



A Descriptive Study of Neonatal Nurses Perceptions, Knowledge, and Practice on Support of Breastfeeding in the NICU



Lori Merkel, BSN, RNC; Heather Stephens, BSN, RN; Melissa Koonce, BSN, RN; Lindsay Zaleski, BSN, RN; Mary Lewis, MSN, RNC; Karen Campbell, RN, IBCLC; Barbara Shocker, MEd, RN, IBCLC ; Kim K. Doheny, PhD, NNP-BC

Background & Significance

It is well documented that infants who receive breast milk also incur significant health benefits. Human milk contains growth factors and immunoglobulins that are proven to provide protection for the infant from various diseases, including respiratory and gastrointestinal infections. Breastfeeding in the Neonatal ICU can be hindered by many environmental challenges. Support of breastfeeding mothers can be influenced by unit policies and nursing practice as well as the nurse's individual beliefs and/or perceptions. Providing the best care for our smallest patients means presenting consistent and evidence based breast milk/breastfeeding information to aid, support and encourage mothers. The purpose of this descriptive correlational study was to examine the knowledge, practice and perceptions of NICU nurses regarding breastfeeding.

Methods

- N= 68 NICU nurse respondents
- 45.6% RNs have had 5 years or less of Neonatal ICU experience
- 76.4% RNs have completed a Bachelors or Masters degree
- Participants completed a 34-item investigator generated survey which utilized a 4-point Likert scale to measure views on perceptions, knowledge and practice of breastfeeding

Nurses Total Scores by Domain

	PERCEPTION	KNOWLEDGE	PRACTICE
Total Mean Scores	13.03	26.15	21.46
Std. Deviation	1.564	2.529	2.175
Mean score range	5-20	9-36	8-32

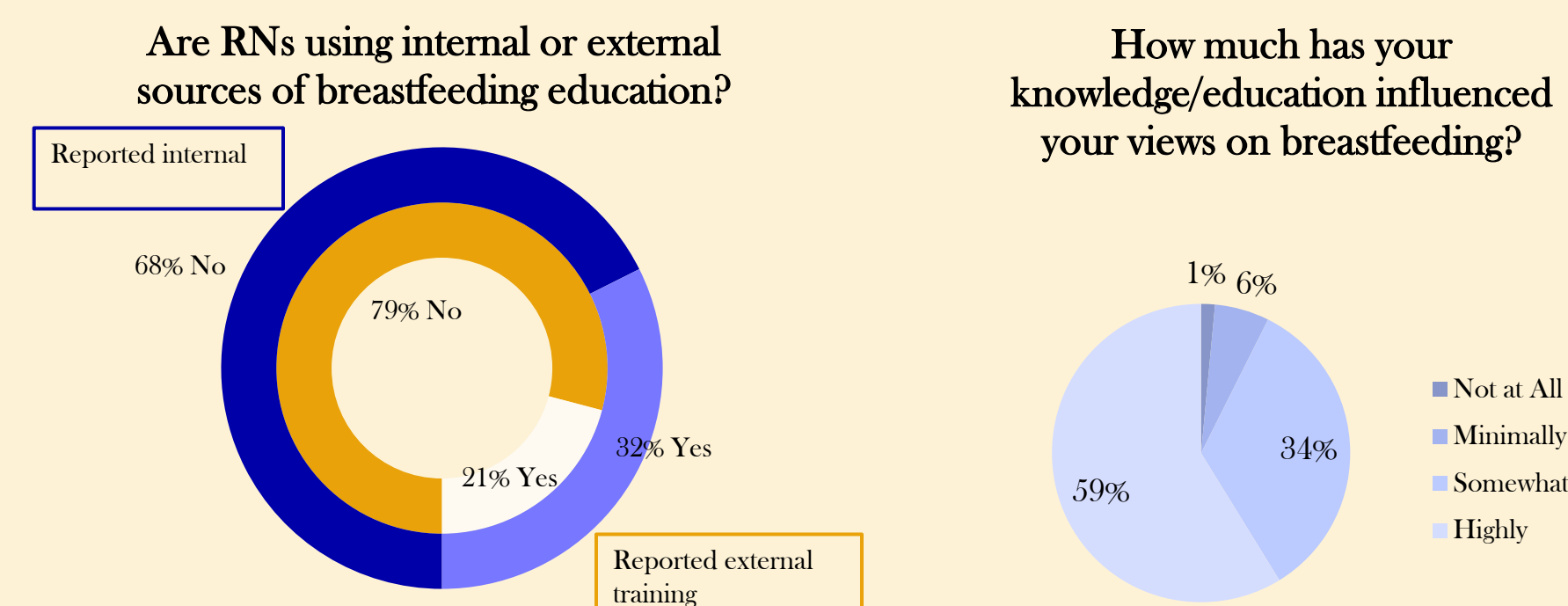
Correlation Coefficients

		PERCEPTION	KNOWLEDGE	PRACTICE
PERCEPTION	Pearson Correlation	1	0.274(*)	0.049
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.024	0.694
KNOWLEDGE	Pearson Correlation	0.274(*)	1	-0.061
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.024	.	0.62
PRACTICE	Pearson Correlation	0.049	-0.061	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.694	0.62	.

