



Breast feeding among Brazilian adolescents: Practice and needs

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: to characterise breast feeding practices among Brazilian adolescents and identify their breast feeding needs.

Methods: the study was undertaken in Ribeirão Preto, Brazil in two stages. The first stage analysed data from the Second National Survey of Breast-feeding Prevalence, held in August 2008, which included 229 adolescent mothers. The second stage was a qualitative approach, and involved interviews with 10 adolescent mothers in a primary care unit. The data from the first stage were analysed in June 2010 based on descriptive statistics. The data obtained from the interviews were transcribed and organised using thematic content analysis.

Findings: breast feeding was reported by 75% of the adolescent mothers. Of the 144 mothers with infants aged < 180 days, 84% reported that they were breast feeding: 19% were breast feeding exclusively, 17% were breast feeding predominantly, 49% were providing complementary feeding, and 16% had weaned their infants. Analysis of the interviews led to the identification of three thematic units: concern for the child's health; breast feeding difficulties; and health team and family support.

Conclusions: the majority of the adolescent mothers presented conditions that were favourable to breast feeding (e.g. did not work outside the home, only had one child, breast fed in the first hour post partum). However, the practice of breast feeding still failed to meet the recommendations of the World Health Organization. The interviews led to identification of the breast feeding needs and demands of adolescent mothers, many of which were related to the needs of their infants. It is important to know what adolescent mothers think about breast feeding, in order to encourage the establishment of practices to keep breastfeeding as longer as possible in a satisfactory way for both mothers and infants.

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Introduction

Maternity in adolescence is an issue that calls for the attention of governmental programmes and the scientific community. Various health problems are associated with negative outcomes of pregnancy during adolescence (World Health Organization, 2008), including anaemia, malaria, human immunodeficiency virus and other sexually transmitted infections, postpartum haemorrhage and mental disorders (e.g. depression) (Phipps and Sowers, 2002). Adverse birth outcomes associated with teenage

pregnancies not only affect the health of mothers and infants but also influence familial and societal aspects (Chen et al., 2010).

Although the average age at first childbirth is increasing in most countries, the persistence of adolescent parenthood among the poorest populations continues to be a cause for concern (Gibbs et al., 2012). In Latin America, the risk of maternal death is four times higher among adolescents aged < 16 years than among women in their twenties. In Brazil, a middle-income country in South America, the National Survey on Demography and Health of Women and Children, conducted in 2006, found that the fertility rate has increased among adolescents aged 15–19 years compared with adolescents aged 10–14 years; 16% of adolescents aged 15–19 were mothers and 14% of those had two or more children (Brazil, Ministério da Saúde, 2009a).

Health experts agree that pregnant adolescents require special physical and psychological attention during pregnancy, childbirth

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and the postnatal period in order to preserve their own health and the health of their infants (World Health Organization, 2011). Maternal adaptation involves the development of skills to care for an infant and occurs before, during and after pregnancy. This includes feeding the infant, which can be a complex event for adolescents (Wambach and Cohen, 2009).

Breast feeding is known to be beneficial for infant and maternal health. In recognition of these benefits, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund recommend exclusive breast feeding for the first six months of life. After this period, breast feeding is encouraged together with other foods for the first year of life and beyond (World Health Organization, United Nations Children's Fund, 2009).

In Brazil, 95% of mothers initiate breast feeding at birth. However, a short duration of breast feeding is common in this population, and rates fall well below the WHO recommendations (Brazil, Ministério da Saúde, 2009a). A national survey of the prevalence of breast feeding in Brazil in 2008 showed that 68% of infants are breast fed within the first hour of life, and the median duration of breast feeding is 11 months (Brazil, Ministério da Saúde, 2009b).

The factors that influence breast feeding practice include maternal age, level of education, economic status, marital status, employment, and physiological issues related to mother and infant. Maternal age is directly associated with the duration of breast feeding; adolescents have low breast feeding initiation rates, as well as a short duration of breast feeding (Wambach and Cohen, 2009). Younger mothers are less likely to initiate breast feeding and are likely to breast feed for a shorter duration compared with adult mothers (Brown et al., 2011).

