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# Sociocultural factors, myths and beliefs of mothers potential causers of the early weaning: an integrative review

Factores socioculturales, mitos y creencias de las madres lactantes causas potenciales del destete precoz: una revisión integradora

Fatores socioculturais, mitos e crenças de nutrízes potenciais causadores do desmame precoce: uma revisão integrativa

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Identify sociocultural factors of mothers related to breastfeeding. **Methodology:** It is an integrative review carried out on the basis of LILACS, BDNF and IBECs. The descriptors "Belief", "Breastfeeding", "Breastfeeding" and "Nutriz" were used by crossing with the Boolean operators "AND" and "OR". The collected articles were selected by title, followed by the summary reading and the full reading. The time gap considered in the search was from 2009 to 2019. **Results:** Eight articles were found. After applying the inclusion criteria, 04 articles were included in the study. Among the socio-cultural factors stand out myths and beliefs, the unwillingness or laziness to breastfeed. Women's beliefs and economic, social and cultural situation also influenced and had a direct impact on breastfeeding. **Conclusion:** Sociocultural factors were related to early interruption of breastfeeding. It highlights the importance and the need for health professionals to know these factors in order to develop strategies in order to reduce the negative impact on the breastfeeding process for the mother / baby binomial.

**DESCRIPTORS:** Belief; Breast Feeding; Breastfeeding mother.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Identificar factores socioculturales de las madres lactantes relacionados con la lactancia. **Método:** Se trata de una revisión integradora realizada sobre la base de LILACS, BDNF e IBECs. Los descriptores "Creencia", "Lactancia materna", "Lactancia materna" y "Nutriz" se utilizaron cruzando con los operadores booleanos "Y" y "O". Los artículos recopilados fueron seleccionados por título, seguido de la lectura resumida y la lectura completa. El intervalo de tiempo considerado en la búsqueda fue de 2009 a 2019. **Resultados:** Se encontraron ocho artículos. Tras aplicar los criterios de inclusión, se incluyeron en el estudio 04 artículos. Entre los factores socioculturales, se destacan mitos y creencias, la falta de voluntad o pereza para amamantar. Las creencias y la situación económica, social y cultural de las mujeres también influyeron e impactaron directamente en la lactancia maternal. **Conclusión:** Los factores socioculturales se relacionaron con la interrupción temprana de la lactancia materna. Destaca la importancia y la necesidad de que los profesionales de la salud conozcan estos factores para desarrollar estrategias que permitan reducir el impacto negativo en el proceso de lactancia materna para el binomio madre / bebé.

**DESCRIPTORES:** Creencias; Amamantamiento; Amamantamiento.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Identificar fatores socioculturais de nutrízes relacionados à amamentação. **Método:** Trata-se de uma revisão integrativa realizada nas bases de LILACS, BDNF e IBECs. Foram utilizados os descritores "Crença", "Aleitamento Materno", "Amamentação" e "Nutriz" por meio do cruzamento com os operadores booleanos "AND" e "OR". Os artigos coletados foram selecionados pelo título, seguido da leitura do resumo e a leitura na íntegra. A lacuna temporal considerada na busca foi de 2009 a 2019. **Resultados:** Foram localizados oito artigos. Após aplicação dos critérios de inclusão, 04 artigos foram incluídos no estudo. Entre os fatores socioculturais destacam-se mitos e crenças, a falta de vontade ou preguiça de amamentar. Também influenciaram e geraram impacto direto na amamentação as crenças e a situação econômica, social e cultural das mulheres. **Conclusão:** Os fatores socioculturais relacionaram-se a interrupção precoce da amamentação. Destaca-se a importância e a necessidade do conhecimento desses fatores pelos profissionais de saúde para elaboração de estratégias a fim de reduzir o impacto negativo no processo de amamentação para o binômio mãe/bebê.

