



## **Influence of Maternal Knowledge and Attitude on the Practice of Exclusive Breastfeeding Among Working Nursing Mothers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District**

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### **Abstract**

*This study examined the influence of maternal knowledge and maternal attitude on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in General Hospitals in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey design, and the population comprised 1,247 working nursing mothers who attended immunization clinics in the seven general hospitals within the district. A sample of 200 nursing mothers was drawn using a multi-stage sampling technique. Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled Knowledge, Attitude and Practice of Exclusive Breastfeeding Questionnaire (KAPEBQ). The instrument was validated by experts, and reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha, yielding coefficients of .75 for knowledge and .80 for attitude. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for the research questions, while a dependent t-test was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that maternal knowledge significantly influences the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers in the study area. Similarly, maternal attitude was found to have a significant influence on exclusive breastfeeding*

*practice. Based on these findings, the study concluded that both knowledge and attitude play critical roles in determining whether working nursing mothers adhere to exclusive breastfeeding recommendations. The study recommends strengthening health education programs to increase mothers' knowledge and improve attitudes toward exclusive breastfeeding. It further suggests that health educators should intensify counseling and supportive interventions that address misconceptions and promote positive breastfeeding behaviors among working nursing mothers.*

**Keywords:** Exclusive breastfeeding, maternal knowledge, maternal attitude, working nursing mothers, immunization clinics, Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District.

### **1.1 Introduction**

Breastfeeding, the natural feeding of infants with their mother's breast milk, has been practiced since the beginning of human history. It remains the most effective and biologically appropriate method of infant nourishment, whether the milk is taken directly from the breast or expressed for later use. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) recommends initiating breastfeeding within the first hour after birth and continuing on demand. Exclusive breastfeeding (EBF), feeding only breast milk for the first six months, has been shown to significantly enhance infant growth, health, and survival, serving as one of the simplest and most cost-effective public health interventions available today. Despite these global benefits, only 44% of infants under six months are fed exclusively on breast milk (WHO, 2021). In Africa, EBF prevalence remains low, with only 37% of infants exclusively breastfed (Jama et al., 2020).

In Nigeria, breastfeeding is widely practiced, but exclusive breastfeeding rates remain critically low. According to Agho et al. (2022), only 16.4% of Nigerian infants younger than six months are exclusively breastfed, and this rate declines to 7.1% by the fifth month. This pattern is also evident in the Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District, where many working nursing mothers discontinue exclusive breastfeeding early. This ongoing decline persists despite the well-established advantages of exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) for both mother and child, including infection prevention, improved cognitive development, and diminished risks of diabetes, obesity, and specific childhood illnesses (Kayode et al., 2022; Valeii, 2021). The World Health Assembly

(WHO, 2020) has set a global target to increase exclusive breastfeeding rates to 50% by 2025, underscoring its importance as a powerful tool for public health improvement (Baker et al., 2023).

One of the major determinants of EBF practice is the mother's **knowledge** about breastfeeding. Adequate maternal knowledge guides feeding decisions and shapes understanding of the timing, duration, and benefits of exclusive breastfeeding (Dukuzumuremyi et al., 2020). However, numerous studies reveal persistent knowledge gaps. For example, while 86% of mothers in Bangladesh had heard of EBF, many incorrectly believed that infants should receive water or cow's milk in addition to breast milk (Sultana et al., 2022). Similarly, Neupane et al. (2020) found that even when knowledge levels were relatively high (35.7%), actual practice remained low (17.9%), indicating that knowledge alone does not guarantee adherence. Thus, assessing mothers' understanding of EBF remains vital to improving breastfeeding outcomes.

