



E-ISSN: 2664-1305  
P-ISSN: 2664-1291  
[www.paediatricnursing.net](http://www.paediatricnursing.net)  
IJRPN 2024; 6(1): 109-111  
Received: 25-01-2024  
Accepted: 02-03-2024

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## Understanding the factors influencing early initiation of breastfeeding in diverse populations

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26641291.2024.v6.i1b.161>

### Abstract

Early initiation of breastfeeding (EIBF), defined as putting the newborn to the breast within the first hour of life, is critical for the health and survival of both infants and mothers. This article explores the various factors that influence the early initiation of breastfeeding across diverse populations, drawing on recent research and case studies. Key factors include maternal education, cultural practices, healthcare support, socioeconomic status, and birth practices. Understanding these influences can help tailor interventions to improve breastfeeding rates globally.

**Keywords:** Influencing early initiation, breastfeeding, diverse populations

### Introduction

Early initiation of breastfeeding (EIBF) is recognized for its significant health benefits, yet its prevalence varies widely across different populations. This variation can be attributed to a complex interplay of factors including maternal knowledge, cultural norms, healthcare practices, and socioeconomic conditions. This article aims to dissect these factors to provide a comprehensive understanding of what influences EIBF in diverse settings.

### Factors Influencing Early Initiation of Breastfeeding

#### 1. Maternal Education and Awareness

Maternal education plays a pivotal role in the initiation of breastfeeding. Higher levels of education are often associated with better breastfeeding practices due to increased knowledge about the benefits of EIBF. Educated mothers are more likely to receive and understand antenatal and postnatal care guidance, leading to higher rates of EIBF.

#### 2. Cultural Practices and Norms

Cultural beliefs and practices significantly impact breastfeeding behaviors. In some cultures, traditional practices may delay the initiation of breastfeeding due to beliefs about colostrum being harmful or impure. Conversely, cultures that emphasize the importance of immediate breastfeeding contribute positively to EIBF rates.

#### 3. Healthcare Support and Practices

The role of healthcare providers and the practices adopted in maternity settings are crucial. Hospitals following the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) protocols have higher rates of EIBF due to practices such as rooming-in and immediate skin-to-skin contact. Continuous support from healthcare professionals during and after birth encourages mothers to initiate breastfeeding early.

#### 4. Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic factors also influence EIBF. Mothers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds often have better access to healthcare resources and education, leading to higher EIBF rates. In contrast, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may face barriers such as inadequate healthcare access and lack of support, hindering EIBF.

#### 5. Birth Practices and Mode of Delivery

The mode of delivery significantly impacts the initiation of breastfeeding. Cesarean

deliveries are often associated with delays in EIBF due to medical interventions and recovery time. In contrast, vaginal deliveries, especially those with minimal interventions, facilitate immediate breastfeeding initiation.

## Case Studies and Research Findings

### 1. India

In India, various studies have shown that cultural practices, socioeconomic status, and healthcare infrastructure play significant roles in EIBF. For instance, research in rural areas indicates that traditional beliefs and lack of education often delay breastfeeding initiation. Efforts to train community health workers and integrate breastfeeding education into maternal health programs have been effective in improving EIBF rates. Targeted interventions that address specific local challenges and leverage existing community support structures have shown promise in enhancing early breastfeeding practices.

### 2. South Sudan

A study conducted at Juba Teaching Hospital in South Sudan highlighted the significant impact of comprehensive health worker training on EIBF. The training program, which focused on breastfeeding techniques and the importance of immediate initiation, led to a remarkable increase in EIBF rates from 48% to 91%. This case demonstrates the crucial role of healthcare support and professional training in improving breastfeeding practices.

### 3. Brazil

Research in Brazil identified that antenatal breastfeeding guidance and previous breastfeeding experience were strong predictors of EIBF. The study found that mothers who received targeted antenatal education were more likely to initiate breastfeeding within the first hour of birth. This suggests that enhancing antenatal education programs could effectively overcome barriers to EIBF, leading to better health outcomes for both mothers and infants.

### 4. Saudi Arabia

In Central Saudi Arabia, a study published in the International Breastfeeding Journal found that factors such as maternal education, antenatal care, and postnatal support were critical in promoting EIBF. The research recommended that improving educational and support systems for expectant mothers could significantly enhance breastfeeding practices. This highlights the importance of comprehensive maternal care in facilitating early breastfeeding initiation.

