

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Influence of Infant Massage Practice on Breastfeeding Among Mothers In Sarawak

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Practice of infant massage by mothers has been reported previously to provide benefits such as nurturing touch, warmth and relaxation to infants and a more positive breastfeeding practice due to its stimulant for oxytocin release. This study aimed to determine the influence of infant massage by mothers on their breastfeeding practice in the local context. **Methods:** A quasi-experimental study was conducted among 310 mother-infant pairs who were recruited from five selected health centres within First Division of Sarawak. Intervention group participants ($n=155$) were taught to do infant-massage during the clinic session and instructed to practice 15 minutes twice daily throughout the two-months intervention period, while the control group ($n=155$) were not. Breastfeeding practice data were obtained using questionnaire from both groups pre-intervention at infants' age one-month and post-intervention at age three-months. **Results:** Multinomial regression analysis showed that those in the intervention group were two times more likely than the control group for exclusive breastfeeding when compared to mothers who stopped breastfeeding ($RR=2.022$, 95% CI=1.007, 4.071; p -value=0.048). Similarly, mothers from the intervention group were two and half times more likely than control group for mixed feeding ($RR=2.560$, 95% CI=1.280, 5.121; p -value=0.008). Those who were housewives were nearly three times more likely than the private workers for exclusive breastfeeding ($RR=2.734$, 95% CI=1.246, 5.997; p -value=0.012). **Conclusion:** Infant massage influenced breastfeeding practice positively at infants' age three-months, in particular, among mothers who were housewives. Healthcare providers should encourage infant massage practice by mothers as part of the maternal and child healthcare service.

Keywords: Infant massage, Mothers, Breastfeeding practice

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INTRODUCTION

The practice of infant massage (IM) is a long-established natural mothering tradition which has been passed down through the generations in many cultures. However, the sense of touch or tactile sensation related to the practice of infant massage has been neglected and under-valued in the modern, advance-technology era, as highlighted by Adamson (1). It is gaining acceptance in the western countries such as the United States of America and Europe as more findings that support the benefits of the IM practice emerged (1-4). Locally in Malaysia,

though the teaching of postnatal mothers to practice IM is provided in selected private healthcare settings, this is still not part of the regular government maternal and child health service.

IM by mothers provides their infants with nurturing touch, warmth, relaxation, better sleep, relief from discomfort and colic, stimulation and interaction (3-7). The correlation of mothers providing IM and its positive influence on stress, self-esteem and depression were highlighted earlier (8-9). Those who practiced IM to their infants experienced higher level of self-esteem, less stress and depression. The experience of peer support from one another in the context of IM by mothers in group sessions was reported (9, 10). IM practice and its positive influence on breastfeeding (BF) practice are due to the IM strokes which provide the skin-to-skin