

Assessing the Role of Nurses and Midwives in Promoting Breastfeeding in Riyadh Military Hospital in Saudi Arabia

Abstract

This study aims will focus on the role of health care providers, specifically nurses and midwives, in relation to breastfeeding. The significant part of those health professionals in promoting breastfeeding has been recognized as well as the need to evaluate their knowledge and expertise on the matter. Both qualitative and quantitative methods will be used in order to assess the midwives and nurses in Riyadh Military Hospital.

Introduction

Background

Maternal health care is one of the most persistently underplayed problems all over the world. United Nations included this matter as one of their Millennium Developmental Goals (MDGs). This problem also covers the breastfeeding which is ultimately being promoted worldwide in order to improve maternal and child health conditions.

In reality, mothers and young children do not receive the necessary health care that they need. Those in health system do not give enough attention to rural areas who are primarily in need, and their services instead focus toward the “highly-specialized hospital-based care” (PRIME II, 2005). The RAND Corporation, a nonprofit research organization believes that “the health and well-being of mothers, infants, and young children are of critical importance, both as reflections of the current health status of individuals, local communities, and the nation as a whole and as predictors of the health of the next generation” (2005).

According to Rogan and Olvena (2004), those belonging in the developing countries — those who are poor, illiterate, and unemployed— are the ones mostly affected by the existing problems in terms of giving necessary care for women and their newborn children. There is a great connection between the well being of the mother and that of her child, most especially in the stage that the child solely depend on his/her mother in meeting the basic biological needs. They also pointed out that future developments in pre- and postnatal care can be possible by creating modifications in policies and plans for utilization of health care services. According to the *World Health Report* in 2004, the factors that prevent women in developing countries from getting the health care they need include: “distance from health services, cost (direct fees as well as the cost of transportation, drugs, and supplies), multiple demands on their time, and women’s lack of decision-making power within the family. The poor quality of services, including poor treatment by health providers, also makes some women reluctant to use services”.

Statement of the Problem

This research will evaluate the role of midwives and nurses in promoting breastfeeding. The main question that this study will try to answer is whether the nurses and midwives in Riyadh Military Hospital in Saudi Arabia have the right, supportive attitude and whether they are knowledgeable about the specific management strategies with regards to meeting the needs of breastfeeding patients, as well as basic counseling approaches in order to encourage the mothers to breastfeed their new-born children.

The following are the goals of this research:

- ❖ To increase the initiation efforts toward breastfeeding in Saudi Arabia (specifically the practice in Riyadh Military Hospital).
- ❖ To evaluate the knowledge of midwives and nurses regarding breastfeeding.
- ❖ To assess the current policies and practices in the units of Riyadh Military hospital regarding breastfeeding.
- ❖ To encourage the health professionals, most importantly the nurses and midwives, to generate collaborative efforts to promote breastfeeding.
- ❖ To increase the breastfeeding rates.

- ❖ To evaluate the role of professional health care providers like nurses and midwives in promoting breastfeeding.
- ❖ To call for the culture transformation and attitudinal change in the health care workers (nurses and midwives) toward breastfeeding and hope that this will influence the cultural acceptance of the people about practicing breastfeeding.

Research Hypothesis:

The hypothesis to be tested in this research is that there is still inadequacy in the knowledge of nurses and midwives regarding breastfeeding— a knowledge that is essential in order for them to assist breastfeeding mothers during the period of lactation— in Riyadh Military Hospital, and that some may not have the right attitude toward the promotion of breastfeeding in women.

Research Questions:

This study will attempt to answer the following questions during the course of this research:

1. How important is the role of nurses and midwives in promoting breastfeeding?

2. Do they have the enough knowledge and management skills required to effectively assist breastfeeding women?
3. Does the hospital have adequate policies regarding breastfeeding?
4. Are these policies being implemented?
5. How are they effective?

Justification and Rationale

The researcher opted to focus on this matter because of the significant need to promote breastfeeding as part of worldwide healthcare programs. In order to show this significance, the table below will provide the some benefits of breastfeeding that became one of the reasons why the researcher chose to pursue this topic.

