

Correspondence

Breastfeeding knowledge and attitude among Saudi women in Central Saudi Arabia

To the Editor

I read the interesting study by Alwelaie et al¹ on the breastfeeding knowledge and attitude among Saudi women in Central Saudi Arabia. It is obvious that breast milk is the best for infant feeding as it ensures optimum growth and development.² Poor knowledge and attitudes of women towards breastfeeding seems to be increasingly noticed in Saudi Arabia since the first published report on that issue in 1983.³ Women in some Arabian countries generally share that knowledge and attitude too.⁴⁻⁶ Interestingly, and in contrast to Arabian countries, there is an increasingly positive awareness among women towards breastfeeding in Western countries.^{7,8} I presume that all programs targeted to promote breastfeeding in Arabian countries, including Saudi Arabia were not completely successful, since they have not yet considered the religious belief that contemplating breastfeeding represents the filling of an Islamic order strongly stressed in the Holy Qur'an. Therefore, Islamic activists and preachers could tremendously help ameliorate misbeliefs in breastfeeding, and actively encourage mothers to breastfeed their babies by strengthening that religious motive.

Mahmood D. Al-Mendalawi
Department of Pediatrics
Al-Kindy College of Medicine
Baghdad University
Baghdad, Iraq

Reply from the Author

In response, we would like to extend our thanks and appreciation for the remarks and comments of Professor Al-Mendalawi on our paper in the Saudi Medical Journal.¹ We emphatically support the suggestion forwarded by Professor Al-Mendalawi that the approach to such a problem should use religious teaching, as well as medical facts. Women in Saudi Arabia, just like in other developing countries have some misconceptions regarding breastfeeding, and how it deforms their figures. Therefore, they substitute breastfeeding with

milk formula. Our religion conducts its followers to breastfeed an infant for 2 whole years. In the glorious Qur'an, Allah says "the mothers shall give suck to their offspring for 2 whole years" (Surah Al-Baqarah: 233). Recently, it has also been proven that breastfeeding may lower the risk of breast cancer,⁹ as well as serving as natural contraceptive method for most women.¹⁰

We believe that such medical facts with religious teachings ought to be utilized in an awareness program that Professor Al-Mendalawi is calling for. Again, we are grateful to be given this opportunity to discuss this matter further.

Yazeed A. Alwelaie
Faculty of Medicine
King Fahd Medical City
Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

References

1. Alwelaie YA, Alsuhaibani EA, Al-Harthi AM, Radwan RH, Al-Mohammady RG, Almutairi AM. Breastfeeding knowledge and attitude among Saudi women in Central Saudi Arabia. *Saudi Med J* 2010; 31: 193-198.
2. Walker A. Breast milk as the gold standard for protective nutrients. *J Pediatr* 2010; 156 (Suppl 2): S3-S7.
3. Haque KN. Feeding pattern of children under two years of age in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. *Ann Trop Paediatr* 1983; 3: 129-132.
4. MUSAIGER AO. Breastfeeding patterns in the Arabian Gulf countries. *World Rev Nutr Diet* 1995; 78: 164-190.
5. Batal M, Boulghourjian C, Abdallah A, Afifi R. Breast-feeding and feeding practices of infants in a developing country: a national survey in Lebanon. *Public Health Nutr* 2006; 9: 313-319.
6. Abdul Ameer AJ, Al-Hadi AH, Abdulla MM. Knowledge, attitudes and practices of Iraqi mothers and family child-caring women regarding breastfeeding. *East Mediterr Health J* 2008; 14: 1003-1014.
7. Cattaneo A, Burmaz T, Arendt M, Nilsson I, Mikiel-Kostyra K, Kondrate I, et al. Protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding in Europe: progress from 2002 to 2007. *Public Health Nutr* 2010; 13: 751-759.
8. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Racial and ethnic differences in breastfeeding initiation and duration, by state - National Immunization Survey, United States, 2004-2008. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2010; 59: 327-334.
9. De Silva M, Senarath U, Gunatilake M, Lokuhetty D. Prolonged breastfeeding reduces risk of breast cancer in Sri Lankan women: a case-control study. *Cancer Epidemiol* 2010; 34: 267-273.
10. Lobbok M, Cooney K, Coly S. Guidelines: breastfeeding, family planning, and the Lactational Amenorrhea Method - LAM. Washington (DC): Institute for Reproductive Health; 1994.