Beyond knowledge, **maternal attitude** is critically important when determining whether a mother practices EBF. Attitude, defined by Vogel et al. (2021) as a psychological tendency to evaluate an idea or practice with favor or disfavor, influences behavior through perceptions, beliefs, and emotional responses. Mothers may develop positive attitudes based on the perceived benefits of EBF or negative attitudes due to misconceptions such as fear of breast sagging, inconvenience, or pain. These are factors reported in different cultural settings. Studies also indicate that external influences such as culture, religion, and education shape maternal attitudes toward breastfeeding (Ibe et al., 2020; Villani et al., 2019). However, among these factors, attitude itself remains a direct and strong predictor of breastfeeding behavior.

Despite extensive research on exclusive breastfeeding globally, there remains limited empirical attention to how knowledge and attitude specifically influence exclusive breastfeeding practices among working nursing mothers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District. Working mothers frequently face unique challenges such as workplace constraints, time limitations, and social pressures, which may interact with their knowledge and attitudes to affect EBF practice. Understanding these relationships is crucial for designing targeted interventions that can improve EBF uptake in this population. Therefore, this study investigates the influence of maternal knowledge and attitude on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers in the Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Exclusive breastfeeding is globally recognized as a key strategy for ensuring optimal nutrition, growth, and survival of infants during the first six months of life. The World Health Organization recommends exclusive breastfeeding for this period because of its proven benefits in reducing infant morbidity and mortality, strengthening the immune system, and promoting healthy development. Despite this evidence, the practice of exclusive breastfeeding remains suboptimal in many regions, including Nigeria.

In Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District, observations from immunization clinics reveal a persistent reluctance among working nursing mothers to practice exclusive breastfeeding. Many introduce water, herbal mixtures, or solid foods within the first few months of life, while others avoid breastfeeding altogether, even in the absence of medical conditions that would prevent them from doing so. Although health workers frequently educate mothers on the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, adherence remains low.

One major concern is whether working nursing mothers possess adequate knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding, including its meaning, recommended duration, and benefits. Studies in other regions indicate that mothers may have heard of exclusive breastfeeding yet still misunderstand its proper implementation or hold misconceptions about breast milk sufficiency. Such knowledge gaps may also exist among mothers in this district, contributing to poor breastfeeding practices.

Similarly, maternal attitude (whether positive or negative) is an important factor that influences breastfeeding behavior. Some mothers may appreciate the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding but view it as stressful, inconvenient, socially embarrassing, or incompatible with workplace demands. Such negative attitudes can undermine willingness to practice exclusive breastfeeding, regardless of awareness campaigns.

Although several studies have explored different factors influencing exclusive breastfeeding practices across Nigeria, there is limited empirical evidence focusing specifically on how knowledge and attitude influence exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District. This gap raises concerns for infant nutrition and health outcomes in the district.

It is against this backdrop that the present study seeks to examine the extent to which maternal knowledge and attitude influence the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to determine the influence of maternal knowledge and attitude towards exclusive breastfeeding on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in the Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District. Specifically, the study determines the following:

- i. The influence of maternal knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District.
- ii. The influence of attitude towards exclusive breastfeeding on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District.

### **1.4 Research Question**

The following research questions guided the study:

- i. What is the influence of maternal knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in general hospitals in the Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District?
- ii. What is the influence of attitude towards exclusive breastfeeding on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in general hospitals in the Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study will be beneficial to nursing mothers, health educators, healthcare institutions, policymakers, and future researchers. The study will help working mothers understand how their knowledge and attitudes influence their feeding decisions, encouraging more informed choices that support exclusive breastfeeding and improve infant health outcomes.

The results will reveal gaps in mothers' knowledge and attitudes, enabling the design of more effective breastfeeding education programs tailored to the needs of working nursing mothers. The study will provide evidence-based insights to strengthen exclusive breastfeeding campaigns and workplace policies that support breastfeeding mothers. The study will serve as a reference point for research on exclusive breastfeeding, especially those focusing on behavioral determinants such as knowledge and attitude.

