



# Effectiveness of a Breastfeeding Intervention on Knowledge and Attitudes Among High School Students in Taiwan

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## Keywords

attitudes  
breastfeeding  
high school students  
knowledge  
school nurses

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To evaluate the effectiveness of an educational intervention on the breastfeeding knowledge and attitudes of female high school students living in Taiwan.

**Design:** A prospective, two-group, quasi-experimental, repeated measure design.

**Setting:** A high school in Taichung, Taiwan.

**Participants:** Two hundred four female high school students.

**Methods:** Data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire at baseline, after the intervention, and 1 month later. After administration of the questionnaire at baseline, the experimental group ( $n = 103$ ) received a 30-minute breastfeeding education; the control group ( $n = 101$ ) did not.

**Results:** Findings showed that students in the experimental group had significantly greater breastfeeding knowledge immediately after the intervention and at 1 month postintervention. Also, compared with the control group, the experimental group had significantly greater positive breastfeeding attitudes after the intervention period, and the effect lasted at least 1 month.

**Conclusions:** Breastfeeding interventions in schools improve adolescents' knowledge and attitudes. School nurses are well positioned to promote breastfeeding as a healthy lifestyle behavior within the school setting.

*JOGNN*, 45, 71–77; 2016. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jogn.2015.10.009>

Accepted October 2015

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The authors report no conflict of interest or relevant financial relationships.



It is widely recognized that breastfeeding is one of the most cost-effective ways to promote health, prevent disease, and support infant growth and development. Breastfeeding also has benefits for the mother, including postpartum weight loss, and it increases interactions between mother and infant (World Health Organization, 2012). In 2001, to promote breastfeeding, the Taiwanese government designed and implemented a lactation intervention program to guide hospital practice (Health Promotion Administration, Ministry of Health and Welfare, Taiwan, 2007). The program was developed in accordance with the *Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding* advocated by the World Health Organization and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (2012). Additionally, the Taiwanese Department of Health has set a 2016 goal to increase the continued rate of exclusive breastfeeding at 1 month postpartum

to 70% or more. Government recommendations encourage women to exclusively breastfeed during an infant's first 6 months of life, with continued breastfeeding for 2 years or more, as recommended by the World Health Organization and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (Health Promotion Administration, Ministry of Health and Welfare, Taiwan, 2007). A national survey conducted in Taiwan in 2012 indicated that the prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding was 71.9% at 1 month, 57.5% at 4 months, and 49.6% at 6 months (Health Promotion Administration, Ministry of Health and Welfare, Taiwan, 2014). Although these results demonstrate an encouraging rate of exclusive breastfeeding at 1 month postpartum, the need to increase exclusive breastfeeding and duration of breastfeeding after hospital discharge remains an area of concern. Therefore, new strategies are warranted to promote breastfeeding in Taiwan.

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### Providing breastfeeding education in the school setting can encourage female adolescents to make healthy behavioral choices.

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A woman's intentions and attitudes regarding breastfeeding are predictors of infant feeding behaviors and continued breastfeeding (DiGirolamo, Thompson, Martorell, Fein, & Grummer-Strawn, 2005; Ho & McGrath, 2010b; Scott, Binns, Oddy, & Graham, 2006; Shaker, Scott, & Reid, 2004). Moreover, one of the factors that influences a woman's decision to breastfeed is her knowledge and attitudes toward breastfeeding (Dennis, 2002; Ho & Yu, 2014). Much attention has been placed on prenatal breastfeeding promotion to improve breastfeeding attitudes, but it seems that waiting until a woman becomes pregnant may in some cases be too late to influence decisions about whether to breastfeed and for how long (Dennis, 2002; Losch, Dungy, Russell, & Dusdieker, 2002). It is reasonable to believe that the sooner the importance of breastfeeding is internalized, the more favorable an individual's perception regarding breastfeeding will be. Actually, decisions about breastfeeding are often made before pregnancy (Martens, 2001). Infant feeding decisions depend on breastfeeding attitudes that are often formed early in adolescence (Goulet, Lampron, Marcil, & Ross, 2003; Martens, 2001). More important, female adolescents between the ages of 15 and 19 years already have opinions regarding infant feeding (Walsh, Moseley & Jackson, 2008). Thus, it seems important to begin the promotion of breastfeeding in childhood.

Although a number of researchers have reported on adolescents' knowledge and attitudes toward breastfeeding and have recommended breastfeeding promotion for this age group (Forrester, Wheelock, & Warren, 1997; Goulet et al., 2003; Greene, Stewart-Knox, & Wright, 2003; Leffler, 2000; Marrone, Vogltanz-Holm, & Holm, 2008; Spear, 2007; Tarrant & Dodgson, 2007), few have examined the effect of breastfeeding education in a school setting on adolescents' knowledge and attitudes toward breastfeeding. We found two studies, one conducted in Brazil and the other in Canada, in which researchers used an education intervention and found an increase in breastfeeding knowledge and favorable attitudes after the intervention (Bottaro & Giugliani, 2009; Walsh et al., 2008).

The school system is an opportune setting in which present and future health-promotion education can occur. Providing breastfeeding education in the school setting can encourage young people to choose this behavior. Promoting positive attitudes toward and knowledge of breastfeeding during adolescence may help establish breastfeeding as the first choice by parents. This is especially important for high school students while they transition to autonomy and begin to make choices regarding their own behavior. To our knowledge, to date investigators have not examined the effect of an infant-feeding education on breastfeeding knowledge and attitudes of female adolescents in Taiwan. Thus, the purpose of this study was to describe the knowledge of and attitudes toward breastfeeding of female adolescent high school students and to examine the effects of an educational intervention provided in a high school setting on their knowledge of and attitudes toward breastfeeding.

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## Methods

### Design and Sample

We used a quasi-experimental, pretest/posttest design to evaluate the effectiveness of a breastfeeding educational intervention. The study was conducted from September 2013 to December 2013 at a public high school in Taichung, Taiwan. Before data collection, the regional research ethics institutional review board granted ethical approval for this study. The school principal also granted approval for the study. Students provided their own consent and obtained parental permission to participate. To determine a sufficient sample size for the study's planned bivariate and multivariate analyses, a power analysis was performed using the G\*Power program (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). The multivariate analysis required a sample size of 199 with a power level of 0.8, an effect size of 0.2, and an alpha of 0.05. Random assignment of individuals to the experimental or control groups was not possible. Students were assigned by cohorts; thus, a classroom was assigned to the experimental group or control group based on convenience. The researchers did not provide any suggestions in the assignment process. Students who were at least 16 years old were eligible to participate in the study. Students who declined to participate and declined to sign the informed consent were excluded. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. Because the study took place in a home economics high school, only

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