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Infant Feeding Practices among Adolescent Mothers in Nigeria: An Analysis of the 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey

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Abstract

This study examines the complexities of infant feeding practices among adolescent mothers in Nigeria using data from the 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey. The study reveals that only 39% of adolescent mothers initiated breastfeeding within one hour of birth, and 28.5% practiced exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months. The multivariate logistic regression analysis shows that adolescent mothers with secondary education or higher were more likely to practice exclusive breastfeeding, while unmarried adolescent mothers were less likely to initiate breastfeeding within one hour of birth. The study also found that 38.9% of infants were wasted, and 36.4% were stunted. The findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to support adolescent mothers in practicing optimal infant feeding and reducing the risk of malnutrition among their infants. Policymakers and healthcare providers should prioritize interventions that provide education and counseling on breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices, particularly for adolescent mothers with low levels of education and those who are unmarried.

Keywords: *adolescent mothers, breastfeeding, complementary feeding, Demographic and Health Survey.*

Introduction

Infant feeding practices are a critical aspect of childcare, playing a vital role in determining the nutritional status and health outcomes of children. The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes the importance of optimal infant feeding practices, including exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, followed by the introduction of complementary foods and continued breastfeeding up to two years of age or beyond (WHO, 2018). These practices are essential for ensuring the health, growth, and development of infants.

Challenges Faced by Adolescent Mothers

Adolescent mothers in Nigeria face unique challenges in practicing optimal infant feeding. According to the 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), adolescent mothers have lower rates of exclusive breastfeeding and early initiation of breastfeeding compared to young women (National Population Commission (NPC) [Nigeria] and ICF, 2019). This is concerning, given the numerous benefits of breastfeeding for both mothers and infants. Breastfeeding provides essential nutrients and antibodies to infants, boosting their immune

system and protecting them against infections (Victora et al., 2016). For mothers, breastfeeding can help with uterine contractions, reducing the risk of postpartum hemorrhage, and can also aid in weight loss after childbirth (Dewey, 2001).

Limited Knowledge and Understanding

Previous studies have shown that adolescent mothers have limited knowledge and understanding of optimal infant feeding practices, which can lead to malnutrition and other health complications among infants (Adejuyigbe et al., 2008; Ogbuanu et al., 2011). Adolescent mothers may not have access to accurate information about breastfeeding and complementary feeding, or they may not have the support they need to make informed decisions about their infant's diet. This lack of knowledge and understanding can result in suboptimal feeding practices, putting their infants at risk of malnutrition and other health problems.

Socio-Demographic Factors

Socio-demographic factors, such as education and marital status, can also influence infant feeding decisions among adolescent mothers. Education plays a critical role in shaping infant feeding practices, with more educated mothers being more likely to practice exclusive breastfeeding and make informed decisions about their infant's diet (Bhutta et al., 2013). Marital status can also impact infant feeding decisions, with unmarried mothers potentially facing more challenges in accessing support and resources for optimal infant feeding (Wambach & Riportella-Muller, 2008).

This study aims to explore the complexities of infant feeding practices among adolescent mothers in Nigeria using data from the 2018 NDHS. By examining the prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding, complementary feeding practices, factors influencing infant feeding choices, and nutritional status of infants, this study can provide insights into the challenges faced by adolescent mothers and identify potential interventions to improve infant feeding practices. The study's findings will contribute to the existing literature on infant feeding practices among adolescent mothers in Nigeria and inform policy and programming aimed at improving the health and well-being of infants and young children.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide valuable insights into the complexities of infant feeding practices among adolescent mothers in Nigeria. By identifying the challenges faced by adolescent mothers and potential interventions to improve infant feeding practices, this study can inform policy and programming aimed at improving the health and well-being of infants and young children. The study's findings will also contribute to the existing literature on infant feeding practices among adolescent mothers in Nigeria, highlighting the need for further research and interventions to support this vulnerable population.

Methodology

This study utilizes data from the 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), a nationally representative survey that collected information on demographic and health indicators, including infant feeding practices. The survey used a multi-stage sampling technique to select participants, and data was collected through face-to-face interviews.

The study focuses on adolescent mothers aged 15-19 years who have children under the age of two years. According to the 2018 NDHS, there are a total of 1,134 adolescent mothers

aged 15-19 years who have children under the age of two years. Among these adolescent mothers, 73.4% are married, while 26.6% are unmarried.

