

10th Annual World Congress on

Pediatrics, Pediatric Gastroenterology & Nutrition

March 23-25, 2017 Orlando, USA

Prevalence and predictors of exclusive breastfeeding in late preterm Korean infants at 12 weeks

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Statement of the Problem: Although late preterm infants (LPIs) compose the majority of premature newborns in Korea, lactation support or education for breastfeeding LPIs has not been adequately provided. Breastfeeding for LPIs was less likely to be performed by their mothers than by mothers with full-term infants, or those up to age 33 weeks of gestational age.

Aim: The purpose of this study was to identify the prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding with LPIs from discharge to 12 weeks after discharge in Korea. This study also aimed to determine predictors of exclusive breastfeeding at the 12th week after discharge.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: This was a prospective study with repeated measures design. The participants were 106 mothers of LPIs hospitalized in neonatal intensive care units at two major urban hospitals in Korea. Data were collected from Feb to Oct 2013. Questionnaires included characteristics of LPIs and their mothers, and feeding-related characteristics. Feeding methods were exclusive breastfeeding, mixed feeding, and formula feeding.

Findings: Exclusive breastfeeding steadily increased from 5.7 percent at the 1st week to 19.8 percent at the 12th week, as did formula feeding 27.3 percent to 67.9 percent. Contrarily, mixed feeding decreased from 67.0 percent at the 1st week to 12.3 percent at the 12th week. The ratio of formula feeding was higher than that of exclusive breastfeeding over time. Predictors for exclusive breastfeeding were the following: type of delivery (OR=2.96, 95% CI=1.07-8.14), feeding intolerance (OR=3.03, 95% CI=1.26-7.25) and feeding method during hospitalization (OR=7.84, 95% CI=3.15-19.53).

Conclusion & Significance: In order to increase exclusive breastfeeding opportunities for LPIs, educational programs for gestational age-appropriate breastfeeding should be developed. The focus of breastfeeding education needs to be on mothers who delivered their LPIs through cesarean-section and LPIs who had feeding intolerance or were fed only formula feeding during hospitalization.

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