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A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY ON THE AWARENESS OF BREASTFEEDING AND PROPER WEANING PRACTICES AMONG INFANT FEEDING MOTHERS ATTENDING IMPERIAL MEDICAL SERVICES ENTEBBE WAKISO DISTRICT.

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ABSTRACT.

Background:
Breastfeeding is important in infancy and weaning is crucial in reducing mortality and promoting growth. The main aim of the study was to assess awareness of breastfeeding and proper weaning practices among infant-feeding mothers.

Methodology:
The study was cross-sectional and relied on quantitative methods of data collection. This design was chosen because data was collected at once, questionnaires were used to collect data, and findings were presented in the form of tables, figures, and pie charts.

Results:
The majority of 10(33%) breastfeeding mothers were aged 26 to 30 years, and half 15(50%) of the respondents had 2 children. 20(67%) an had O level as their highest level of education. 11(37%) of mothers knew that they should start breastfeeding a neonate after 1 hour of birth. While 10(33%) of the respondents thought that they could stop exclusive breastfeeding after 1 month and the same number for 6 months. 20(67%) of respondents revealed the best source of nutrients as breast milk. Moreover, 18(60%) reported that any food can be weaned to the babies. For factors attributed to early weaning, 8(27%) of mothers said that babies do not get enough nutrients, 7(23%) revealed that it was the wish of the husband and the minority 5(17%) said it was pregnancy.

Conclusion:
The findings revealed that not all of the mothers were aware of when to start exclusive breastfeeding and when to wean so midwives should be empowered to health educate, train, and involve the community and stakeholders in boosting knowledge and practices on weaning.

Recommendation:
The study urges the Ugandan government through the Ministry of Health to empower healthcare providers (e.g. nurses) to offer continuous health education to mothers about breastfeeding and weaning. Regardless of having more than one child. To bridge the existing gap of weaning at different intervals.

Keywords: *Breastfeeding, Weaning practices, Wakiso district, Imperial Medical Services, Infant feeding mothers*
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BACKGROUND.

According to 2018 data from Turkish Demographic and Health Surveys, 59% of infants in Turkey are fed only with breast milk for the first two months. This rate decreased to 45% in the period between two and three months so about 39% of babies get fed with additional nutrients up to the age of 2 years, and the average breastfeeding period is 16.7 months (TDHS, 2018). However, Breastfeeding Report Card 2018 showed that breastfeeding rates have fallen below the targets set by Healthy People 2020 (CDC, 2020). In newborns, the exclusive breastfeeding rate in the first month was 83.2%, compared to 46.9% in the first quarter and 35.9% by the 12th month. On the other hand, the feeding rate with additional foods has increased, approaching the 55%-80% rate (CDC, 2020). Despite these reports and the many benefits of breastfeeding, difficulties with the initiation and duration of breastfeeding continue to be reported (Aksoy et al., 2020)

In India, an average mother, although poor in nutritional status, has a remarkable ability to breastfeed her infant for prolonged periods, Sometimes, extending to nearly 2 years (Saeed et al., 2015). However, India still has the highest

number of under-weight children under five in the world, and 70 percent of children are anemic. (Kaur et al., 2015). In Bangladesh, regarding determinants of infant and young child feeding practices, it was reported that of young infants under 6 months of age, 42.5% were exclusively breastfed meaning that the rest weaned before 6 months of age, and among those aged 6-9 months,62.3% received complementary foods in addition to breast milk yet the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends feeding a baby only breastmilk for the first six months of its life, (Mihrshahi et al., 2010)

Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics cites that the rate of initiating breastfeeding within 1 hour in Nigeria is 62% of children ever breastfed, and the rate of giving pre-lacteals is 15.4%, (Oden, 2023). This indicates that good Weaning practices are still sub-optimal in Nigeria, specifically in Ogun State, and this presents a challenge to meeting goal three of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The study aims to determine the awareness of breastfeeding and proper weaning practices among infant-feeding mothers attending Imperial Medical Services Entebbe.

Specific objectives.

