

## PREVALENCE OF EXCLUSIVE BREAST FEEDING PRACTICES AMONG THE IRULAR MOTHERS IN COIMBATORE DISTRICT, TAMILNADU

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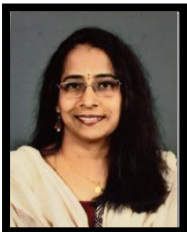
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### ABSTRACT:

Exclusive breastfeeding, which means to give only breast milk to the infant till first six months, is the ideal way for the healthy growth and development. Globally 53% of the under-five deaths are due to under-nutrition. Exclusive breastfeeding prevents the under-nutrition, diarrhoea and Pneumonia. But the prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding is low globally (35%) and nationally (46.4%). In India, the prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding is not only low among the general population but also among the tribes, where malnutrition is highly prevalent, which needs to be explored. This community based cross sectional study was conducted among the Irular mothers with children of age 6 to 24 months residing in the tribal villages in Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu. The sample size was 60. Data was collected by simple random sampling using the pretested, standardized Tamil questionnaire and was analyzed using Chi Square and Fisher's exact test. The prevalence of Exclusive breastfeeding among the Irulars is 26.9% with the median duration as 5 months. Only 35.2% of the mothers gave colostrum as the first feed while 64.8% gave prelacteal feeds, of which 73.1% had discarded the colostrum. The important reasons for non-exclusive breastfeeding were the lack of support from the family and fear of inadequate milk. Increasing maternal age, age at conception, Education, antenatal counseling on breastfeeding, awareness, previous breastfeeding experience and postnatal support from the health workers were the factors favouring the Exclusive breastfeeding with statistical significance ( $p < 0.05$ ). Health Education, antenatal counseling of the Irular mothers, encouraging giving colostrum within the first hour of life, Exclusive breastfeeding up to six months of age, avoiding the traditional beliefs like prelacteal feeds, discarding the colostrum and training the health workers to promote exclusive breastfeeding are the vital measures against the under-nutrition, morbidity and infant mortality.

**Key words:** Irular tribes, Prelacteal feeds, Health Education, colostrum, Exclusive Breast feeding.

### ABOUT AUTHORS



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**INTRODUCTION**

Breastfeeding is the ideal way of providing nutrition for the healthy growth and development of infants. As a global public health recommendation, infants should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life to achieve optimal growth, development and health. Early initiation of breastfeeding is extremely important for providing 'Colostrum' to the newborn and establishing successful lactation. Ideally, the baby should be breastfed as soon as possible and preferably within one hour of birth. Exclusive breastfeeding means that babies are given only breast milk and nothing else – no other milk, food, drinks and not even water excluding medications during the first six months of life. It is important to ensure exclusive breastfeeding of all the babies, as it saves them from diarrhoea, pneumonia and also helps in reducing the ear infections, risk of attacks of asthma and allergies. Globally, only 35% of infants are exclusively breastfed during the first six months of life. Improper infant feeding practices not only results in malnutrition but also contribute to impaired cognitive development, poor school performance and reduced productivity in later life. Of all the under-five deaths, under-nutrition is the underlying cause of estimated 53% of deaths. Over 2/3 of these deaths occur during the infancy and are often associated with inappropriate feeding practices. The status of breastfeeding practices is very dismal in India. According to NFHS-3, the prevalence of the early initiation of breastfeeding in India is only 25% and Exclusive breastfeeding is only 46.4%. The low rate of exclusive breastfeeding is equally prevalent in both rural and urban parts of India including the urban slums. While the rate of exclusive breastfeeding is low among the general population itself, the practice and the rate of exclusive breastfeeding among the tribal population is indeed a matter of interest and concern.

**NEED FOR THE STUDY**

India is home to almost half the tribal population of the world. Tribes are social group of people characterized by a distinctive culture, beliefs, traits and territorial affiliation constituting 8.2% of total population. Various factors like illiteracy, geographical isolation, cultural isolation and socio-economic backwardness render the tribes to remain at the lowest stratum of the society. About 91% of the tribal population still lives in rural areas and 47.3% are below the poverty line.

A separate Directorate has been created in Tamil Nadu for the welfare of the Tribes which has identified 36 Scheduled Tribal communities in 13 districts within the state. Six of these communities – Todas, Kota, Kurumba, Irular, Pania and Kattunaiken have been further identified as Primitive Tribal groups. Irular tribes who are one of these primitive tribes are recognized as Scheduled Tribe (ST) by the Govt. of India. Though Irular tribal groups are scattered throughout the state, Irular settlement is predominantly highest in the Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu.