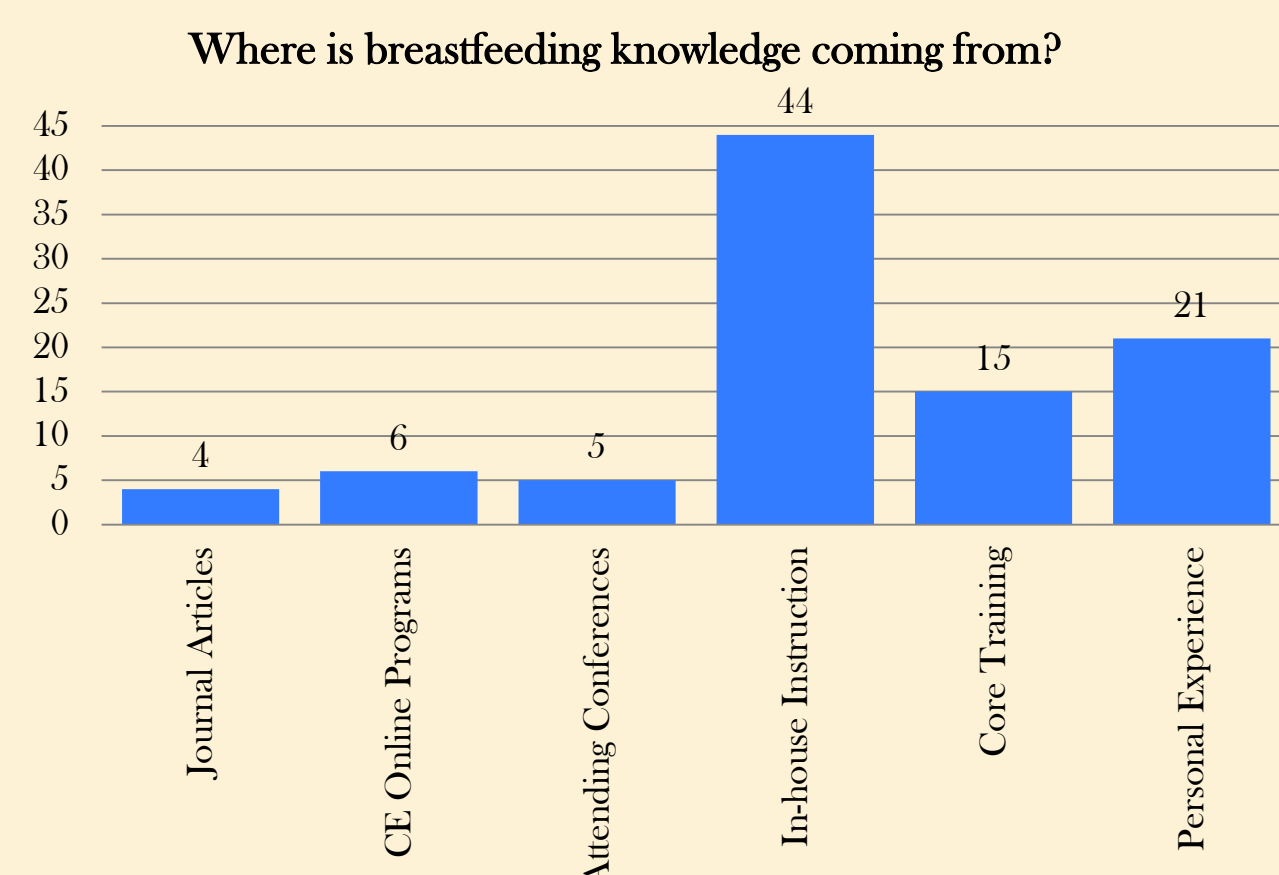
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Results

- While only 32% of nurses reported completing formal breastfeeding training, the majority (59%) stated their views on breastfeeding were 'highly' influenced by knowledge/education.



- A statistically significant association was found between nurses' perceptions and knowledge on breastfeeding (p=0.02).
- Those nurses who reported attending formal internal education on breastfeeding scored higher on practice domain questions in support of breastfeeding than those who did not report attending formal internal classes on breastfeeding (ANOVA, F=4.9; p=0.03).



- 54% of nurses felt there was inadequate support in the NICU for breastfeeding mothers and identified three opportunities for improvement. These included a lack of lactation resource people/support, inconsistent information given to mothers, and a lack of time.

Conclusions

This study implies that breastfeeding knowledge influenced nurses views on breastfeeding. Furthermore, nurses who attended formal education on breastfeeding reported higher support of breastfeeding in their practice. However, the majority of nurse respondents felt there were inadequate resources to support the practice of breastfeeding in the NICU.

Clinical Implications

- Promote staff participation in formal breastfeeding education within their practice setting and at outside conferences.
- Examine barriers to staff participation in these programs.
- Provide increased support for lactation services by utilizing lactation support nurses to work with breastfeeding mothers in addition to lactation consultants.
- Explore approaches to improve efficiency in care delivery so that additional time can be allocated for education and support of breastfeeding practices.

Selected References

Bernaix, L. W., Schmidt, C. A., Arrizola, M., Iovinelli, D., & Medina-Poelinez, C. (2008). Success of a lactation education program on NICU nurses' knowledge and attitudes. *J Obstet Gynecol Neonatal Nurs*, 37(4), 436-445.

Brodribb, W., Fallon, A., Jackson, C., & Hegney, D. (2008). The relationship between personal breastfeeding experience and the breastfeeding attitudes, knowledge, confidence and effectiveness of Australian GP registrars. *Matern Child Nutr*, 4(4), 264-274.

McCarter-Spaulding, D. E., & Dennis, C. L. Psychometric testing of the Breastfeeding Self-Efficacy Scale-Short Form in a sample of Black women in the United States. *Res Nurs Health*, 33(2), 111-119.

Nakar, S., Peretz, O., Hoffman, R., Grossman, Z., Kaplan, B., & Vinker, S. (2007). Attitudes and knowledge on breastfeeding among paediatricians, family physicians, and gynaecologists in Israel. *Acta Paediatr*, 96(6), 848-851.

Siddell, E., Marinelli, K., Froman, R. D., & Burke, G. (2003). Evaluation of an educational intervention on breastfeeding for NICU nurses. *J Hum Lact*, 19(3), 293-302.