- To evaluate the level of awareness about breastfeeding among infant-feeding mothers attending Imperial Medical Services Entebbe.
- To assess the knowledge of weaning among infant-feeding mothers attending Imperial Medical Services Entebbe.
- To assess the weaning practices of infant-feeding mothers attending Imperial Medical Services Entebbe.

METHODOLOGY.

Study Design and rationale.

The study employed a descriptive cross-sectional study design. It was a cross-sectional study because data collection and management were done within a short period. Additionally, cross-sectional survey design was used because it helped gather data from a sample of a large population at a specific time and the data collected was used to make inferences about the general population.

Study Area and rationale.

The study was conducted at Imperial Medical Services which is located in Entebbe Wakiso District, 4 kilometers from the center of Entebbe town. The study focused precisely on infant-feeding mothers attending Imperial Medical Services.

Study population.

Infant-feeding mothers were considered for the study.

Sample Size Determination.

A sample of 30 respondents was used in this study because it was the recommended sample by UNMEB (2009) guidelines for diploma students.

Sampling Procedure.

The study employed a non-probability convenience sampling approach where the interviewer administered questionnaires to any available respondents who met the required inclusion criteria and consented to participate in the study.

Inclusion Criteria.

The study considered infant-feeding mothers

Study Variables.

Independent variables.

The knowledge level of infant-feeding mothers and weaning practices.

Dependent variables.

Breastfeeding and weaning infants were dependent on the level of knowledge among infant-feeding mothers attending Imperial Medical Center.

Research Instruments.

The questionnaires comprised both structured and unstructured questions. The purpose of the study was explained to the respondents within the questionnaire.

FINDINGS.

Socio-demographic related factors to breastfeeding.

A total of 30 respondents were included in this study and the socio-demographic related breastfeeding included; Age, Religion and Parity of mothers, highest level of education, and Place of residence.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents (n=30)

Variable	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Age of the respondents	< - 25 years	5	17
	26 - 30 years	10	33
	31 - 35 years	8	27
	36 - 40 years	7	23
	Total	30	100
Parity of mothers	Only one	9	30
	2 children	15	50
	3 children	4	13
	More than four	2	7
	Total	30	100
Highest level of education	Primary	3	10
	O level	20	67
	A level	5	17
	Tertiary	2	7
	Total	30	100
Place of residence	Urban	19	63
	Rural	11	37
	Total	30	100

Findings in Table 1 show that, majority 10(33%) of the childbearing women were of the age group 26 to 30 years; 8(27%) were of the age group 31 to 35 years; 7(23%) were of the age group 36 to 40 years; and 5(17%) were below 25years of age. Half 15(50%) of the respondents were having 2 children9(30%) had only one, 4(13%) had 3 children, and 2(7%) had more than four. Furthermore, results in Table 1, indicated that of the thirty respondents, the majority 22(67%) had ordinary level as their highest level of education, 5(17%) had A 'level, 3(10%) were still primary, and 2(7%) went up to tertiary level.

Knowledge of breastfeeding among mothers.

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Table 2: knowledge of breastfeeding among mothers (n = 30)

Variable	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
What mothers know about breastfeeding	Breastfeeding of children by mothers	5	17
	Giving baby human milk	25	83
	Total	30	100
When mothers should start breastfeeding a neonate	After delivery	5	17
	Within half an hour	9	30
	Within 1 hour	5	17
	After 1 hour	11	37
	Total	30	100
When mothers started exclusive breastfeeding	<1month	19	63
	>1month	11	37
	Total	30	100
The age exclusive breastfeeding is stopped	1 month	10	33
	3 months	6	20
	6 months	10	33
	9 months	4	13
	Total	30	100
Assistance is given to breasting mothers such as	Emotional support	4	13
	Education	8	27
	Environment of comfort	18	60
	Total	30	100
Benefits of breastfeeding	Contraceptive benefit	2	7
	Best nutritive source	20	67
	Protects child from infections	8	27
	Total	30	100