Irulars as a tribe are traditional snake and rat catchers, which are no longer their means of living and over these years of existence, they have been unable to find a sustainable occupation for themselves. Socio-economic backwardness, illiteracy, malnutrition and under-utilization of health services are the major public health problems prevailing among the Irular tribal community. There is no data on the infant feeding practices among the Irular tribes. So this study is conducted to assess the exclusive breastfeeding practices among the Irular tribal population residing in Coimbatore District of Tamil Nadu.

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

"A cross sectional descriptive study to assess the prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding practices among the Irular tribal population residing in Coimbatore District of Tamil Nadu."

**OBJECTIVES**

1. To assess the prevalence of Exclusive Breastfeeding practices among the Irular tribal mothers in Coimbatore District of Tamil Nadu.
2. To identify the factors influencing the exclusive breastfeeding among the Irular tribal mothers.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**Research approach:** Quantitative approach.

**Research design:** Community based descriptive cross sectional design

**Setting of the study:** Irular tribal mothers with children of age 6 months to 24 months residing in the Villages

**Population:** Irular tribal mothers with children of age 6 months to 24 months in Coimbatore district

**Sample and sample size:** 60 Irular tribal mothers with children of age 6 months to 24 months in Coimbatore district.

**Sample Technique:** Simple random sampling technique

**Description of the tool****The tool consists of three sections**

**Section A:** Semi-structured questionnaire included six sections with Socio demographic characteristics (Age, Educational status, Occupation, religion, socioeconomic status, Marital status), Details of the antenatal period,

Details of the Delivery, Details of the initiation of breastfeeding, Details of the exclusive breastfeeding practice and the Details of the exclusive breastfeeding practices in the previous child if applicable

**Section B:** WHO structured questionnaire to assess the prevalence of exclusive breast feeding among Irular mothers. This standardized, pretested questionnaire based on WHO structured questionnaire for Exclusive breast feeding practices. The questionnaire was modified according to the feeding practices in our State and to the need of the study, prepared both in English and Tamil.

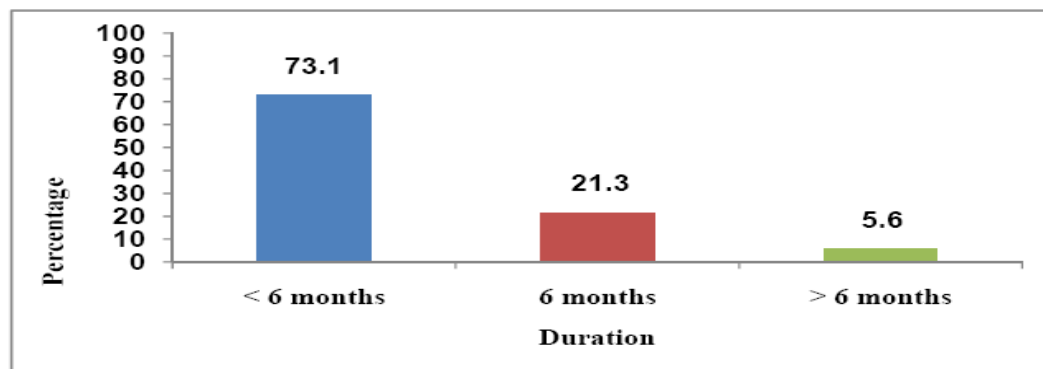
#### FINDINGS

##### 1. Prevalence of Exclusive breastfeeding practices among the Irular mothers:

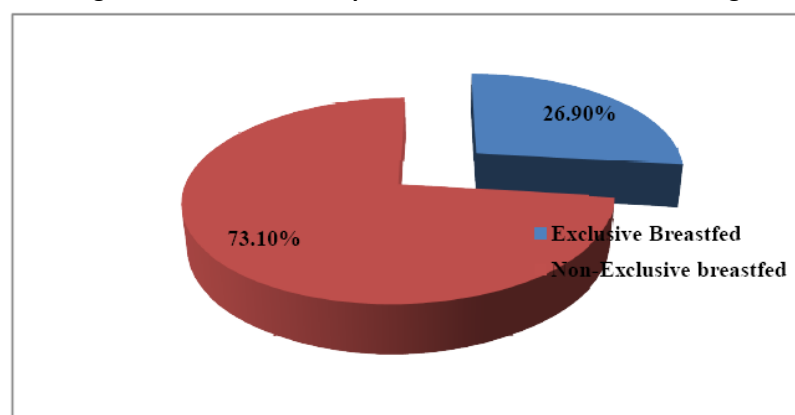
The Prevalence of the Exclusive breastfeeding practices among the Irular tribal mothers in Coimbatore District of Tamil Nadu in this study is 26.7%. This prevalence is higher than the prevalence reported in DLHS3 2017-2018 data for Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu. This might be attributed to the health promotive measures like institutional deliveries, enhanced Primary health care following the implementation of National Rural Health Mission in this District of Tamil Nadu. In this study, 73.3% of the Irular mothers did not practice the Exclusive breastfeeding for their children up to the first 6 months of life.

