

# Exclusive breastfeeding: Knowledge and attitudes of senior health professional students of a Malaysian medical college

**Phaik Choo Ooi, Muhammad Haziqkhan Hajimolkan, Mohammad Haziq Mohammad Jainal, Raja Muhammad Azim Raja Aziz, Muhammad Saiful Irfan Mohamad Sabri**

Royal College of Medicine Perak, Universiti Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Malaysia

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Despite improvement of sanitation and economical status of many countries, exclusive breastfeeding remained an established and important public health strategy to prevent infectious diseases, especially acute multiple respiratory and gastrointestinal diseases among infants. Mothers need effective motivation and support from healthcare professionals to opt for and maintain breastfeeding. **Objective:** This study aimed to assess the knowledge and attitudes regarding exclusive breastfeeding among senior medical and nursing students of Universiti Kuala Lumpur Royal College of Medicine Perak (UniKL RCMP). **Materials and methods:** A total of 195 seniors (97 medical and 98 nursing students) participated in this cross-sectional study using a validated self-administered online questionnaire, between 19th Oct 2020 and 27th Nov 2020, in the time of COVID-19. **Results and conclusion:** The participants had moderate knowledge (mean =  $20.32 \pm 3.405$ , 70.08% correct), and positive attitudes regarding exclusive breastfeeding (mean =  $64.34 \pm 6.816$ ). However, only 32.8% of the students knew that formula milk cannot be given to infants less than six months old and a lack of knowledge regarding expression and storage of breast milk was evident. Only less than half of the students strongly disagreed or disagreed with five out of nine negative statements which reflected a deficiency in positive attitudes. Using the means as cut-off point, only 63.1% and 56.9% of the students demonstrated good knowledge and positive attitudes, respectively. Against the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on medical education, overall, the students had moderate knowledge and positive attitudes towards exclusive breastfeeding. However, specific knowledge gaps and misconceptions were identified, and only less than two-thirds of the health professional students had good knowledge and positive attitudes, indicating an urgent need for interventions to promote exclusive breastfeeding skills of our future doctors and nurses to efficiently motivate and support mothers in exclusive breastfeeding which is crucial in infectious disease prevention amongst infants worldwide.