Concerning Table 2, almost all 25(83%) knew breastfeeding as feeding of children by mothers of the childbearing age while a few 5(17%) knew breastfeeding as giving baby human milk. Furthermore, less than half of mothers 11(37%) knew that they should start breastfeeding a neonate after 1 hour, 9(30%) knew that they would breastfeed within half an hour and 5(17%) said they would start within 1 hour after delivery. More than half 19(63%) of mothers started exclusive breastfeeding after one month, while the rest 11(37%) started after a month. When asked about the age when exclusive breastfeeding is stopped, the majority 10(33%) of the respondents revealed one month and the same number revealed 6 months. While others, 6(20%) and 4(13%) said 3 months and 9 months respectively. 18(60%) of breastfeeding women said that they were given a conducive environment to breastfeed, 8(27%) were educated about BF, and 4(13%) were given emotional support. The same table showed that the benefits of breastfeeding mothers revealed the majority 20(67%) said it was the best nutritive source, 8(27%) said that it protects a child from infections while the minority revealed that it had contraceptive benefits.

Knowledge of weaning among mothers.

The study sought to find out the Knowledge of weaning among mothers.

Meaning of weaning.

Respondents were requested to state the meaning of weaning, findings are presented in Figure 1.

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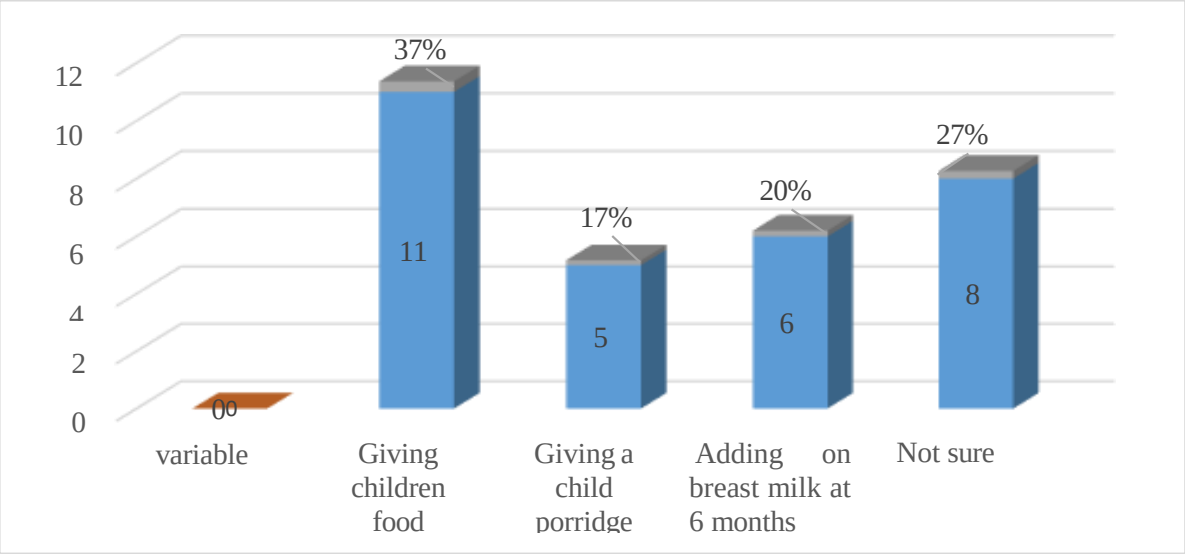
Figure 1: meaning of weaning (n = 30)