**Table1: Prevalence on Exclusive Breastfeeding practices**

S.No	Components	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Exclusive breast feeding practice	16	26.9%
2.	Non Exclusive breast feeding practice	44	73.1%



**Figure: 1 Duration of the practice of Exclusive breast feeding**



**Figure: 2 Prevalence of Exclusive breast feeding Practices**

The important reasons for the non-exclusive breastfeeding was observed to be the family members insisting on artificial feeding in addition to breastfeeds in majority of the mothers (65.3%) and the fear on the part of the mother regarding the adequacy of breast milk in 12.4% of mothers. Other reasons are difficulty in breastfeeding technique, job. Most of the reasons are preventable and effectively tackled through the motivation and health education from the part of the health care providers which proved to be effective in mothers who had successfully practiced the exclusive breastfeeding with statistical significance.

## 2. Comparison of Mean, Standard deviation and Correlation of prevalence and factors influencing for Exclusive Breast feeding scores (N=60)

Variables	Obtainable Score	Mean	SD	Chi square test	r value	P value
Prevalence	0-20	14.56	2.46	0.184	7.34	0.001**
Factors	0-20	13.44	1.86	1.927	9.43	0.05*

\*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05

Table: 2 depicts there was a significant correlation of prevalence for exclusive breast feeding (M=2.46, SD=2.46) with 'r' value of 7.34 and factors for exclusive breast feeding (M=13.44, SD=1.86) with 'r' value of 1.927 at p<0.05 level.

### 3. Awareness on the practice of Exclusive Breastfeeding:

Only 21.3% of the mothers were aware of the right duration of exclusive breastfeeding as up to 6 months of age. While others 78.7% were not aware of the duration as 6 months of age, of whom 5.6% were of the opinion to exclusively breastfeed more than 6 months of age (till 8 to 9 months of age). Only 40% mothers were counseled on the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding of whom majority of 80% received the information through the ANM, 8.7% Staff Nurses, 8% VHN, 2% through the doctors with only 0.7% from family members.

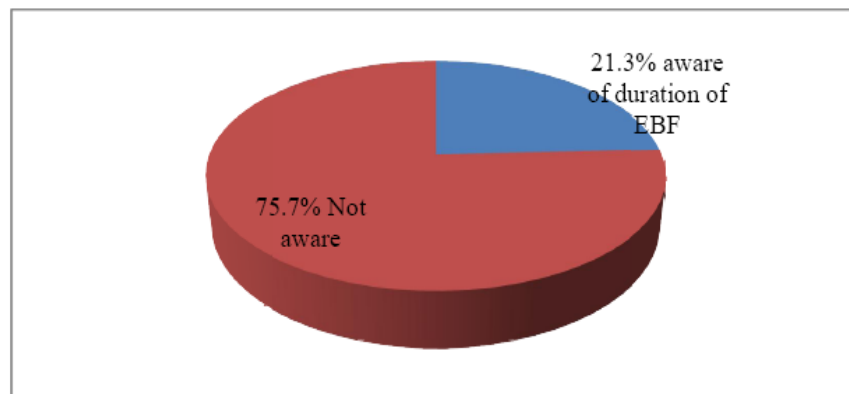


Figure: 3 Awareness of the practice of Exclusive Breast feeding

### CONCLUSION:

Health Education, antenatal counseling of the Irular mothers, encouraging giving colostrum within the first hour of life, Exclusive breastfeeding up to six months of age, avoiding the traditional beliefs like prelacteal feeds, discarding the colostrum and training the health workers to promote exclusive breastfeeding are the vital measures against the under-nutrition, morbidity and infant mortality.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the recommendations of this study:

- ❖ There is a strong emphasis on the Health education and counseling of the Irular mothers regarding the ideal infant feeding and care during the antenatal period, delivery and postnatal period for successful lactational management.
- ❖ Traditional beliefs and customs of introduction of the pre lacteal feeds and discarding of the colostrum which is prevailing in the Irular community should be strictly discouraged through the Health Education.
- ❖ Early initiation of breastfeeding to give the colostrum within the first hour of life is the first step to future exclusive breastfeeding up to 6 months. So there should be an emphasis for the motivation of the mothers and the family members for the early initiation of breastfeeding soon after the delivery by the health care providers.
- ❖ Maternal illiteracy, Gender bias, early marriage and higher order births are the other Public health problems that are prevailing in this Irular community which should be addressed to the Public health authorities for necessary action.

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