**DESCRIPTORES:** Crenças; Aleitamento Materno; Amamentação.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

**B**reast milk is the ideal and essential food for newborns in the first months of life due to its nutritional and immunological properties. For this reason, what is recommended by the Ministry of Health<sup>1</sup> is that the nursing mother maintains exclusive breastfeeding until the baby's six months of age and, at least, until the age of two together with complementary feeding.<sup>2</sup>

The practice of breastfeeding protects the infant's health, preventing the appearance of diseases characteristic of early life, such as infections, gastrointestinal and respiratory diseases, in addition to chronic comorbidities such as diabetes mellitus and food allergies. Breastfeeding can prevent the death of 823.000 children under 5 years old annually.<sup>2</sup> In addition, it reinforces the bond between mother and baby.<sup>3</sup>

For the nursing mother, it can reduce the risk of developing cancer of the uterus or ovaries and fractures<sup>3</sup>, prevents the occurrence of breast cancer, and can prevent

death from the disease of up to 20.000 women annually. However, even with the proven benefits, Brazil still does not reach the recommendations of the Ministry of Health 1 and early weaning continues to occur significantly, which, consequently, increases the rates of infant morbidity and mortality.<sup>4</sup>

For this reason, the theme has been the subject of several government programs, which aim to develop strategies to reduce early weaning. For this, biological and socio-cultural aspects must be considered.<sup>3</sup> The first are related to the anatomophysiological integrity of the breast of the nursing mother and to the conditions of the baby's stomatognathic system, which guarantee the occurrence of the lactation and ejection process of the milk, as well as good grip and correct suction. Sociocultural ones, on the other hand, involve the culture and the environment to which the woman and her family are inserted, which can impact the breastfeeding process.<sup>5</sup>

Myths about little milk production to satisfy the baby, the lack of desire or laziness to breastfeed, the low understand-

ing of the importance of breastfeeding, the return to work routine before the baby is six months old, the concern with the aesthetics of the mother's breasts after weaning, the woman's body self-perception, the use of pacifiers or bottles with artificial nipples and the beliefs of the reference persons of the nursing mother influence breastfeeding and early weaning.<sup>4</sup>

The objective of this study was to review in the scientific literature the socio-cultural factors of nursing mothers related to breastfeeding. It is understood that it is relevant to explain these aspects present in the life of the nursing mother and reflect on the impact they have on the breastfeeding process, being possible causes of early weaning.

## **METHOD**

It is an integrative literature review of a descriptive nature. In order to carry out the study, the guiding question was used: "What are the socio-cultural factors of the nursing mother that influence breastfeeding?" The study was developed from

March to December 2019. The databases used were: LILACS (scientific and technical literature from Latin America and the Caribbean), BDENF (Nursing Database) and IBECIS (Bibliographic Index Español en Ciencias de la Salud).

The descriptors "Belief", "Breastfeeding" and "Nursing mother" were used by crossing with the Boolean operators "AND" and "OR". The collected articles were selected by title, followed by reading the abstract and reading it in full. The time gap considered in the search was from 2009 to 2019. All original articles available online that addressed the subject, published in the last ten years and with the full text available in Portuguese, were considered eligible. Experimental review articles that were not relevant to the topic and did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded.

## RESULTS

From the search strategy, eight studies were found, after excluding those that did not fit the inclusion criteria, four were se-

lected. It is observed that two studies were published in 2011. It is worth noting that the socio-cultural aspects are related to the environment and the culture to which the nursing mother is inserted, which often have an impact on the breastfeeding process. Half of the studies analyzed pointed out as main beliefs and myths: "milk can dry out", "little milk production", "milk is weak" and "milk does not quench the baby's thirst".

In addition to these beliefs, other factors were observed, such as unwillingness or laziness to breastfeed, the woman's return to the job market before the baby reached six months of age, excessive concern with the aesthetics of the breasts after breastfeeding, the lack of preparation or knowledge of the importance of breastfeeding, the use of pacifiers and bottles, the influence of the reference persons of the nursing mother, such as parents and grandparents, and the advice given by them while she is breastfeeding. All the factors mentioned above, reported by the women participating in the study, were directly related to the duration of breastfeeding or to

the interruption of breastfeeding.<sup>4</sup>

It was observed that many nursing mothers modify their diet during pregnancy according to their beliefs in an attempt to produce more milk, because they believe that they may not produce enough milk for the baby.<sup>3</sup> However, Oliveira and collaborators<sup>6</sup> found that the economic and socio-cultural factors of the nursing mother influence her diet and constantly make her deprive herself of essential foods for the good production of breast milk. The results showed that the socio-cultural aspects of the nursing mother influenced the baby's early weaning. Thus, it appears that these aspects must be taken into account as much as biological factors, in order to reduce the negative impacts they have on the breastfeeding process.

