

## Improving Breastfeeding in Saudi ArabiaThe Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative

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### Abstract

**Objectives:** Current evidence indicates low levels of extended breastfeeding among mothers in Saudi Arabia with breastfeeding rates of 92% at birth, declining to 51% and 10% at one and six months respectively. This study aims to identify determinants of infant feeding practices and strategies for improving breastfeeding rates in Saudi Arabia. **Method:** This prospective study will be carried out at two-matched healthcare facilities in Riyadh (BFHI-practicing versus BFHI-non-practicing). Randomly selected women at 38-40 weeks gestation will be enrolled (N=200 per hospital). Women of all educational levels, nationalities and ages will be included. Those with known contraindications to breastfeeding will be excluded. A pre-tested questionnaire administered prenatally and at one, three and six months postnatal will be used to collect demographic data, information on infant feeding practices, breastfeeding education and support prior to, during, and after birth. A survey of maternity staff practices on breastfeeding education and support will be conducted. Site visits will be conducted to both hospitals by researchers. **Results:** We have identified only two hospitals in Riyadh attempting to implement the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative. Preliminary data from these centers indicate that implementation of the BFHI Ten Steps has resulted in an increase in breastfeeding rates. It is expected that the results from this study comparing BFHI versus non-BFHI hospitals will identify factors that affect initiation and sustaining of extended breastfeeding rates as well as the implementation of the BFHI in Saudi Arabia. **Conclusion:** The findings of this study will facilitate the introduction of the BFHI as a strategy for improving breastfeeding rates in Saudi Arabia.

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