MEANING OF BREASTFEEDING IN THE COLLECTIVE IMAGINARY OF WOMEN/MOTHERS WHO BREASTFED

ABSTRACT
Objective: analyzing the perceptions of women/mothers who breastfed about the proper breastfeeding.
Method: an exploratory and descriptive study of a qualitative approach, involving 16 women/mothers with children who attended the Childcare Service of a Family Health Unit in a city of Bahia, Brazil. The data were produced through individual interviews, with a semi-structured guidance and analyzed based on the Content Analysis technique in the form of Thematic Categorical Analysis. The study had the project approved by the Research Ethics Committee, Protocol number 158/2011. Results: it showed that mothers attach importance to breastfeeding, relating it to the promotion and protection of child and maternal health and strengthen the bond between mother and child. Conclusion: nursing professionals should sensitize the wife/mother about the importance of breastfeeding, taking into account the socio-cultural context in which these mothers are inserted.

RESUMO
Objetivo: analisar as percepções de mulheres/mães que amamentaram sobre o aleitamento materno. Método: estudo exploratório e descritivo, com abordagem qualitativa, envolvendo 16 mulheres/mães, com filhos que frequentavam o Serviço de Puericultura de uma Unidade de Saúde da Família de um município da Bahia, Brasil. Os dados foram produzidos por meio de entrevistas individuais, com um roteiro semiestruturado e analisados a partir da técnica de Análise de Conteúdo na modalidade Análise Temática Categorial. O estudo teve aprovado o projeto pelo Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa, protocolo nº 158/2011. Resultados: evidenciou-se que as mães atribuem importância ao aleitamento materno, relacionando-o com a promoção e proteção da saúde infantil e materna e ao fortalecimento do vínculo entre mãe e filho. Conclusão: os profissionais de enfermagem devem sensibilizar a mulher/mãe sobre a importância do aleitamento materno, levando em consideração o contexto sociocultural no qual estas mães estão inseridas.

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INTRODUCTION

Breast milk is an extraordinary substance being considered the ideal food for growth and development of infants. In addition to containing nutrients and enzymes balanced, it also favors health promotion and strengthening of the bond between mother and child. Its composition gives the baby all the nutrients needed in the first months of life and even half or more of nutritional support for the child during the second half of life and up to a third in the second year. This is a great quality food, inexpensive and provides protection against many diseases that can affect it during childhood and adulthood. For a woman breastfeeding helps reduce postpartum bleeding, some types of bone fractures, breast and ovaries, as well as decrease the risk of death from rheumatoid arthritis.

The advantages of breastfeeding are numerous and undeniable, not only reaching the baby and the nursing mother, as well as the family and the whole society. However, despite the benefits and advances brought by the National Policy on Breastfeeding, Brazil is still far from fulfilling the WHO guidelines as the exclusive and complemented breastfeeding. Studies show that in Brazil, even if it's occurring an improvement the practice of breastfeeding, this process remains unique in only 41% of children under six months old.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of baby's life. After this period up to two years of age or older must be supplemented by other foods and not replaced by them. In this context, breastfeeding depends on factors that can influence positively or negatively on its maintenance. Among them, some are related to the mother, as the characteristics of his personality, his attitude towards breastfeeding situation. Others refer to the child and the environment, such as the conditions of its birth and the postpartum period, including environmental factors, such as maternal employment and the usual conditions of life.

Moreover, the family's role in the breastfeeding process can influence lactation to be successful or unsuccessful, especially the influence exercised by the father and grandmother. This influence is often related to lack of information on the subject as well as the beliefs or myths that undermine breastfeeding. The family acts as transmitter of knowledge about how best to feed the baby, and that transmission takes place in a specific way for each family, according to their past history and life experience.

