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ABSTRACT

Assessment of Exclusive Breastfeeding among Lactating Women Visiting Al-Remal Primary Healthcare Clinic in Gaza, Palestine.

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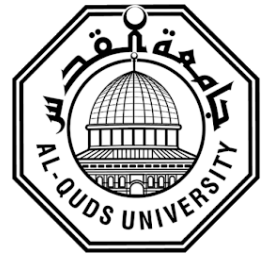
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Breastfeeding has many health benefits for both the mother and infant. Breast milk contains all the nutrients an infant needs for the first six months of life. Breastfeeding protects against diarrhea and common childhood illnesses such as pneumonia. It may also have long-term health benefits for the mother and child, such as reducing the risk of obesity in childhood and adolescence. Exclusive breastfeeding means that the infant receives only breast milk. No other liquids or solids are given – not even water – with the exception of oral rehydration solution or drops/syrups of vitamins, minerals or medicines. The results of the PMS study in 2013 show that exclusive breastfeeding in GS is 55%, meanwhile in WB it is 52.9%, and in the state of Palestine it is 53.9%. The World Health Organization estimates that around 220,000 children could be saved each year with exclusive breastfeeding. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that infants should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life to achieve optimal growth, development, and health. The Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding describes the essential interventions to promote, protect and support breastfeeding. In order to survive, grow, and develop properly, infants require the right proportion of nutrients. Breast milk is rich in nutrients and antibodies and contains the right quantities of fat, sugar, water, and protein. These nutrients are major prerequisites to the wellbeing and survival of the baby. When a child is exclusively breastfed, their immune system is strengthened, enabling it to prevent life-threatening illnesses like pneumonia and diarrhea amongst other infections. In fact, reports indicate that newborns who are not breastfed for the



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first six months of life are 15 times more likely to die from pneumonia compared to those who are breastfed exclusively for six months after birth.

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