## 1.6 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided the study and were tested at the .05 level of significance:

- i. There is no significant influence of maternal knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in general hospitals in the Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District.
- ii. There is no significant influence of attitude towards exclusive breastfeeding on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in general hospitals in the Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District.

## 1.7 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided the study and were tested at the .05 level of significance:

- i. There is no significant influence of knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in general hospitals in the Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District.
- ii. There is no significant influence of attitude towards exclusive breastfeeding on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in general hospitals in the Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District.

## Literature Review

### 2.1 Conceptual Framework

#### 2.1.1 Concept of Exclusive Breastfeeding

Exclusive breastfeeding involves feeding infants **only breast milk** for the first six months, except for prescribed vitamins or medications (Valeii, 2021). WHO (2021) highlights EBF as essential for reducing infections such as diarrhea, respiratory tract diseases, otitis media, and early childhood obesity. EBF also helps babies' immune systems, brain development, growth, and survival (Kayode et al., 2022; Jama et al., 2020).

Despite these benefits, the global rate of EBF remains low at 44% (WHO, 2021), and in Africa, only 37% of infants are exclusively breastfed (Jama et al., 2020). In Nigeria, the rate is even lower, with an average of 16.4% (Agho et al., 2022). These statistics

illustrate the value of understanding the roles of maternal knowledge and attitude in shaping EBF practices.

### **2.1.2 Maternal Knowledge of Exclusive Breastfeeding**

Maternal knowledge refers to a mother's understanding of the meaning, duration, timing, and benefits of exclusive breastfeeding. Adequate knowledge is considered essential for proper breastfeeding practice (Dukuzumuremyi et al., 2020).

Research shows that while many mothers have heard of EBF, significant knowledge gaps persist. Sultana et al. (2022) found that, although 86% of mothers in Bangladesh knew about EBF, many wrongly believed that water or cow milk could be given during the first six months. Similar misconceptions exist in many developing countries.

Neupane et al. (2020) further reported that knowledge alone does not guarantee practice: even though 35.7% of mothers demonstrated adequate knowledge, only 17.9% practiced EBF. This suggests that knowledge must be accompanied by positive attitudes and supportive conditions to translate into actual behavior.

Mothers with correct knowledge on the health benefits of EBF are more likely to practice it, while those who believe breast milk is insufficient or harmful tend to abandon it.

### **2.2.3 Maternal Attitude Towards Exclusive Breastfeeding**

Maternal attitude refers to a mother's positive or negative beliefs, perceptions, and feelings toward exclusive breastfeeding. Vogel et al. (2021) defined attitude as a psychological tendency expressed through an evaluative judgment (favorable or unfavorable) toward a particular behavior.

Positive attitudes, such as believing that breast milk protects against disease, strengthens mother–infant bonding, and is convenient, support the adoption of EBF. Negative attitudes such as the belief that breast milk is insufficient, fear of breast sagging, embarrassment about feeding in public, the perception that EBF is stressful or inconvenient, etc., have been linked to poor EBF practice (Zainab & Folake, 2022; Srimorogan, 2023).

Studies indicate that mothers may not engage in exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) due to perceived pain, discomfort, or the belief that infants necessitate supplementary feeding (Webb-Girard et al., 2021). Roth et al. (2021) noted that mothers who feel uncomfortable breastfeeding in public are less likely to practice exclusive breastfeeding. Thus, maternal attitude is a major predictor of breastfeeding decisions.

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

### **2.2.1 Empirical Studies on Maternal Knowledge and Exclusive Breastfeeding**

Egenti et al. (2018) found that lack of knowledge was a major barrier to EBF among mothers in Abuja. Similarly, Wana (2020) reported that 94.3% of mothers in Southern Ethiopia knew what EBF meant, yet only 56.1% practiced it for six months, demonstrating the gap between knowledge and behavior.

Nukpezah et al. (2020) found that knowledge significantly influenced EBF practice among mothers in Ghana. Richard and Adi (2019) also observed that mothers with adequate knowledge were more likely to uphold exclusive breastfeeding. These studies collectively show that knowledge is an important but not sufficient determinant of EBF practice.

