

Factors Influencing Exclusive Breastfeeding Among Lactating Mothers Infected with Human Immunodeficiency Virus and its Associated Infant Health Outcomes in Southern Highlands Regions-Tanzania: Analytical Cross-Sectional Study

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Introduction: There is no other better way proven to safeguard an infant's health in the first six months of life than exclusive breastfeeding. Mother's breast milk is proven valuable in all aspects of an infant's physical and mental growth as well as immune development. It has also been shown that exclusive breastfeeding significantly reduces the risk of mother-to-child transmission of HIV after delivery. However, exclusive breastfeeding is not universally practiced by everyone regardless of its significant benefit, primarily to the infants of HIV-infected mothers. This study assessed factors influencing exclusive breastfeeding among lactating mothers infected with HIV and associated infant health outcome.

Method: A hospital-based analytical cross-sectional study was conducted in the southern highlands' region of Tanzania. A random sampling procedure was employed to obtain 372 HIV-infected mothers of infants of six to twelve months who were still breastfeeding at the time of data collection. An interviewer-administered structured questionnaire was used to capture data from the study participants. Bivariate and multivariate logistic regression was used to assess predictors of EBF among HIV-infected lactating mothers. Statistical package for social science (SPSS v.20) software was used for data entry and analysis.

Results: More than half of the respondents, 216 (58.1%), reported to practice EBF at the time of data collection. Of the exposed infants, 24(6.5%) were HIV positive during data collection, and inadequate ANC visit was the predictor for exposed infants to acquire (AOR=0.195, 95%CI: 0.066-0.574, P=0.003). Predictors for EBF were adequate knowledge (AOR=5.114, 95%CI: 3.200-8.172, P=<0.001), positive perception on EBF (AOR=3.506, 95%CI: 2.248-5.468, p=<0.001), adequate ANC visits (AOR=1.756, 95%CI: 1.094-2.817, P=0.002), and having never experienced breast problem (AOR=3.623, 95%CI: 1.832-7.165, P=<0.001).

Conclusion: About half of the respondents practiced EBF for the first six months. Adequate knowledge, positive perception, and adequate visits were the predictors for EBF practice among HIV-lactating mothers. Strengthening adherence to ANC routine visits, counseling on breastfeeding, and improving mother's knowledge on EBF would enhance EBF practice in this region.

Keywords: Exclusive breastfeeding, exposed infants, and HIV