Table (1) The Benefits of Breastfeeding¹

Benefits for mothers	Benefits for Infants	Benefits for Society
❖ There is a minimal risk for women who breastfed to develop ovarian and pre-	❖ Children who are breastfed obtain higher scores on cognitive and IQ tests at school	❖ breastfeeding offers economic and environmental benefits for the society

¹ The content of this table is adapted from United States Breastfeeding Committee's publication *Benefits of Breastfeeding*

<p>menopausal cancers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Breastfeeding reduces osteoporosis. ❖ Mothers who breastfeed are more likely to recover faster after childbirth, with reduced risk of postpartum bleeding. ❖ The chance for the mothers to return to their pre-pregnancy weight is higher to those who breastfeed as breastfeeding reduces the risk of long-term obesity. 	<p>age</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Breastfed children have a lower incidence of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) ❖ Breastfed children have smaller chance of acquiring infectious diseases and their symptoms ❖ Breastfed children have lower chance of experiencing the risk of obesity in childhood an adolescence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ it reduces the need for costly health services ❖ packaging is not required in breastfeeding thus its production does not harm the environment ❖ It is a lot cheaper than artificial formula
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Aside from these benefits, the researcher has also acknowledged the worldwide programs that promote breastfeeding over the use of bottled infant formulas. In support of this, the researcher felt the need to conduct a study concerning breastfeeding and focusing on the role of health care professionals such as nurses and midwives, since they play a very important part in supporting and promoting breastfeeding.

One of the related studies that can be considered is the one conducted in Australia, a study that evaluated the knowledge of midwives regarding breastfeeding. The study by Cantrill, Creedy, and Crooke involved 3500 midwives and the results showed that 90% of the midwives that participated in the study are confident and effective in meeting the needs of breastfeeding women, while there is a 39% variance in the midwives' role perception that has been found in the knowledge scores.² Studies like this inspired the researcher to conduct similar study in Saudi Arabia and initiate the assessment of midwives and nurses regarding the role that they play in promoting breastfeeding.

II. Review of Related Literature

It is true that in terms of job description, there is an obvious difference between a nurse and a midwife. Nurses are usually hospital-based, or sometimes in clinics, and they mainly focus on the health needs of the patients rather than the specific illnesses and conditions. The midwives, on the other hand, are considered to be a “key health professional supporting, guiding and caring for the mother, baby and family through the months of pregnancy, during the birth itself and afterwards in the post-natal period.” Nurses and midwives may be working in different ways, but despite these existing differences, they are both essential in providing support and care to the mothers and children under their responsibility (BMA, 2007).

² From the summary of *An Australian study of midwives' breast-feeding knowledge*

One of the existing proofs that the role of nurses and midwives in promoting better health care system is being appreciated today is the PRIME II Project. This project focuses on “increasing the quality and accessibility of family planning and reproductive health care for underserved women”. This program was made to enable nurses and midwives to: 1) monitor healthy pregnant women; 2) educate communities on the danger signs associated with pregnancy; 3) and counsel postpartum women on the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding and the importance of family planning to avoid unwanted or mistimed pregnancies. Dr. Gayane Avagyan of the Ministry of health said that they see a very important role both for nurses and midwives in widening the access for the necessary prenatal care, and that they can give “greater range of services” (PRIME II, 2005).

Nurses and midwives are both fundamental in attaining the goals of improving the high-quality health care for mothers and young children all around the world, including the other health care providers like the family physicians and obstetricians. The integration of services, as well as their utilization coming from health professionals, is needed to be able these people who are looking for primary maternal care. The *Executive Report of the Ontario Maternity Care Expert Panel* showed that more information is needed in terms of assessing the human resources planning for maternity care. It was also emphasized that “it is time for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and regulatory colleges to consider expanded roles for nurses and midwives working in 'special' environments to deliver care closest to home and in a culturally sensitive manner” (Bacon et al., 2006).

