Summary

Breast feeding is an unequalled way of providing ideal food for the healthy growth and development of infants, and has a unique biological and emotional influence on the health of both mother and infant. The anti-infective properties of breast milk helps to protect infants against disease, especially when the infant is exclusively breast fed for the first 4-6 months of life.

The koran provides clear rules governing breast feeding and the adoption of a wet nurse if for unavoidable reasons, the mother is unable to continue breastfeeding.

The aim of this study was to assess the effect of maternal counselling on the incidence and continuation of breast feeding.

This study was carried out on two groups of mothers, each group consisted of 50 primigravidas, attending the ante-natal department of obstetric and MCH Centers of Benha University Hospital. The first group was considered as study group, while the second was the control group.

An initial pilot study was carried out on ten mothers and "not included in the research sample" to assess mother's knowledge about breast feeding, and the revised form of this questionnaire was used twice, once as a pre-counselling during the ante-natal period and the another time as a post-counselling (1 week - 4 weeks - 8 weeks) post-partum. This was filled by the researcher. The data were collected over a period of six months, which started in first April 1998 and ended by 30 September 1998. A follow up was done for two months post-partum.
The counselling or teaching was delivered to the study group mothers during the ante-natal period and continued throughout the first two months post-partum. A hand out manual used by the researcher included all necessary information about breast feeding, was given only to the study group mothers to be used as a personal reference, after its content was explained to them.

The most important findings of the study could be summarized in the following points:

1- Most of the mothers in both groups aged between 20 - 35 years, at different educational level. (38%) of the study group were working mothers versus (28%) in the control group. The analysis of the above mentioned data showed no significant difference among the two groups. The study and control groups were considered well matched.

2- Although no significant difference was found pre- counselling between both groups, the analysis of post - counselling sessions revealed a statistically significant increase in knowledge in the study group (74%) in relation to pre counselling (28%).

3- The majority of mothers in both groups initiated breast feeding by the third day (85%) pre counselling versus (64%) in the study group initiated breast feeding immediately after birth post-counselling, and a statistical significant difference was observed among the two groups.

4- As regarding exclusive breast feeding, this study showed that 50% of infants received exclusive breast feeding in the study group, versus (14%) of the control group. However a significant difference was ob-
served between the two groups.

5- As regarding the practice of exclusive breast feeding between the working mothers, the study revealed that the higher percent of breast feeder was between non-working mothers (64.29%) in the study group.

6- Regarding the knowledge of breast feeding technique and breast care, the study revealed a statistically significant differences between the study and control groups after counselling.

7- The majority of mothers (74%) of both groups did not know the benefits of colostrum pre-counselling versus (72%) in the study group have improved knowledge post-counselling.

8- As regarding the knowledge of practicing milk expression, there is no statistical difference between both groups before counselling, while the difference was significant after counselling and the study group have improved knowledge (76%) versus (20) in the control group.

9- The study revealed that the knowledge about the concept of proper weaning was statistically non significant before and after counselling, and this need more concentration and teaching programs for weaning.

10- The results of this study have generally put into evidence the beneficial effect of a teaching and counselling program for mothers about breast feeding, and the positive impact of the study group to continue breast feeding.

It is necessary to follow up mothers and support them to reinforce and establish breast feeding.