Nursing, a member of the Family Health Strategy (FHS), acts as a driving force in the promotion of breastfeeding, and the possibility through the Prenatal Service the right time to stimulate early on the practice of breastfeeding, disseminating guidelines the importance of breastfeeding as well as information regarding the proper technique, advantages and possible difficulties that mothers may encounter during this process. In this perspective and considering the relevance of this topic, this study aims to:

Analyzing the perceptions of women/mothers who breastfed about breastfeeding.

METHOD

This is a descriptive and exploratory study of a qualitative approach involving 16 women/mothers with children attending the Childcare System in a Family Health Unit in a city of Bahia, Brazil. Participants were selected considering the following inclusion criteria: mothers over 18 years old; who have children in the age group 0-2 years old under breast-feeding or breast-fed; be regularly performing the control of growth and development of their children in the said FHU childcare system; and who agreed to participate voluntarily in the study. After survey conducted in the childcare system, it was found that 83 mothers not fit those criteria.

To determine the sample used to check and verify repeated information, which is considered the principle of theoretical saturation of the data, where it was observed that the results of more cohesive and consistent formats demonstrated repetitive and redundant information. The participant choosing order was determined by the residence closeness to FHU.

To produce the data there was used the semi-structured interview by a subjective script. The interviews were conducted individually, digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure an accurate transcript of the reports of the participants.

As the data analysis technique was used to Categorical Thematic Content Analysis. To that end, it formed the corpus of analysis and subsequent comprehension of detached and exhaustive reading; this to learn and understand the explicit and implicit meanings in the manifest content. Since then, the empirical categories were established, bringing together the units of analysis by
thematic units of meaning. Participants were identified by fictitiously alphanumeric designations from M01 to M16, in parentheses at the end of each speech.

This study had the project submitted to the evaluation of the Ethics Committee of the State University of Southwest Bahia, obtaining the agreement to carry out the research under the Protocol 158/2011.

Several factors can interfere with each population breastfeeding pattern, like the biological, cultural, demographic, and other factors. So, characterizing the biosociodemographic profile of the participants (Table 1) can support the understanding of the content material, as well as contribute to the planning strategies for the promotion of breastfeeding.

Table 1. Biosociodemographic characterization of participants. Jequié (BA), Brasil, 2011.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 - 23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>75,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 - 29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12,50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 - 35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12,50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schooling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school incomplete</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>62,50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school incomplete</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18,75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school complete</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18,75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>62,50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6,25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18,75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12,50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31,25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married/Stable union</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>68,75</td>
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<tr>
<td>Profession/Occupation</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>87,50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maid</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6,25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6,25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was found that 75% of participants were aged between 18 and 23, becoming mothers as adolescents and youth. The level of education emphasizing a high percentage of low maternal educational level, only 62,5% have not finished elementary school. As regards the number of children in this study, it was reported that 62,5% of mothers have only one child, allowing concluding that they are experiencing their first experience as a mother and breastfeeding. As for marital status, 68,75% declared themselves married or in stable condition. For the variable profession/occupation it was found that 87,5% do not perform paid work outside the home, busying themselves with the activities of the home.

Regarding the processing of speech through CategoricalThematic Content Analysis, by analyzing the content material emerged units of meaning that were organized and translated into four thematic categories, which are willing to follow.

♦ Promotion and Protection of child and maternal health.

This category met the units of analysis aimed at the importance given to breast milk as a promotional element and protection of child and maternal health, as can be seen in the following reports:

Avoids many things and the baby is not at risk of catching diseases. The nurse told me. (M1)

It is very important breast milk, is good and the child and the mother become healthy. (M3)

Good health, protects children against various diseases. (M4)

Prevents against various diseases. (M6)

Well, healthy for mother and child. (M8)

It brings more health. (M9)

The world’s best because the child breastfed has more health than that do not. (M11)

Breast milk is good for the child, it is better than other foods to avoid infection (M12)

It’s healthy mother’s milk, can give any child and other milks that the doctor prescribes do not compare. (M13)

Mother’s milk is good, the boys become strong, fatty, clean and free from diseases. (M14)