In relation to matters concerning the promotion of breastfeeding, the nurses and midwives also have a very important role. According to Vinther & Helsing (1997), mothers who wish to breastfeed their infants often depend on the health workers (e.g. nurses and midwives) regarding breastfeeding. They believe that the knowledge and attitude of these health workers have great influence on the success or failure of breastfeeding.

In Europe for example, the importance of breastfeeding is being continuously promoted and the influence of health workers regarding this matter has already been realized by making their attitudes, practices, and knowledge (e.g. on lactation management skills) as the primary basis. This can be reflected in the numerous hospitals that have changed maternity ward routines while also increasing the prevalence and duration of breastfeeding (Vinther & Helsing, 1997).

However, it has been found out that the formal education of many health workers on how to assist mothers during the process of lactation is usually inadequate. Studies have shown that many of them only rely on *what they have learned by chance* regarding breastfeeding based on study, personal observation and experience. Experts have noted that the absence of solid theoretical and practical education on this matter will result to negative personal experience that will make it difficult for the health workers to guide mothers during the period of breastfeeding their infants (Vinther & Helsing, 1997).

Better Health Better Wales' *Investing in a Better Start: Promoting Breastfeeding in Wales* (2001) also acknowledges the transformation in the culture and attitudes of health care professionals towards breastfeeding. The publication argues that while breastfeeding provides benefits to mothers, infants and as well as to the healthcare system, there is a great need for collaborative efforts in addressing the problem regarding the complex factors such as intention, initiation, and duration rates of breastfeeding. And this can only be solved by focusing in the health care providers such as the nurses and midwives as well as on their respective attitudes towards the promotion of breastfeeding.

In Wales, the recommendation for improving quality of professional practice— which is also the focus of this research— has been laid out. The efforts include requiring effective breastfeeding education and professional development requirements for health professionals such as nurses, doctors, and midwives; encouragement from health authorities toward better professional practice on breastfeeding; and as well as collaboration of different sectors in order to achieve the goal concerning the improved quality of professional practice (Better Health Better Wales, 2001).

Despite the known sophistication of infant formulae as breast milk substitutes, breastfeeding is considered to be the best way to feed the new born child. Breast feeding in the developing countries plays a very important role in protecting the children from infections. While in the developed countries, even though the benefits are much less defined, they are still there (Better Health Better Wales, 2001). In Saudi Arabia, the socioeconomic change has

introduced numerous foreign principles in the country which caused the changes in long-established habits of Saudis. Breastfeeding, although still higher in Saudi Arabia as compared to other developing countries, is still affected by the trend of using artificial formulae for infants (al-Nahedh, 1994).

