

Poster 28

Impact of Baby-Feeding Practices on Portuguese Children's Health Outcomes: Preliminary Results

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Abstract

Background: Baby-feeding practices, including breastfeeding and formula milk, exclusively or combined, can have protective or harmful impacts on children's health, such as respiratory infections, allergies, and other chronic diseases [1-3]. **Objective:** This study explores the association between baby-feeding practices (exclusive breastfeeding and its duration, exclusive formula milk, and combination of breastfeeding with formula milk and/or water with the timing of introduction) with the development of health conditions/symptoms. **Methods:** A structured survey was completed by 192 parents of children (5-10 years). In addition to baby-feeding practices information, data on children's health conditions during the first two years of life (bronchitis, asthmatic bronchitis, bronchiolitis, and pneumonia) and until date (doctor-diagnosed asthma, sneezing attacks, eczema, and otitis) were collected. Associations were explored via univariate analyses, with findings presented as odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI). **Results:** Around 58% (n=110/190) of mothers exclusively breastfed their children for 9.5±10.7 months. Among other mothers, 14.3% (n=11/77) used formula milk solely, and 85.7% (n=66/77) combined both. Children exclusively breastfed had lower odds of all conditions than others, except for pneumonia (OR=1.20; CI:0.28-5.17) with no statistical differences. A month increase in breastfeeding duration was associated with 6% lower bronchitis odds and 1.05 times higher sneezing attack odds (p>0.05). When comparing formula milk and combination feeding, children exclusively fed formula milk had 1.50 and 2.64 times higher odds of bronchitis and bronchiolitis, respectively, but 81% lower eczema odds (p>0.05), while combining both feeding practices was associated with 62% lower bronchiolitis odds and 5.39 times higher eczema odds. Minimal impact was found on otitis (OR=0.99; CI:0.26-3.75), while its odds were 1.08 times higher per month increase in the age of formula milk introduction. **Conclusions:** These preliminary findings suggest an overall protective impact of exclusive breastfeeding over formula milk, with a positive influence of combining them on early-in-life conditions.

Keywords: breastfeeding; formula milk; children; bronchitis; asthma; eczema; otitis

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