


Original Research

The Economic Influence of Breastfeeding on the Health Cost of Newborns

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Abstract

Background: Breastfeeding provides health benefits for women and newborns. However, few studies have explored how these health benefits translate into economic savings.

Research aim: This study aimed to estimate the healthcare costs savings generated by exclusive breastfeeding for healthy newborns.

Methods: We designed a longitudinal two-group observational study that included healthy women and newborns ($N = 236$) in Toledo, Spain. Over the first 6-months of the infants' lives, we reviewed their clinical histories to determine their consumption of healthcare resources and the type of nutrition provided. The sample was categorized into two groups: exclusive breastfeeding ($n = 46$) and non-exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months ($n = 190$). Two-part regression models were applied to determine whether there were differences in healthcare costs between the groups.

Results: The average age of the women was 32 ($SD: 5.3$). The average birth weight of the newborns was 3.3 kg. ($SD: 0.38$). At 6 months, 19.5% ($n = 46$) of the women breastfed exclusively, 28.4% ($n = 67$) combined breastfeeding with formula, and 45.8% ($n = 108$) used formula only. Healthcare costs during follow-up reached €785.58 (44% for specialized care, 42% for primary care, 9.8% for medical emergencies, 3% for medications and approximately 1% for medical tests). The statistical analysis estimated a lower healthcare cost of between €454.40 and €503.50 for exclusively breastfed newborns.

Conclusion: Breastfeeding generated savings in healthcare costs; therefore, it could be a cost-efficient option compared with alternatives. Researchers who evaluate the efficiency of strategies that promote breastfeeding can contribute to the sustainability of health services.

Keywords

Breastfeeding, breastfeeding benefits, cost benefit analysis, exclusive breastfeeding, health services research.

Background

Breastfeeding is considered the best way to nourish and promote the proper development of a newborn by both the World Health Organization (WHO; 2009) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF; 2011), especially when breastfeeding is the exclusive source of nutrition. It has been established that breastfeeding provides multidimensional health benefits which favor the immunological development of the newborn (Bridgman et al., 2016; Palmeira & Carneiro-Sampaio, 2016; Petersen, 2017). In the short term, breastfeeding contributes to reduced morbidity and infant mortality and, in the long term, it is associated with better intellectual and motor development and the prevention of chronic diseases (Amitay & Keinan-Boker, 2015).

Breastfeeding provides many other benefits that extend to the rest of society. These benefits are described in recently

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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