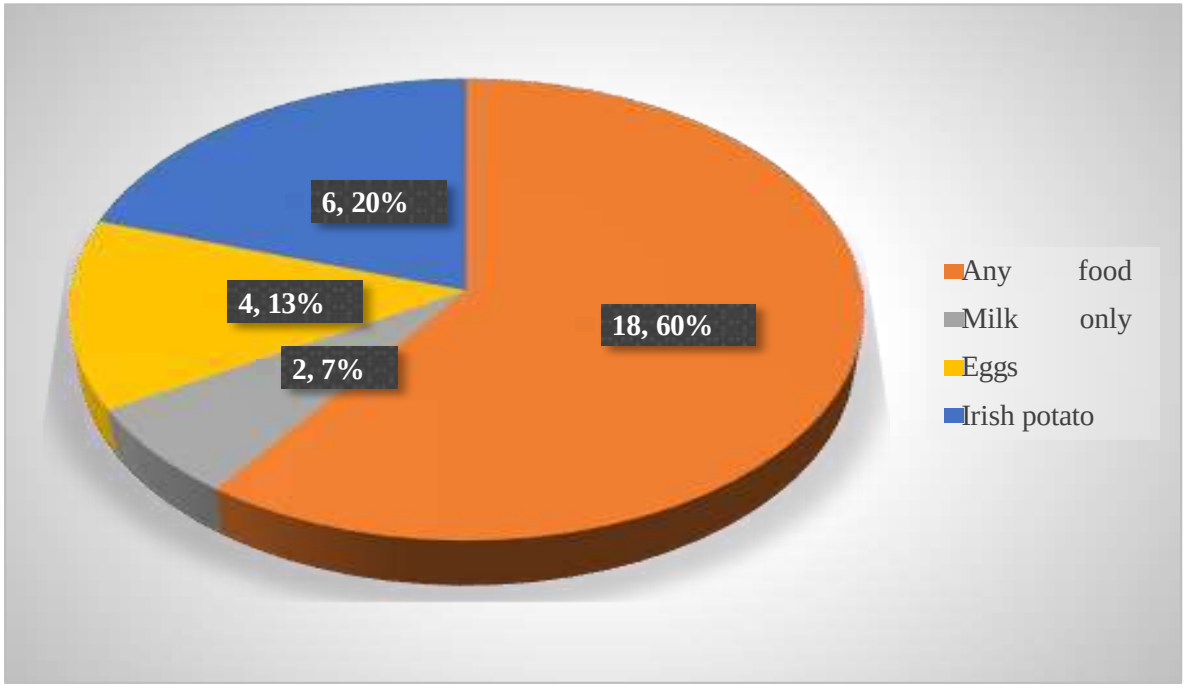


According to Figure 1, 11(37%) of the respondents revealed that weaning means giving children food, 8(27%) were not sure, 6(20%) said weaning is adding on the breast milk at 6 months, while 5(17%) defined weaning as giving children porridge.

What weaning foods would mothers give their babies?

Findings about what weaning foods would mothers give their babies are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: what weaning foods would mothers give their babies (n = 30)



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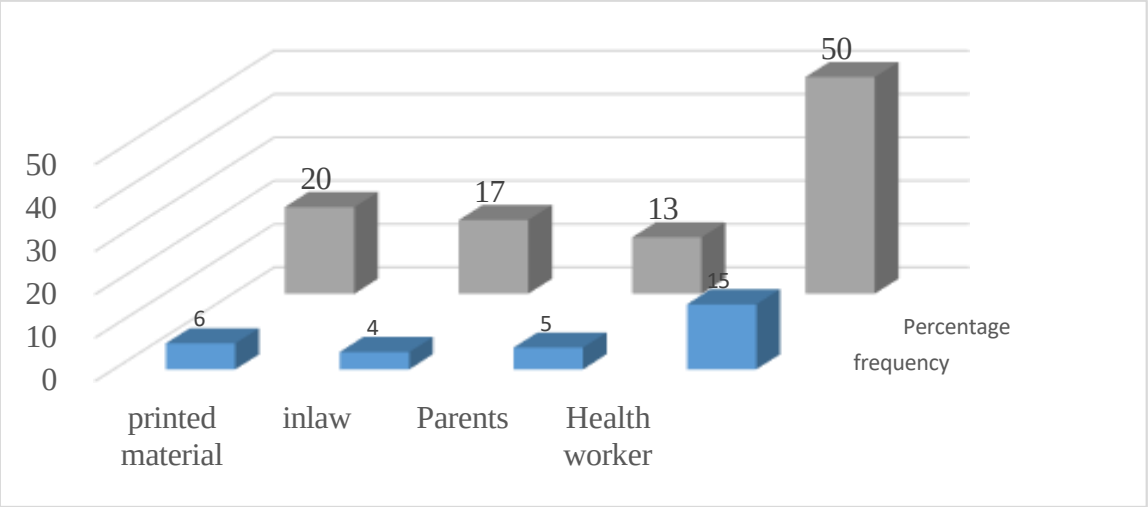
With regard to Figure 2, more than half 18(60%) of BF mothers reported that any food can be given to the babies, 6(20%) gave Irish potatoes, 4(13%) gave eggs and less than a quarter, 2 (7%) of respondents gave milk only.