Prevents many diseases, the child becomes healthier. (M16)

Some participants made mention of diseases that can be avoided through breastfeeding directly in the breast. Thus demonstrated knowledge about this preventive effect of breast milk against some...
diseases and about its importance to both mother and child growth and development, as evidenced below:

- Protects children against disease, malnutrition. (M2)
- Avoids malnutrition. (M4)
- It is important for the child's health, avoids diarrhea and other diseases. (M6)
- Avoids diseases and allergies. It is essential for the child, it was born tiny and not even know what it would be without breast milk. (M7)
- The child does not become malnourished, it does not get sick and her teeth grow best. (M10)
- To me means a strong food because of teeth. (M13)
- It's good for teeth, because if the mother does not breastfeed, I see that is bad for children's teeth. (M14)
- Breast milk is important because it avoids a lot of things and it does not run the risk of catching diseases. For the mother it is good too because it avoids becoming pregnant and avoid cancer. (M15)

♦ It favors growth and development.

In this category the importance of breastfeeding was objectified by some participants through the knowledge they possess about the action of breast milk on growth and development of children. There has been support for the category in the thematic units below:

- The child grows best. (M2)
- It is important for children's development. (M4)
- I think it's good for children because it develops enough. (M6)
- It is important because of the development. (M8)
- I think it's good to be healthier and the child develops well. (M19)
- Helps in the growth and brings many good things to the child and the mother. (M10)
- Milk helps children grow. (M11)
- I think it's good for growth. (M13)
- The child grows up healthy. (M15)
- Milk is everything! Because breastfeeding helps the child developing. (M16)

♦ Strengthens the mother-child bond.

This category crowds the thematic analysis units that attach the mother / child bond as meaning of breast milk. Thus, it was found that the love and tenderness can facilitate the promotion of breastfeeding and strengthening the bond between them and hence promote the emotional development with the baby.

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Proximity moment, to be more with the child. (M4)
When I'm breastfeeding my son feels closer to me and only breast milk could give me that feeling. (M6)
Without breast milk I think my daughter would not recognize me as a mother. When you are feeding realize the love she has for me. (M8)
Every time my son breast I feel my strengthen love for him. Milk is good for that too. (M9)

♦ Practicality related to the use of breast milk.

Breast milk has been objectified as a practical food being offered and advantageous for both the mother and the baby. The reports below demonstrate this importance given the significance of breast milk:

- Wherever I go I can give. (M3)
- I can give the breast to nurse him anywhere, because breast milk does not need much. (M6)
- The good breast milk is that it is practical, every where I can breastfeed my daughter. (M9)
- Breast milk is good for it. It's just the baby is hungry and crying, I give the breast and where he is calming down and powered. (M14)

DISCUSSION

Breastfeeding is one of the first nutritional interventions that the mother can take to ensure her child's well-being and it is an important action to promote health. Recognition that breast milk is proven action on the findings of this study, in addition, it was found that the nurse's role in guiding and stimulating the accession to the practice of feeding was effective.

Healthcare professionals should encourage the practice of breastfeeding during prenatal consultations, supporting mothers to start it as early, soon after birth, encouraging them to acquire self-confidence in their potential to breastfeed the child. Encouraging breastfeeding should be present at the performance of all professionals working in the FHS. Nursing provides care to pregnant and postpartum women together with a multidisciplinary team, which must be able to develop a humanized care in order to strengthen the mother and child, encouraging breastfeeding for better growth and development of children and the promotion effective attachment.

The study participants attach to the breast milk prevention of allergic diseases function as well as the property of being essential and
Breastfeeding contributes for the first six months of life helps in preventing defects in the occlusion of teeth, decreases the incidence of caries and speech problems. Breastfeeding contributes properly for the development of oral skills sucking, pacifier or bottle unlike, which can negatively influence the exercise of these skills. The act of breastfeeding provides full and adequate suction mechanism, stimulating muscles, bones and facial articulation correctly and properly.