## DISCUSSION

The benefits of maternal milk are proven for both for the baby and for the mother and his family, but breastfeeding is stopped early and consequently increases childhood morbimortality rates.

Quadro 1 – Distribuição dos artigos selecionados na revisão integrativa.

ESTUDO	DELINEAMENTO	OBJETIVO	PRINCIPAIS RESULTADOS
Nutr. clín. diet. hosp. 2016; 36(4):27-33 <sup>4</sup>	Estudo transversal descritivo.	Analisar o conhecimento de gestantes no pré-natal quanto a mitos/crenças relacionados ao aleitamento materno e sua influência na intenção/duração.	Os mitos e crenças citados foram: - leite seco/seca; - leite materno não mata a sede do bebê; - os seios caem com o aleitamento.
Ciência & Saúde Coletiva, 16(10):4267-4274, 2011 <sup>2</sup>	Pesquisa qualitativa.	Compreender os significados atribuídos pelas mulheres ao hábito alimentar, no que se referem às proibições, permissões e lactogogos.	Pensar em alimentação nesta fase fisiológica implica conhecer os aspectos histórico, social e cultural que interferem na escolha alimentar, permitindo entender hábitos e crenças para que a atuação profissional seja focada no paciente.
Arquivos Brasileiros de Ciências da Saúde, v.36, n. 2, p. 67-71, Mai./Ago. 2011 <sup>6</sup>	Estudo transversal.	Identificar as restrições alimentares às quais se submetem às puérperas, acreditando contribuir favoravelmente para a sua saúde e a do bebê <sup>6</sup> .	Os dados encontrados apontaram para a existência de tabus e crenças com relação à alimentação durante a lactação.
Revista de Salud Pública, (XIII) 2: 6-14, dic. 2009 <sup>7</sup>	Descritivo com abordagem qualitativa	Analisar os principais fatores, na percepção da nutriz, que interferem na amamentação exclusiva nos seis primeiros meses de vida do lactente <sup>7</sup> .	Excesso de trabalho doméstico, outros filhos, trabalho externo; Mitos e crenças: "leite fraco, não sustentar"; É de fundamental importância que não se generalize à capacidade de amamentar sem antes considerar o contexto que o binômio está inserido.

Elaborado pelos autores

Several factors are related to this interruption, such as biological factors that allow the production and ejection of breast milk, as well as the correct suction and suction of the baby, the socio-cultural aspects related to the environment and the culture to which the nursing mother is inserted, and which in many cases sociocultural aspects are permeated by beliefs and myths, unwillingness or laziness to breastfeed, return to work routine, aesthetics, use of artificial teats, lack of preparation or lack of knowledge about breastfeeding and influence of reference persons of the nursing mother on the breastfeeding process.<sup>3</sup>

The main myths related by breastfeeding mothers in the studies are that the milk can dry, that the amount that they produce is little or that the milk is weak, leaving them unsafe as to the baby's nutrition. This insecurity, when associated with the infant's incessant crying tends to generate discomfort in the mother, inducing it to offer other types of foods like water, tea or children's formulas, early<sup>4</sup>, however, hypogalactics is not a recurrent phenomenon in nursing mothers.<sup>8</sup> Many women change their diet according to their beliefs in pregnancy in order to produce more milk.<sup>4</sup>

Even if in the current times lactants already have a greater level of knowledge about the benefits of breastfeeding, sociocultural aspects still have influence on the introduction of complementary foods before the recommended age.<sup>5</sup> According to the health ministry<sup>1</sup> complementation must be inserted from the sixth month of age.