Balogun et al. (2020) found that 84.7% of urban and 89.5% of rural mothers in Lagos had positive attitudes towards EBF, a factor that significantly contributed to their breastfeeding behavior. Oche et al. (2021), however, found that, despite adequate knowledge, negative attitudes in Sokoto communities contributed to low EBF practice.

Essien, N. O. (2025) conducted a related study that examined the impact of educational attainment and cultural beliefs on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) among working nursing mothers who attend immunization clinics. Using a descriptive survey design, the study selected 200 working nursing mothers through a multi-stage sampling procedure from general hospitals within the district. Data were gathered using a validated, researcher-created tool, the Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice of Exclusive Breastfeeding Questionnaire (KAPEBQ), which had reliability coefficients between 0.71 and 0.88. The findings revealed that educational attainment significantly influenced the likelihood of practicing EBF, with higher-educated mothers showing better adherence to recommended practices. Cultural beliefs also played a significant role in breastfeeding decisions, particularly in relation to colostrum disposal, pre-lacteal feeding, and family-driven feeding norms. The study concluded that both educational

level and cultural beliefs are critical factors shaping EBF behavior among working mothers in the district, recommending strengthened community-based health education, culturally sensitive breastfeeding counseling, and workplace support systems to improve EBF uptake.

Tadele et al. (2020) found that 89.5% of mothers had positive attitudes toward EBF, but only 26.4% of them did it exclusively for six months. This suggests that positive attitude alone does not guarantee practice but is a strong influencing factor.

Studies by Webb-Girard et al. (2021), Zainab and Folake (2022), and Srimorogan (2023) documented that fears, misconceptions, and discomfort significantly reduced EBF practice.

The literature reviewed highlights that exclusive breastfeeding is essential for infant health and survival. However, knowledge gaps and negative attitudes contribute significantly to low EBF rates globally and in Nigeria. The theoretical frameworks reviewed indicate that behavior is influenced by both cognitive (knowledge) and affective (attitude) factors.

Empirical studies confirm that positive attitudes must accompany maternal knowledge for effective EBF practice. Yet, there is limited evidence specifically addressing how knowledge and attitude influence exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers in the Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District. This gap justifies the present study.

### **2.3 Theoretical Framework**

Exclusive breastfeeding behavior can be explained using behavioral theories that show how knowledge and attitudes influence maternal decisions.

#### **2.3.1 Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980)**

The Theory of Planned Behaviour posits that a person's intention to perform a behavior is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. According to the theory, individuals are more likely to engage in a behavior when they believe it is beneficial and within their control. This theory is relevant to the present study because it explains how a mother's attitude toward exclusive breastfeeding (whether favorable or unfavorable) can directly influence her intention and eventual

practice of EBF. Mothers who believe EBF benefits their infants may be motivated to practice it, while those with negative perceptions may avoid it.

### **2.3.2 Locus of Control Theory (Rotter, 1966)**

This theory differentiates between individuals who believe outcomes are determined by their actions (internal locus) and those who believe outcomes are determined by external forces such as fate or luck (external locus). In the context of EBF, mothers with an internal locus are more likely to rely on correct knowledge and actively implement recommended infant feeding practices. Those with an external locus may neglect EBF despite having knowledge, believing that their actions do not significantly influence their child's health.

### **2.3.3 Health Belief Model (Hochbaum, Rosenstock & Kegel, 1950)**

The Health Belief Model suggests that individuals adopt preventive health behaviors based on perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, and perceived barriers.

This model is applicable to the study because many mothers adopt or reject EBF depending on:

- i. how serious they believe early-life diseases are,
- ii. how strongly they believe EBF can prevent such diseases, and
- iii. their attitude toward the convenience or inconvenience of practicing EBF.