In the UK, the latest infant feeding survey showed that 52% of teenage mothers breast feed at birth and 34% are breast feeding at one week post partum. By six months post partum, adult mothers are five times more likely to be breast feeding compared with mothers aged <20 years (Bolling et al., 2007). In a study in Missouri, USA, among 29,589 low-income adolescent mothers, 75% never breast fed or only breast fed for one week (Wambach and Cohen, 2009).

Adolescent mothers are the primary focus of health professionals aiming to improve breast feeding initiation and duration (Meglio et al., 2010). However, it should be noted that proposals for educational actions and care provided by health professionals are stringent and do not consider women's needs in their different ages and or phases of life concerning breast feeding (Machado et al., 2003; Cronin, 2003; Ingram et al., 2011). In this sense, there is a need for integral and extended care for adolescents who are breast feeding in order to support and empower them to deal positively with adversity during breast feeding.

Objectives

This study aimed to characterise breast feeding practices among adolescents and to identify their breast feeding needs.

Methods

Study design

This cross-sectional study had a mixed-method approach, with qualitative and quantitative data collected in two stages. In line with Creswell et al. (2003), qualitative and quantitative data have to be examined in parallel and integrated in the design, implementation and analysis phases.

Study setting

Ribeirão Preto is a city in South-east Brazil, and is the eighth largest municipality in the state. In 2012, the population of Ribeirão Preto was estimated to be 619,746. The city is managed by the 13th Regional Health Department of the State Health Secretariat, and 62% of the population use the public Brazilian Unified National Health System (Carne seca et al., 2012). Health care in Brazil is considered a universal right, affirmed and approved by the Federal Constitution in 1988. The Government is responsible for the provision of access to health care, including promotion, protection, cure and rehabilitation.

Participants

In this first stage of this study, data were extracted from the database of the Second National Survey of Breast-feeding Prevalence, which was conducted in various Brazilian cities on behalf of government health institutions. This survey involved mothers of infants aged <1 year who participated in a multivaccination campaign in 2008. Ribeirão Preto participated in the Second National Survey of Breast-feeding Prevalence, co-ordinated by the authors of this research project and members of the Municipal Health Secretariat. In Ribeirão Preto, 2028 individuals participated in this survey, including 229 (11%) adolescent mothers.

In the second stage of this study, 10 adolescent mothers were interviewed. These individuals were recruited from the public primary health care unit with the highest prevalence of adolescent mothers in 2008, determined from the database used in the first stage of this study.

Information on the National Survey of Breast-feeding Prevalence

The National Survey of Breast-feeding Prevalence was conducted in various Brazilian cities during a national vaccination campaign. The main goals were to provide estimates on the incidence, prevalence and duration of breast feeding and other feeding practices adopted by mothers in Brazil (Venancio et al., 2010).

Data collection

In the first stage of this study, data were collected from an online database developed for the Second National Survey of Breast-feeding Prevalence. Data for Ribeirão Preto had been exported into a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences database, and the authors were given access. From this database, it was possible to identify the district with the highest prevalence of adolescent mothers for the second stage of this study. Data for the first stage of the study were obtained in June 2010, including

- maternal characteristics: age, educational level, occupation, number of children, type of childbirth;
- infant characteristics: age, gender, hospital of birth with a Baby Friendly title; breast feeding in the first hour of life, birth weight; and
- infant feeding practices: exclusive breast feeding (infant only receives breast milk, including milk expressed or from a wet nurse and no other liquids or solids except for medicines or vitamin supplements); predominant breast feeding [infant receives breast milk as the predominant source of nourishment, and water or water-based drinks (tea, juice), ritual fluids, drops, medicines or vitamin supplements and no other liquids or solids]; complementary feeding (infant receives breast milk and any liquids, solid or semi-solid foods, including non-human

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