Aspects like "lack of will or lazy breastfeeding" were also reported by the nursing mothers, as breastfeeding requires patience and technique, in addition to time and willing of it before the baby's needs. The mother does not feel breastfeeding as a pleasant gesture or has no notion of her importance for the newborn's health, giving up on exclusive breastfeeding before the child completes six months of age.<sup>3</sup>

Even with several rights guaranteed to working mothers by Brazilian legislation, the return to the work routine may lead to early weaning, as the maternity

**The influence of relatives can also generate a negative impact on the breastfeeding period, as those relatives press the Nursing mother to breastfeed the baby in accordance with their perceptions or knowledge about the subject through advises or examples, sometimes in favor, sometimes against the mother's will.**

license is offered for the period of few months. With the mother working away from home or for long periods, having to leave the baby in nurses or other places differing from their workplace, it becomes difficult that she find the baby in the intervals provided by the law and lay in the practice.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, the topic points to "aesthetics or vanity", as myths that "breasts get flacid" or that "fall after a long breastfeeding period" generate discomfort for the mother on breastfeeding.<sup>4</sup> The mothers are generally not guided on breast falls to be associated with incorrect support.<sup>10</sup> It is cited that women's body's self-perception both in pregnancy and in the breastfeeding period is a relevant factor, because body insecurity, breast sensualization and construction can discommend the woman's maintaining decision.<sup>6</sup>

The use of pacifiers or chambers can also reduce the time of breastfeeding, as the suck of milk by the baby is facilitated through the artificial nozzles and, when it is placed back to the breast, perceives that the amount of milk suggested by the breast less than by the breastfeeding, leading to the child's disinterest by breastfeeding.<sup>11</sup> Mothers are aware that the use of pacifiers and bottles is inappropriate, but they believe that accessories help to calm the baby and allow them to engage in other activities.<sup>12</sup>

The influence of relatives can also generate a negative impact on the breastfeeding period, as those relatives press the Nursing mother to breastfeed the baby in accordance with their perceptions or knowledge about the subject through advises or examples, sometimes in favor, sometimes against the mother's will.<sup>6</sup> It is verified that negative opinions from close people can lead the mother to have a wrong perception about the amount of milk she is able to produce.<sup>11</sup>

The "lack of preparation / knowledge" was the factor least mentioned by women, which is the most understandable as a potential cause of early weaning, since ignorance leads people to believe in myths more than in scientifically proven

factors. Thus, it becomes evident that the mother's knowledge on the subject is a determining factor in the continuity of breastfeeding practice.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the Nursing mother's biological and socio-cultural aspects, the level of training of health professionals must also be considered, because they are not always prepared to assist on the subject. In this perspective, nurse's conduct is fundamental, as it has a privileged role with regard to the aid in the breastfeeding process.<sup>4</sup> prenatal, postpartum and puerperium. It is noteworthy that the nurse needs to be aware of the real needs of the nursing mother and have sensitivity with regard to guidance on breastfeeding.<sup>11</sup>

Recently there was validation of the

content of the diagnostic addresses, results and nursing interventions contained in the international classification sub-assembly for nursing practice (CIPE) to assist the breastfeeding mom, to the baby and the family in the breastfeeding process and of the 98 nursing diagnoses/results, 50 were validated, and of the 396 nursing interventions presented, 350 received validation, but 52% of the statements of the subsets that were validated are related to the biological conditions, highlighting three concepts that have not had their statements validated: "Woman's body image", "the child's perception of breastfeeding" and "family and social authority".<sup>5</sup> This fact leads the reflection that even advances have occurred in nutrition assistance still devalua-

tion of approach and commitment to the needs expressed by nursing mothers.

## CONCLUSION

Sociocultural factors as myths and beliefs have been great negative influencers in the practice of breastfeeding, being potential causers of early weaning. It is very important to carry out more comprehensive studies on the subject with the purpose of developing actions to improve promotion, incentive and support for breastfeeding. Therefore, it is essential that health professionals know the context of life, culture and the environment in which the breastfeeder inserted, effectively clarifying her anxieties, doubts, fears and demystifying beliefs and myths that they carry. ■

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## Fluxograma das etapas de seleção de artigos nas bases de dados LILACS, BDNF e IBICS.