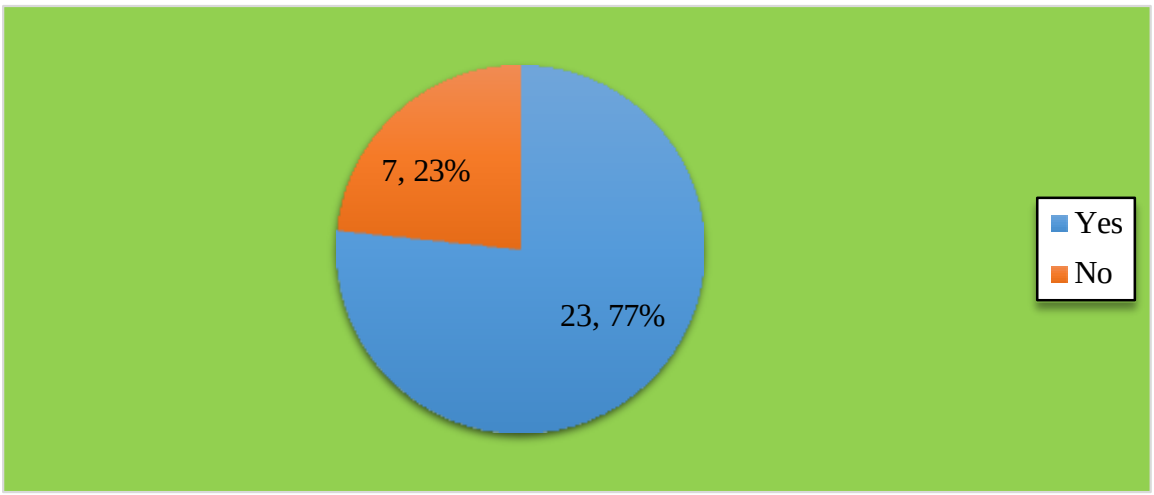
Figure 3: Source of information about weaning. (n = 30)



About Figure 3, half 15(50%) of the respondents revealed that the information about weaning was obtained from health workers, 6(20%) from printed material, 5(13%) from parents, and the least 4(17%) obtained information through in-laws.

Whether educated on the importance of weaning.

Figure 4: Whether educated on the importance of weaning (n= 30)



Results in Figure 4 show that 23(77%) of the respondents said that they were educated about weaning while only 7 (23%) were not educated about weaning.

Weaning practices among mothers sighted by the respondents.

Respondents were asked what weaning practices they exhibited and they gave the following findin

Table 3: Weaning practices among mothers (n = 30)

Variable	Response	Frequency	Percentage%
Factors attributed to early weaning before 6 months	Pregnancy	5	17
	Insufficient breast milk	10	33
	Wish of husband	7	23
	Babies do not get enough nutrients	8	27
	Total	30	100
Contributing factors to poor weaning practices	Lack of resources	17	57
	High parity	11	37
	Poor knowledge	1	3
	The child rejects breast milk	1	3
	Total	30	100

Results in Table 3 show that, majority 10(33%) of the respondents reported factors attributed to early weaning before 6 months as insufficient breast milk, 8(27%) said that babies do not get enough nutrients, 7(23%) revealed that it was the wish of husband and the minority 5(17%) it was pregnancy. The contributing factors to poor weaning practices were mentioned as; Lack of resources 17(57%), high parity 11(37%), poor knowledge, and child rejecting breast milk was 1(3%). Participants were also asked when they would supplement eggs and meat and several answers were given.

DISCUSSION.

Social demographic findings.

Findings in Table 1 showed that the majority 10(33%) of the childbearing women were of the age group 26 to 30 years; 8(27%) were of the age group 31 to 35 years; 7(23%) were of the age group 36 to 40 years; and 5(17%) were below 25years of age. This implies that these mothers can be able to breastfeed their children exclusively for the first 6months and wean them appropriately because they know the benefits of the practice. And more so, in Pakistan, they found out that there was an effect of maternal age on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding and infant feeding choices and practices, (Salim et al. 2016). Moreover, the younger the mother, the less experience, knowledge, and poor practices of breastfeeding.