## **3.1 Research Method**

This study adopted a descriptive survey design, which is suitable for assessing existing conditions, attitudes, and practices among a defined population. The research was conducted in the North-West Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State, an area comprising ten local government areas and seven general hospitals. The population consisted of 1,247 working nursing mothers who attended immunization clinics in these hospitals. A sample of 200 mothers was selected using a multi-stage sampling technique involving systematic sampling of local government areas, simple random sampling of hospitals, and proportional random sampling of respondents. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire titled *Knowledge, Attitude and Practice of Exclusive Breastfeeding Questionnaire (KAPEBQ)*, which covered mothers' knowledge, attitude, and practice of exclusive breastfeeding. The instrument was validated by five experts, and reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha,

yielding coefficients of .75 for knowledge and .80 for attitude, indicating high reliability.

Data collection was carried out by the researcher with assistance from trained research aides after obtaining permission from hospital management. The researcher clearly explained the purpose of the study to participants, assured confidentiality, and administered and retrieved questionnaires immediately to ensure full return. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for the research questions, while a dependent t-test was employed to test the hypotheses at the .05 significance level. Ethical procedures such as voluntary participation, anonymity, privacy, and accurate handling of data were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants were not coerced or misled, and information obtained was used solely for research purposes.

#### 4.1 Results and Discussion

**Table 4.1: Summary of Descriptive Statistics on the influence of Maternal Knowledge of Exclusive Breastfeeding on the Practice of Exclusive Breastfeeding among Working Nursing Mothers attending Immunization Clinic**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Know. of Exclusive Breastfeeding	3.42	1.79	1.25
Attending Immunization Clinic	2.17	1.63	

*Source: Field Data (2023)*

The summary of the result presented in Table 4.1 indicates that the mean influence of maternal knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding is 3.42 and that of attending an immunization clinic is 2.17. The mean difference between the two variables is 1.25. The mean difference between the two variables is 0.72. Hence, knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding has a mean influence of 3.42 on working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in general hospitals in the Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District.

**Table 4.2: Summary of Descriptive Statistics on influence of Attitude towards Exclusive Breastfeeding on the Practice of Exclusive Breastfeeding among Working Nursing Mothers Attending Immunization Clinic**

Variables	Mean	SD	Difference
Atti. Towards Exclusive Breastfeeding	2.89	1.78	0.72
Attending Immunization Clinic	2.17	1.63	

*Source: Field Data (2023)*

The summary of the result presented in Table 4.2 indicates that the mean influence of attitude towards exclusive breastfeeding is 2.89 and that of attending an immunization clinic is 2.17. The mean difference between the two variables is 0.72. Hence, attitude towards exclusive breastfeeding has a mean influence of 2.89 on working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in general hospitals in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District.

## Test of Hypotheses

### 4.1.1 Hypothesis One

There is no significant influence of maternal knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in General Hospitals in the Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District.

**Table 4.3: Summary of Dependent t-test Analysis on the influence of maternal knowledge on the Practice of Exclusive Breastfeeding among Working Nursing Mothers attending Immunization**

Variables	Mean	SD	t-value	t-critical	Df	Decision
Know. Of Exclusive Breastfeeding	3.42	1.79	2.88	1.96	199	Significant
Attending Immunization Clinic	2.17	1.63				

\* Significant at 0.05 alpha level

*Source: Field Data (2023)*

Table 4.3 shows that the calculated t-value of 2.88 at 199 degrees of freedom and a 0.05 alpha level of significance is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. Hence, there is a significant influence of knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in general hospitals in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District.

#### 4.1.2 Hypothesis Two

There is no significant influence of attitude towards exclusive breastfeeding on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in General Hospitals in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District.