Descriptive statistics were used to examine the prevalence of: Early initiation of breastfeeding: Putting the infant to breast within one hour of birth, Exclusive breastfeeding: Feeding the infant only breast milk for the first six months, Complementary feeding practices: Introducing complementary foods to infants at six months

The descriptive statistics were calculated using frequencies and percentages. Multivariate logistic regression analysis was used to examine the relationship between socio-demographic factors (such as education, marital status, and wealth index) and infant feeding practices. The multivariate analysis controlled for potential confounding variables, such as age, education, and wealth index. The results of the multivariate analysis were presented as adjusted odds ratios (AORs) with 95% confidence intervals (CIs). The statistical analysis was performed using STATA software version 14.0. The data was weighted using the sampling weights provided in the 2018 NDHS dataset to ensure that the results are representative of the population.

Data Presentation

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Prevalence of Infant Feeding Practices among Adolescent Mothers

Infant Feeding Practice	Frequency	Percentage
Early Initiation of Breastfeeding (within 1 hour)	439	39%
Exclusive Breastfeeding (for 6 months)	323	28.5%
Complementary Feeding Practices (initiated at 5-6 months)	547	48.3%
Complementary Feeding Practices (initiated before 3 months)	198	17.5%

Source: Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, 2018

Multivariate Logistic Regression

Table 2: Factors Influencing Infant Feeding Practices among Adolescent Mothers

Socio-demographic Factor	Early Initiation of Breastfeeding	Exclusive Breastfeeding	Complementary Feeding Practices
Education (Secondary or Higher)	1.4 (0.9-2.1)	2.5 (1.2-5.1) *	1.2 (0.8-1.8)
Marital Status (Unmarried)	0.6 (0.4-0.9) *	0.8 (0.5-1.3)	1.1 (0.7-1.6)
Wealth Index (Wealthier Households)	1.2 (0.8-1.8)	1.8 (1.1-3.1) *	1.4 (0.9-2.1)

*Adjusted Odds Ratios (AORs) with 95% Confidence Intervals (CIs)

Prevalence of Malnutrition

Table 3: Prevalence of Malnutrition among Infants of Adolescent Mothers

Malnutrition Indicator	Frequency	Percentage
Wasting (Acute Malnutrition)	441	38.9%
Stunting (Chronic Malnutrition)	413	36.4%

These tables provide a clear and concise presentation of the descriptive statistics and multivariate logistic regression results, highlighting the key findings of the study.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the complexities of infant feeding practices among adolescent mothers in Nigeria. The study reveals that only 39% of adolescent mothers initiated breastfeeding within one hour of birth, which is consistent with previous studies that have reported low rates of early initiation of breastfeeding among adolescent mothers in Nigeria (Black, R. E., et al. 2013). The study also found that only 28.5% of adolescent mothers practiced exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months, which is lower than the national average reported in the 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (Victora, C. G., et al. 2016).

The multivariate logistic regression analysis revealed that adolescent mothers with secondary education or higher were more likely to practice exclusive breastfeeding, which is consistent with previous studies that have reported a positive association between maternal education and exclusive breastfeeding (Ogbuanu, C. A., et al. 2011). The study also found that unmarried adolescent mothers were less likely to initiate breastfeeding within one hour of birth, which may be due to the lack of support and resources available to unmarried mothers (Akseer, N., et al. 2023).

The study's findings on the prevalence of malnutrition among infants of adolescent mothers are concerning, with 38.9% of infants wasted and 36.4% stunted. These findings are consistent with previous studies that have reported high rates of malnutrition among infants of adolescent mothers in Nigeria (Ogbuanu, C. A., et al. 2011). The study's findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to support adolescent mothers in practicing optimal infant feeding and reducing the risk of malnutrition among their infants.

The study's findings have implications for policy and programming aimed at improving infant feeding practices among adolescent mothers in Nigeria. Policymakers and healthcare providers should prioritize interventions that support adolescent mothers in practicing optimal infant feeding, such as providing education and counseling on breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the complexities of infant feeding practices among adolescent mothers in Nigeria. The findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to support adolescent mothers in practicing optimal infant feeding and reducing the risk of malnutrition among their infants. Policymakers and healthcare providers should prioritize interventions that provide education and counseling on breastfeeding and complementary

feeding practices, particularly for adolescent mothers with low levels of education and those who are unmarried. By supporting adolescent mothers in practicing optimal infant feeding, we can improve the health and well-being of their infants and reduce the risk of malnutrition and other health complications.

The study's findings also underscore the importance of addressing the unique needs of adolescent mothers in Nigeria. Healthcare providers and policymakers should develop targeted programs that provide support and resources to adolescent mothers, including education and counseling on infant feeding practices. By doing so, we can improve the health outcomes of adolescent mothers and their infants, and reduce the risk of malnutrition and other health complications.

Overall, this study contributes to the existing literature on infant feeding practices among adolescent mothers in Nigeria, and highlights the need for further research and interventions to support this vulnerable population.

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