Half 15(50%) of the respondents were having 2 children 9(30%) had only one, 4(13%) had 3 children, and 2(7%) had more than four. This means that these mothers had some experience in feeding their babies exclusively on breast milk and weaning them. Furthermore, the majority 22(67%) had ordinary level as their highest level of education, 5(17%) had A 'level, and 2(7%) went up to tertiary level. The higher the education, the higher the social class and knowledge about breastfeeding the same way Saeed, et al., (2019) ruled out in Egypt that social class was the only significant factor affecting knowledge and practice of breastfeeding where moderate knowledge was noticed in the medium social class but moderate practice was associated with high social class

Awareness about breastfeeding among mothers.

Concerning Table 2, almost all 25(83%) knew breastfeeding as feeding of children by mothers of the childbearing age while a few 5(17%) knew breastfeeding as giving baby human milk. This implied that many of these mothers would not define breastfeeding much as they breastfed their babies exclusively. These results are similar to those of Hien et al., (2020) and Mogre et al., (2016) in Ghana where they found that mothers had adequate knowledge about exclusive breastfeeding for up to 6 months. Similarly, a study conducted among rural lactating mothers in Ghana reported that 74 % of mothers who took part in the study had general knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding.

Furthermore, less than half of mothers 11(37%) knew that they should start breastfeeding a neonate after 1 hour, 9(30%) knew that they would breastfeed within half an hour and 5(17%) said they would start within 1 hour and after delivery. This means that mothers were aware of when to start breastfeeding. These results were similar to those of Suhag & Akter (2020) who revealed that respondents knew and breastfed the baby as soon as possible after delivery while others knew that babies should be breastfed within half an hour but contradictory to the results from this same study where some respondents had little knowledge on when to start breastfeeding as they mentioned that, more than half 19(63%) of mothers started exclusive breastfeeding below I month while the rest 11(37%) started after a month.

When asked about the age when exclusive breastfeeding is stopped, the Majority of 10(33%) of the respondents revealed one month and the same number revealed 6 months, while others 6(20%) and 4(13%) said 3 months and 9 months respectively. This implied that mothers did not know when to stop exclusive breastfeeding. So regarding these results, not all mothers knew when to stop exclusive breastfeeding, there were only 6 who were aware of the time weaning was started. Just as Suhag & Akter (2020) results showed respondents started weaning babies after 6 months because they knew that breast milk protects a child from illness.

11(60%) of breastfeeding women said that they were given a conducive environment to breastfeed, the same way Ratnasari et al. (2017) reported their results that creating an environment of comfort to facilitate breastfeeding among busy or working mothers facilitated good breastfeeding practices. 8(27%) were educated about BF and 4(13%) were given emotional support. This implies that mothers knew about breastfeeding. These results are similar to those from a study done in Egypt by Tawfilis et al., (2023) which revealed that most of the studied mothers had good knowledge about the benefits of BF for the child. Regarding the benefits of breastfeeding, the Majority 20(67%) mothers revealed that the best nutritive source was breast milk Tawfilis et al., (2023) while other mothers 8(27%) said that it protects the child from infections

Knowledge of weaning among mothers.

Most 11(37%) of the respondents revealed that weaning means giving children food, 8(27%) were not sure, 6(20%) said weaning is adding on the breast milk at 6 months, while 5(17%) defined weaning as giving children porridge. Not all the participants knew about the meaning of weaning so this means that there is a big gap the health workers need to bridge such that all mothers can define weaning and can do it appropriately, these results are similar to those of Ezenduka et al. (2018) done in local Communities of Enugu State Nigeria, where it was asserted that only 40.7percent knew the real meaning of weaning.