## Key Strategies

The factors influencing EIBF are multifaceted and vary across different populations. Tailoring interventions to address specific barriers within each context is essential for improving EIBF rates globally. Strategies such as enhancing maternal education, adopting supportive healthcare practices, and addressing cultural beliefs can significantly contribute to better breastfeeding outcomes.

## Enhancing Maternal Education

**1. Awareness Campaigns:** Educating expectant mothers about the importance of EIBF can significantly influence their willingness and ability to initiate breastfeeding early. Campaigns can use various media,

including print, digital, and community workshops, to disseminate information.

- 2. Prenatal Education Programs:** Incorporating EIBF education into prenatal care visits allows healthcare providers to address misconceptions and provide accurate information. These programs can emphasize the health benefits for both mother and child, such as reduced risk of infections and improved bonding.
- 3. Literacy and Empowerment:** In regions with low literacy rates, enhancing overall maternal literacy can empower women to make informed health choices, including the decision to breastfeed early.

## Supportive Healthcare Practices

- 1. Training Healthcare Providers:** Ensuring that doctors, nurses, and midwives are well-trained in the benefits and techniques of EIBF is crucial. They can provide hands-on support and encouragement immediately after birth, helping mothers to initiate breastfeeding.
- 2. Hospital Policies:** Adopting baby-friendly hospital initiatives (BFHI) that promote EIBF through rooming-in policies, skin-to-skin contact, and avoiding unnecessary separation of mother and baby can create an environment conducive to early breastfeeding.
- 3. Postnatal Support:** Providing continued support through lactation consultants and breastfeeding support groups in the postpartum period can help address any challenges mothers may face, ensuring sustained breastfeeding practices.

## Addressing Cultural Beliefs

- 1. Cultural Sensitivity:** Understanding and respecting cultural beliefs and practices related to childbirth and breastfeeding is essential. Interventions should be culturally sensitive and involve community leaders and influencers to promote positive attitudes toward EIBF.
- 2. Community Engagement:** Engaging fathers, grandmothers, and other key family members in breastfeeding education can help create a supportive environment for the mother. In many cultures, family members play a significant role in decision-making, and their support can be crucial.
- 3. Addressing Misconceptions:** Many cultural beliefs may include misconceptions about breastfeeding, such as the need to give pre-lacteal feeds or the belief that colostrum is harmful. Providing clear, evidence-based information can help dispel these myths and encourage early breastfeeding.

## Structural and Policy Interventions

- 1. Maternity Leave Policies:** Ensuring adequate maternity leave and workplace support for breastfeeding can encourage mothers to initiate and continue breastfeeding. Policies that provide paid leave and facilities for breastfeeding or expressing milk at work can make a significant difference.
- 2. Access to Healthcare:** Improving access to healthcare services, especially in rural and underserved areas, can help ensure that more women receive the support they need to initiate breastfeeding early. This includes transportation, affordable care, and availability of trained healthcare professionals.
- 3. Legal Frameworks:** Implementing and enforcing regulations that support breastfeeding, such as banning

the promotion of breastmilk substitutes and ensuring maternity protection in the workplace, can create an enabling environment for EIBF.

### Monitoring and Evaluation

- 1. Data Collection and Research:** Collecting data on EIBF rates and the factors influencing them can help tailor interventions more effectively. Research can identify specific barriers in different contexts and measure the impact of various strategies.
- 2. Feedback Mechanisms:** Establishing feedback mechanisms where mothers can share their experiences and challenges with breastfeeding can help healthcare providers and policymakers adjust their approaches to better meet the needs of mothers.

### Conclusion

Understanding the diverse factors influencing EIBF is crucial for developing effective interventions. By addressing the unique challenges faced by different populations, healthcare providers and policymakers can promote early breastfeeding initiation, ultimately improving maternal and child health outcomes.

### Conflict of Interest

Not available

### Financial Support

Not available

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#### How to Cite This Article

Divya MR, Sujatha V. Understanding the factors influencing early initiation of breastfeeding in diverse populations. International Journal of Research in Paediatric Nursing. 2024;6(1):109-111..

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