Conceptual Framework

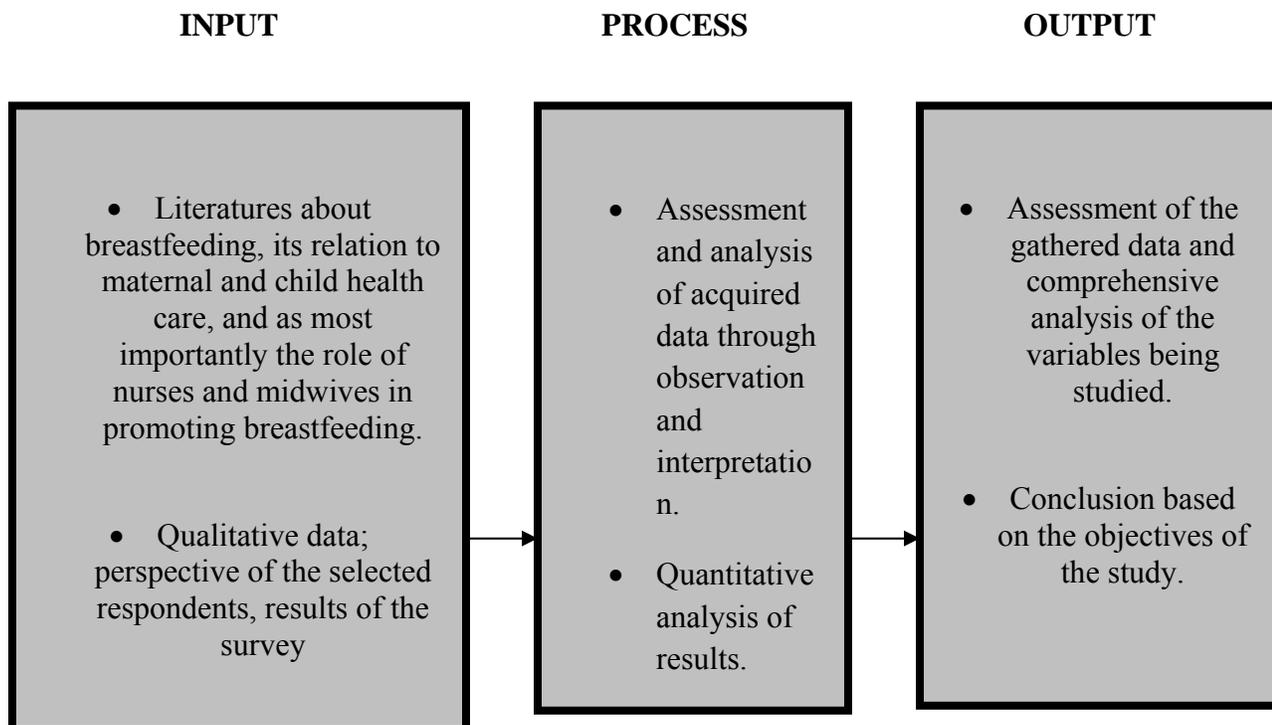
The theoretical framework that will be used in the study is the input-process-output model. In the model, a process is viewed as a series of boxes (processing elements) connected by inputs and outputs. Information or material objects flow through a series of tasks or activities based on a set of rules or decision points. Flow charts and process diagrams are often used to represent the process. Basically, what goes in is the input; what causes the change is the process; what comes out is the output (Armstrong, 2001). Figure (1) illustrates the basic IPO model:

Figure (1) Input – Process – Output Model



The IPO model will provide the general structure and guide for the direction of the study. Substituting the variables of this study on the IPO model, the researcher came up with the following:

Figure (2) Conceptual Framework



In this IPO model, the research essentials are summarized. The literatures gathered from published materials, the interviews and the structured questionnaire are all the tools that will serve as the research input. In order to obtain relevant findings and conclusions, the data gathered or the inputs will go through a process that will involve observation and data

interpretation processes. As the research output, the objectives set for this research will be obtained.

III. Research Methods

This section will present the proceedings of this research and how the researcher plans to conduct this study based on the theories previously discussed. It is very important to understand the process in which a certain academic pursuit is planned to be achieved based on the methodological approach designed and used in order to answer the different research questions and explore the nature of strength based practice approach.

In the process of this research, the objective of this chapter explores to develop and design a research process that will be the most appropriate and acceptable in assessing the midwives and nurses in Riyadh Military Hospital, in terms of their attitude and knowledge about breastfeeding. The different sections incorporated in this section will present the different aspects and procedures that will be undertaken by the researcher in the process of exploring the research topic involved. The research methodology of this study will present and research design that will help towards assessing the certain theories and assumptions articulated by the researcher.

Research Design

In order to achieve the specific goals of this research, both the qualitative and quantitative research approaches will be incorporated in this study— with the quantitative research process as the primary research design. The difference between these methods mainly lies in the approach used for investigation, as well in the techniques of collecting data. Qualitative methods are the ones utilized when a researcher wishes to investigate a case on a more profound and broader perspective (Easterby-Smith, 1991, as cited in Johansson & Kjeller, 2001). The qualitative approach is most suitable when the researcher is not completely decided on the specific characteristics or variables that will be measured or when they are not really subject to quantification (Patel & Davidsson, 1991, Johansson & Kjeller, 2001). The techniques for this method include interviews, surveys, observations, and analysis of documents. On the other hand, the aim of a quantitative research design is to classify features of a population and construct statistical models or representations in order to explain the observed outcomes (Neill, 2007).