**Table 4.4: Summary of Dependent t-test Analysis on the influence of Attitude towards Exclusive Breastfeeding on the Practice of Exclusive Breastfeeding among Working Nursing Mothers attending Immunization Clinic**

Variables	Mean	SD	t-value	t-critical	df	Decision
Atti. Towards Exclusive Breastfeeding	2.89	1.78	3.38	1.96	199	Significant
Attending Immunization Clinic	2.17	1.63				

\* Significant at 0.05 alpha level

*Source: Field Data (2023)*

Table 4.4 shows that the calculated t-value of 3.38 at 199 degrees of freedom and a 0.05 alpha level of significance is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. Hence, there is a significant influence of attitude towards exclusive breastfeeding on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in general hospitals in the Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District.

#### 4.2 Findings

Findings from Table 4.1 show that maternal knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding recorded a mean score of 3.42, while the mean score for practice of exclusive breastfeeding among mothers attending immunization clinics was 2.17, yielding a mean

difference of **1.25**. This suggests that mothers possessing elevated levels of knowledge exhibited a stronger inclination to engage in exclusive breastfeeding. The results suggest that maternal knowledge exerts a considerable positive influence on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers in the Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District.

The test of hypothesis in Table 4.3 further supports this finding. The calculated t-value of 2.88 exceeded the critical t-value of 1.96 at the 0.05 significance level with 199 degrees of freedom. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming that maternal knowledge has a significant influence on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in the district.

Results in Table 4.2 reveal that attitude towards exclusive breastfeeding had a mean score of 2.89, compared with a mean score of 2.17 for practice of exclusive breastfeeding, producing a mean difference of 0.72. This shows that mothers with more positive attitudes were more likely to practice exclusive breastfeeding. Although the mean influence of attitude was lower than that of knowledge, the results nonetheless indicate that maternal attitude contributes meaningfully to the adoption of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers.

Findings from the hypothesis test presented in Table 4.4 corroborate this. The computed t-value of 3.38 exceeded the critical value of 1.96 at the 0.05 significance level and 199 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected, demonstrating that maternal attitude has a significant influence on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District.

### **4.3 Discussion of Findings**

#### **4.3.1 Influence of Maternal Knowledge of Exclusive Breastfeeding on Its Practice**

The findings of this study revealed a significant influence of maternal knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding on its practice among working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in General Hospitals in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District. This suggests that mothers who possess adequate knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding are more likely to adhere to its recommended practice. This outcome is logical because understanding the meaning, duration, and benefits of exclusive

breastfeeding enables mothers to appreciate the importance of strictly providing breast milk during the first six months of life. Mothers who know enough about the benefits, such as a lower risk of gastrointestinal infections, a stronger immune system, a stronger bond with their child, a longer time before their period returns, and better health for themselves, are more likely to breastfeed.

Conversely, inadequate or incorrect knowledge may limit a mother's motivation to practice exclusive breastfeeding. When mothers are unfamiliar with the advantages of exclusive breastfeeding or misunderstand what the practice entails, they may prematurely introduce other feeds, thereby exposing infants to preventable health risks. The findings of this study align with the observations of Richard and Adi (2019), who reported that mothers' knowledge significantly influences their practice of exclusive breastfeeding. Their study emphasized that improved knowledge remains a critical enabler of proper breastfeeding behavior. Thus, the present study reinforces existing evidence that knowledge is a key determinant of exclusive breastfeeding practice.

#### **4.3.2 Influence of Attitude Towards Exclusive Breastfeeding on Its Practice**

The findings from the second hypothesis revealed that maternal attitude significantly influences the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District. This indicates that the way mothers think or feel about exclusive breastfeeding plays a decisive role in whether they choose to practice it. Attitude, being a psychological disposition expressed through favor or disfavor, affects behavior by shaping willingness, motivation, and commitment. Working mothers who hold positive attitudes, such as viewing exclusive breastfeeding as beneficial, natural, or convenient, are more likely to sustain the practice. Positive attitudes have been shown to support longer breastfeeding duration and greater adherence.