As manifest content by nursing mothers participating in the study, breast milk as well as protect and promote children’s health is crucial to promoting and protecting maternal health. Breastfeeding protects women from breast and ovarian cancer, aids in uterine involution, delaying the return of fertility and optimizing the woman in her role as mother.

Women who promote breastfeeding exclusively breastfed up to the first six months of a baby's life usually run smaller lower risk of developing certain diseases. In general, the greater exclusivity and duration of breastfeeding are associated with better outcomes in maternal health. Breastfeeding reduces postpartum bleeding, decreases the risk of bleeding, help mothers recover faster birth, is associated with long intervals between resulting births of lactation amenorrhea or suppression of ovulation, favoring women a non-pharmacological method and free family planning. It is also associated with reduced morbidity and mortality from breast cancer and ovarian cancer, some types of bone fractures, and reduces the risk of death from rheumatoid arthritis.4,25,21

However, as noted in the category 'strengthens the mother-child bond', the act of breastfeeding transcends the biological point of view, the nutritional promotion and adaptation of the child, he meets the emotional needs, making the mother the first teacher of love for their children. Breastfeeding has a number of benefits for both the mother and the baby, it is essential for developing affective mother/child, providing a very strong emotional bond that will serve as a basis for future relationships of trust with others.

Breastfeeding is much more than feed the child. It involves a complex interaction, multifactorial, between two people, which interferes with the nutritional status, in its ability to fend off infections, the physiology and cognitive and emotional development while also providing aspects related to physical and mental health of the mother.28 The creation and solidification of this bond between mother and child through breastfeeding are happening gradually as the mother loses insecurity and uncertainty, breaking the myths and taboos, dispelling the anxieties and questions. Thus, the success of the breastfeeding process means for women a satisfaction in their role as mother, encouraging them to offer more affection and attention to their child.

In this sense, the strengthening of the bond between mother and child, resulting in a comfortable relationship, affection and security arising from intimate contact between the binomial may greatly influence the quality of current and future life of the baby, thus favoring its relationship with others in the course of its life.29

In addition to these numerous advantages attributed by the mothers in this study also showed up the practicality of the act of breastfeeding. The breast milk a food produced and delivered to the consumer without polluting the environment and without causing excess. It is a renewable and highly beneficial feature from the standpoint of preserving the nature, since it does not need tools to be offered, fire to be heated, water to be prepared is ready, in a separate packing, at a temperature ideal and adequate amount.30

To present these characteristics, many mothers find practical nursing with the ready milk, without running the risk of pampering, at the right temperature can be offered anytime and anywhere. With the practice of...
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breastfeeding’s time and effort savings because breastfeeding dispenses energy costs with the preparation and cleaning of bottles, with the breast milk always ready to be consumed, and it is not very convenient for feedings doubt in the evening and while traveling.

**FINAL REMARKS**

As evidenced in the perception of mothers who participated in this study, breastfeeding is an important practice in promoting child and maternal health, in addition, is able to promote benefits not only to the binomial mother/son, but also extending to family, environment and the whole society.

Healthcare professionals such as counselor agents and opinion leaders should sensitize the woman/mother and their families about the importance of this practice, addressing knowledge concerning breastfeeding, its advantages and benefits, demystifying myths and taboos, taking into account the sociocultural context in which these mothers are inserted.

It has been shown that mothers attach importance to breastfeeding, relating it to the promotion and protection of child and maternal health, growth and child development, strengthening of the bond between mother and child, and the practicality of the act of breastfeeding.

The results of this study serve as subsidy for the establishment of reflections by health professionals within the FHS in the face of issues related to breastfeeding. Thus, it is important that there is an interaction of nursing professionals with the remaining team members, aiming to strengthen the link between the woman/mother breastfeeding and the health team, in order to promote greater adherence of these mothers the proper practice breastfeeding.

**REFERENCES**


Meaning of breastfeeding in the collective…
