LOW PREVALENCE OF EXCLUSIVE BREASTFEEDING AMONG HOSPITALIZED BRAZILIAN INFANTS

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Background and Aims:

Breastfeeding is known to protect against child infections. Its importance in reducing morbidity and mortality is widely recognized in low and middle-income countries. About 70% of hospital admissions for diarrhoea and 60% for respiratory infections could be avoided with breastfeeding. Despite that, prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding in children under 6 months in Brazil is only 36.6%. The aim of this study was to assess the prevalence of breastfeeding in children up to 6 months admitted to a University Hospital in Sao Paulo city, Brazil.

Methods:

This is a cross-sectional retrospective study, carried out in the pediatric ward of University Hospital of University of Sao Paulo, including all children from 1 to 6 months old admitted in 2015. Data were collected from electronic records of Nutrition and Dietetics Department and medical records. Nutritional status was assessed according WHO criteria for weight to age (2006). SPSS software version 20.0 was used for statistical analysis ($p < 0.05$).

Results:

Three hundred fifty three patients were included, mostly male (61.8%) (**Table 1**). Respiratory diseases were responsible for 79.9% of admissions, followed by urinary tract infection (4.0%), diarrhoea (3.4%) and skin infections (3.4%). The prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding was 38.8%, and 27.2% of children were mixed-fed. Exclusive breastfeeding decreased substantially over the first 6 months of life (**Figure 1**). Weaned children were significantly more often admitted for diarrhoea than breastfed children (7.5% versus 1.3%, $p = 0.004$). There were no difference in length of stay between breastfed and weaned children (median=4.0 days, $p = 0.235$).

Table 1 – Demographic characteristics, nutritional status and breastfeeding status of the participants (n=353).

Characteristics	Value	p value
Age, median (IQR), months	87 (55-134)	
Sex, n (%)		
Male	218 (61.8)	<0.001
Female	135 (38.2)	
Nutritional status, n(%)		
Normal	317 (89.8)	<0.001
Malnutrition	29 (8.2)	
Overweight	6 (1.7)	
Breastfeeding status, n(%)		
Exclusive	137 (38.8)	0.027
Mixed	120 (34.0)	
Weaned	96 (27.2)	

Chi-square test. Significant level adopted, $p < 0.05$.

Figure 1 – Infant feeding in the pediatric ward of University Hospital of University of Sao Paulo (n=353).

Conclusions:

Prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding was low and it was considered “fair” according World Health Organization criteria. Early weaning predisposed gastrointestinal infections. These results reinforce the importance of creating new and intensifying the existing policy on promoting and protectin breastfeeding.

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