



Factors Associated with Level of Responsiveness to Food Security Among Postnatal Mothers for Exclusive Breastfeeding Practices: Implication for Infant-Malnutrition in Ilaro Community, Ogun State

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Introduction

Adequate nutrition is vital for the health and development of infants, who are highly vulnerable when food security is compromised. Post-natal mothers play a critical role in ensuring optimal nutrition through exclusive breastfeeding, as recommended by the World Health Organization. However, this practice depends heavily on the mother's access to adequate and nutritious food. In communities where food security is challenged, mothers may struggle to maintain exclusive breastfeeding, putting infants at risk of malnutrition. A healthy maternal diet supports sufficient breast milk production and overall infant wellbeing, making maternal food security a significant public health concern.

Materials and methods/Methodology.

This diagnostic cross-sectional study was conducted to identify factors associated with the level of responsiveness to food security among postnatal mothers, and how this affects exclusive breastfeeding practices in Ilaro, Ogun State. The research was grounded in a theoretical framework that considers maternal cognitive responsiveness—how well mothers recognize threats to their infant's nutrition and take appropriate action. Data were collected from 184 consenting postnatal mothers attending five selected health facilities in the Ilaro community using a validated 30-item questionnaire. The tool captured demographic data and assessed psycho-cognitive factors including knowledge, attitude, perception, and responsiveness toward food security in relation to exclusive breastfeeding.

Results and discussion

The mean age of respondents was 33.3 ± 7.2 years, with 95% identifying as Yoruba and 84.8% having attained education beyond secondary school. Knowledge scores regarding food security were high (9.13 ± 1.42 on a 10-point scale), indicating a strong awareness. However, attitudes toward food security were generally poor, with a mean score of 4.22 ± 1.77 on a 12-point scale and 61.4% showing negative attitudes. Perception of food security had a mean score of 7.57 ± 2.12 , while responsiveness was measured at 9.60 ± 2.82 . Notably, only perception showed a significant positive correlation with responsiveness ($r = 0.219$; $p = 0.0031$), suggesting that how mothers perceive food security issues is more influential in shaping their responsive actions than their knowledge or attitude.

Conclusions

The findings reveal that while knowledge of food security among postnatal mothers is high, it does not directly influence their responsiveness. Instead, perception plays a critical role, highlighting a need to address underlying attitudinal and perceptual factors in health education and policy interventions. This gap suggests an unresolved dynamic that warrants further exploration to improve exclusive breastfeeding practices and reduce infant malnutrition in food-insecure communities.

Keywords: Food security, exclusive breastfeeding, postnatal mothers, infant nutrition, health