

## Factors Adversely Associated with Breastfeeding among Obese Mothers in Malaysia

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**Abstract :** The total of obese mothers is growing throughout Asia. Breastfeeding provides the perfect nutrition for infants, by promoting a higher IQ and protecting against childhood and adult diseases. A prospective cohort study was carried out of mothers attending eight antenatal clinics run by the Ministry of Health in Selangor, Malaysia to document the prevalence of obesity and its relationship with breastfeeding outcomes. Mothers were enrolled during the antenatal period and followed up until 6 months postpartum to document breastfeeding outcomes. A total of 652 Malay mothers were recruited for the study a response rate of 93.1 %. The pre-pregnancy body mass index (BMI) of the mothers showed that 36.5% of the mothers were overweight or obese. There were a total of 78 obese mothers in the sample and 41 (52.6%) of these mothers were able to initiate breastfeeding within one hour of birth compared to 238/337 (70.6 %,  $\chi^2$  9.35,  $p < 0.001$ ) of those with a normal BMI. At 6 months, 23.1 % of obese mothers were exclusively breastfeeding their infants, compared to 56.0 % of the normal BMI mothers. On the other hand, the rate of infant formula feeding was higher in the obese mothers by 53.8 % compared to 19.0 % among normal weight mothers,  $\chi^2$  37.6,  $p < 0.001$ ). Further analysis suggested these factors were found to be positively associated with discontinued exclusive breastfeeding at 6 months among obese mothers; mothers whom delayed breastfeeding initiation, had health problems during pregnancy, caesarean delivery, reported had insufficient colostrum/milk and babies had sucking problems at or before 4 weeks. Besides that, mothers who perceived their biological mothers had preference towards formula feeding or were ambivalent about the feeding method and had biological mothers without experience in breastfeeding for more than 1 month also were more likely to discontinue exclusive breastfeeding at 6 months. These findings suggested that the greater the pre-pregnant BMI, the earlier the cessation of exclusive breastfeeding and they were also less likely to initiate breastfeeding and have less adequate milk supply. Future investigations of the effects of maternal obesity on breastfeeding outcomes should be conducted along with effective interventions to advance the care of obese women at reproductive age and their children.

**Keywords :** exclusive breastfeeding, body mass index (BMI), breastfeeding discontinuation, maternal obesity

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