Study Location: Riyadh Military Hospital (antenatal clinic- antenatal /postnatal wards and delivery/labor)

Target group and Sample size:

Ward, midwives, nurses, patient aide assistance, the nursing staff who have worked not less than six months caring for mother/infants in maternity units (n= 100)

Sources of Data

The Literature Studies

Data needed by the researcher in order to achieve the goals of this research will come from various literature sources including books, journals, and online sources.

Books and Journal Articles

In order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the role of nurses and midwives in promoting breastfeeding— focusing on the case of Riyadh Military Hospital, books and journal articles about the nursing profession and other related articles will be used.

Web Sources

Since the health and medical industry also uses the Internet to promote the importance of breastfeeding, lots of online articles can be found in the World Wide Web. The researcher will take advantage of this and use them as sources for this research.

Survey Questionnaire

The primary research instrument in this study will make use of a survey questionnaire in order to collect all the needed information from the subjects involved. The use of a survey questionnaire is suitable in this study since it makes use of a

quantitative research design. The use and development of the survey questionnaire will be based on the nature of the research questions and the data collection procedure.

The use of a survey questionnaire in this study will be through the process of having direct contact with the respondents for them to answer the questions at hand. Originally, the researcher planned to mail the questionnaires because it seemed to be the more practical way of distributing this research tool. But the researcher considered the disadvantage of this kind of process: the researcher cannot fully discuss the nature of the study to the subjects involved. Since the survey questionnaire will be mailed, there is a possibility of the different subjects not answering the survey questionnaire or even returning an incomplete form (Trochim, 2006b). In this manner, data collection techniques shall be administered in order to motivate and encourage participants towards having a higher level of participation with answering the survey questionnaire.

In the aspect of survey questionnaire design, the researcher will provide close ended questions in line with the type of questions to be asked on the subjects. Some questions will be dichotomous in nature and some based on a response scale depending on the answers being explored and tested by the researcher (Trochim, 2006b). A self-administered questionnaire, or the type of questionnaire that is usually completed by respondents (Saunders et al, 2003), will be constructed by the researcher to gather the needed data. The survey questionnaire design will involve two sections— first part will acquire the demographic profile of the respondents, and the other section comprises of a

set of attitude statements that intends to determine the level of agreement or disagreement using a five-point Likert scale.

The use of the Likert technique, the degree of agreement (or disagreement) is given a numerical value ranging from one to five, thus a total numerical value can be calculated from all the responses (Underwood, 2004). This kind of approach will be vital in developing a parameter in analyzing the degree of relevance towards the responses of the subjects. The equivalent weights for the answers are:

Range	Interpretation
4.50 – 5.00	Strongly Agree
3.50 – 4.00	Agree
2.50 – 3.49	Uncertain
1.50 – 2.49	Disagree
0.00 – 1.49	Strongly Disagree

Aside from using the usual open and close ended types of questions, this research study will make use of a structured questionnaire format. This is utilized because it will be less difficult in analyzing and completion of the task. The researcher originally

planned to conduct semi-structured questionnaire because it is more flexible than the structured type.

Data Analysis

The data that will be collected in this study will be analyzed by using the latest version of Epi Info statistical software and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The variables under study, as well as the association between them, will be assessed through chi-squared and t-tests. Logistic regression models will also be used to study the predictors for the attitude of nurses and midwives toward promoting and supporting breastfeeding.

Conclusion

Given all the points and arguments, it can therefore be concluded that nurses and midwives play a very important role in administering and providing maternal health care all over the world and this include the important role they play in promoting breastfeeding. The success and failure of breastfeeding indeed lie on the knowledge and management skills of these healthcare professionals, and thus their capability and knowledge regarding the matter must be assessed.

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