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Abstract Title:

The Measurement of Breastfeeding Indicators in the Maltese Population

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Abstract

Introduction: Presently, regularly collected Maltese data on breastfeeding is that of breastfeeding at discharge from hospital, by the National Obstetric Information System (NOIS). A method was chosen to enable continuous monitoring of the local Breast Feeding Policy. **Aim:** The aim of this study was to determine the prevalence of breastfeeding in Malta. **Methodology:** The study was conducted using modules from a validated tool developed by WHO for measurement of Infant and Young Child Feeding Indicators. Core indicators of early initiation of breastfeeding, exclusive breastfeeding under 6 months and continued breastfeeding at 1 year were measured. All infants of 5 months of age and 12 months of age were invited to participate (n= 654) Data collection occurred via (1) a telephone interview method and (2) an online questionnaire. Another part of the study consisted of recruitment of 12 and 13 month old infants at immunization clinics. **Results:** From the 385 participants, prevalence of breastfeeding initiation within 1 hour of birth was 71.1%. The prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding declined to 28.9%, at 5 months of age, and further declined to 10% at 12 months of age. The telephone survey method was the most effective method for data collection. **Conclusion:** Findings are in agreement with a previously published local study and NOIS figures for breastfeeding initiation. Recommendations are drawn up to enable regular measurement of local breastfeeding rates, and the adoption of policies and initiatives.