On the other hand, mothers who possess negative attitudes are less inclined to practice exclusive breastfeeding, even when knowledge is adequate. These negative attitudes may arise from misunderstandings, perceived inconvenience, fear of physical alterations, or workplace pressures. Attitude, unlike knowledge, is not directly observable and can therefore vary widely among individuals, making its assessment important in understanding actual breastfeeding behavior. An indifferent or negative attitude is unlikely to translate into practice, highlighting the crucial role attitude plays in behavioral outcomes. The findings of this study are consistent with those of Balogun

et al. (2020), who reported that maternal attitude significantly influenced exclusive breastfeeding practices in both urban and rural settings in Lagos State. Their study similarly concluded that positive attitudes promote adherence to exclusive breastfeeding, while negative attitudes hinder it.

### **5.1 Summary**

The main purpose of this study was to determine the influence of maternal knowledge and maternal attitude on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in general hospitals in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District. To achieve this purpose, two research questions were raised and two hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population consisted of 1,247 working nursing mothers who attended immunization clinics in the seven general hospitals in the district. A sample of 200 working nursing mothers was drawn using a multi-stage sampling procedure.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire titled Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice of Exclusive Breastfeeding Questionnaire (KAPEBQ). The instrument was validated by five experts from the University of Uyo, and reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha, yielding coefficients of .75 for knowledge and .80 for attitude. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while a dependent t-test was used to test the hypotheses. The findings revealed that maternal knowledge significantly influenced the practice of exclusive breastfeeding and that maternal attitude also had a significant influence on exclusive breastfeeding practice among working nursing mothers in the study area.

### **5.2 Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that maternal knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding and maternal attitude toward exclusive breastfeeding both have significant influences on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers attending immunization clinics in general hospitals in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District. Mothers who demonstrated higher knowledge and more positive attitudes were more likely to practice exclusive breastfeeding as recommended.

### **5.3 Educational Implications of the Findings**

The findings of this study have important educational implications. First, they emphasize that there must be continuous health education programs that increase mothers' **knowledge** of exclusive breastfeeding, since knowledge positively affects practice. Second, the results demonstrate that improving mothers' **attitudes** through counseling, demonstration, and peer-support interventions can promote higher adherence to exclusive breastfeeding recommendations. Finally, the findings underscore the responsibility of health educators and healthcare workers to provide consistent, accurate, and culturally sensitive information that strengthens both knowledge and attitude among working nursing mothers.

### **5.4 Contribution to Knowledge**

This study contributes to existing knowledge by providing empirical evidence that among working nursing mothers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District:

- i. Knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding significantly influences exclusive breastfeeding practice.
- ii. Attitude toward exclusive breastfeeding significantly influences exclusive breastfeeding practice.

The study therefore strengthens evidence that behavioral factors (knowledge and attitude) remain critical determinants of exclusive breastfeeding practice, particularly among working mothers in hospital-based settings.

### **5.5 Recommendations**

The study's findings lead to the following recommendations:

- i. Working nursing mothers should apply the knowledge they possess about exclusive breastfeeding to ensure effective feeding practices that promote infant health.
- ii. Health workers should help mothers develop positive attitudes toward exclusive breastfeeding through consistent counseling, demonstrations, and supportive communication.
- iii. Hospital-based health education sessions should prioritize correcting misconceptions that negatively affect mothers' attitudes about exclusive breastfeeding.

- iv. Exclusive breastfeeding promotion programs should focus equally on increasing knowledge and shaping positive attitudes, since both significantly influence practice.

### 5.6 Suggestions for Further Studies

To expand understanding of exclusive breastfeeding behavior among working nursing mothers, the following areas are suggested for further research:

- i. Influence of workplace environment on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District.
- ii. Influence of economic factors on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among working nursing mothers in the district.
- iii. Influence of government and organizational breastfeeding policies on exclusive breastfeeding practice among working nursing mothers.

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