About the weaning foods would mothers give their babies, more than half 18(60%) of BF mothers reported that any food can be given to the babies, 6(20%) gave Irish potatoes, 4(13%) gave eggs and less than a quarter 2(7%) of respondents gave milk only. These mothers gave what was available for the babies and all were the correct food used for weaning children. These results were similar to those of Suhag & Akter (2020) who asserted that all respondents in their study knew about weaning foods and the time of weaning food after 6 months, but contrary to the study of Hasnain et al. (2013) who revealed that some mothers had poor knowledge about weaning foods. Further still, this study's results were contrary to those confirmed in Ghana by Mogre et al., (2016) where the weaning foods included processed, dried, packed, instant snacks, breads, cereals, chips, and noodles available in the market.

In Ezenduka et al., (2018) study, half 15(50%) of the respondents revealed that the information about weaning was obtained from health workers, 6(20%) from printed material, 5(13%) from parents, and the least 4(17%) obtained information through in-laws.

Considering the importance of weaning, results showed that 23(77%) of the respondents said that they were educated about weaning while only 7 (23%) were not educated about weaning. Since more than half of mothers knew about weaning, the rest needed to be educated to be on the same board. This contradicts a study about knowledge, attitude, and practice of weaning among mothers in the Najran Region, Saudi Arabia, Al-Gashanin and Ghazwani (2022) which confirmed, that knowledge levels were alarmingly unsatisfactory about weaning among the participants.

Weaning practices among mothers sighted by the respondents.

The majority 10(33%) of the respondents reported factors attributed to early weaning before 6 months as insufficient breast milk, 8(27%) said that babies do not get enough nutrients, 7(23%) revealed that it was the wish of husband and the minority 5(17%) it was pregnancy. Weaning before 6 months is not a good practice because at that time baby's intestines can digest milk better and not food and mothers have myths that the nutrients in the breast milk are not enough. These mothers weaned their babies the same way Ezenduka et al. (2018) in their study about weaning practices reported that weaning was started as early as two months. These mothers also may have had the same reason such as that given by Mensah et al. (2017) that babies do not get enough nutrients from breast milk hence the need to add other food substitutes early.

The contributing factors to poor weaning practices were mentioned as; Lack of resources 17(57%), high parity 11(37%), poor knowledge, and child rejecting breast milk 1(3%). These results contradict those by Suhag & Akter (2020) which showed that respondents started weaning babies after 6 months because they knew that breast milk protects a child from illness.

For mothers to have a reduced knowledge deficit of when to supplement meat, they need to be health-educated on the issue. In the same way, Aaqib et al. (2017) confirmed from their study that mothers must be educated about the importance and effectiveness of weaning, the age at which weaning starts, and the types of weaning diets,

CONCLUSIONS.

The findings of this study revealed that even though all respondents were having babies to breastfeed, not all of them were aware of when to start exclusive breastfeeding, when to

stop, and what to start weaning, much as most of them knew the foods to be given to the babies. However, some mothers had poor weaning practices and so must be educated about the importance and effectiveness of weaning, the age at which weaning starts, and the types of weaning diets.

LIMITATIONS.

Firstly, findings were based on infant-feeding mothers so, the recall bias and/or social desirability bias cannot be excluded.
Moreover, access to new material on the Internet was not easy since some files required one to subscribe to access them and at times their results are not easy to understand.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

Recommendations to the ministry of health.

The government of Uganda through the Ministry of Health should empower healthcare providers to offer continuous health education to mothers about breastfeeding and weaning such that mothers obtain enough knowledge and achieve good weaning practices for their babies to prevent infant mortality.

Recommendations to Imperial Medical Services Entebbe Wakiso District.

The medical center administrators should empower the health workers to educate mothers about when to start exclusive breastfeeding when to stop, what weaning takes place, and the benefits of breastfeeding and weaning. This can cause a significant reduction in malnutrition in children.

Nursing implications.

Nurses should use these results to understand that mothers need to be given continuous knowledge even when they have had more than one child to bridge the existing gap of weaning at different intervals.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.

CDC: Centers for Disease Control & Prevention
SDGs: Sustainable Developmental Goals
TDHS: Turkish Demographic and Health Surveys
UNMEB: Uganda Nurses & Midwives Examination Board
BF: Breastfeeding

SOURCE OF FUNDING.

The was no source of funding

CONFLICT OF INTEREST.

There was no conflict of interest

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