determined using a score ranging from 0 to 11 points. EB was defined as the proportion of infants who were exclusively breastfed during the first six months of life. Results: A total of 180 women with a mean age of  $33 \pm 4.9$  years were included. The average knowledge score was equal to  $6.4 \pm 1.5$  points, with extremes ranging from 3 to 11 points. Most of the respondents had a moderate knowledge level (44.4%). More than half of surveyed mothers (66.1%) thought that breastfeeding deforms breasts, and 16.7% thought that breastfeeding is specific to women who do not work. Breastfeeding experience during the first week of life was considered difficult in 70% of cases. The prevalence of EB up to 6 months of age was equal to 16.4% [10.8-23.2]. The main reported obstacles during breastfeeding practice were having an insufficient quantity of breast milk (18.3%) and child difficulties with sucking (12.8%), and having pain in the breast while breastfeeding (12.80%). Conclusion: Our results highlighted the insufficient level of knowledge and a low prevalence of EB in our study population. Improving mothers' knowledge and promoting EB practice is needed. Implementing health education strategies involving healthcare workers, who represent a main actor in education and breastfeeding promotion, is very important to reach a satisfactory frequency for EB.

**Keywords :** breastfeeding, practices, knowledge, Tunisia

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