

BEYOND THE BASICS: INSIGHTS ON BREASTFEEDING FROM EXPERIENCED MOTHERS

Dharshini Nadaraja¹, Nurul Wahidah Wagimon¹, Azlin Mohamed Ismail²,
Nur Azurah Abdul Ghani², Ixora Kamisan Atan², Azimatun Noor Aizuddin³

¹Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Hospital Canselor Tuanku Muhriz, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

²Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Faculty of Medicine, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

³Department of Public Health Medicine, Hospital Canselor Tuanku Muhriz, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Breastfeeding ensures optimal infant health and enhances maternal well-being. Despite all the initiatives, the breastfeeding trend in Malaysia is still declining mainly due to many mothers viewing breastfeeding as not convenient or desirable in the context of modern lifestyle, challenges with lactation, lack of support for working mothers, and certain misconceptions regarding breastfeeding. Our National Key Performance Index Set for exclusive breastfeeding for up to six months is 58%. However, based on the latest National Health Morbidity Survey in 2016, the achievement was about 47.1%.

OBJECTIVES

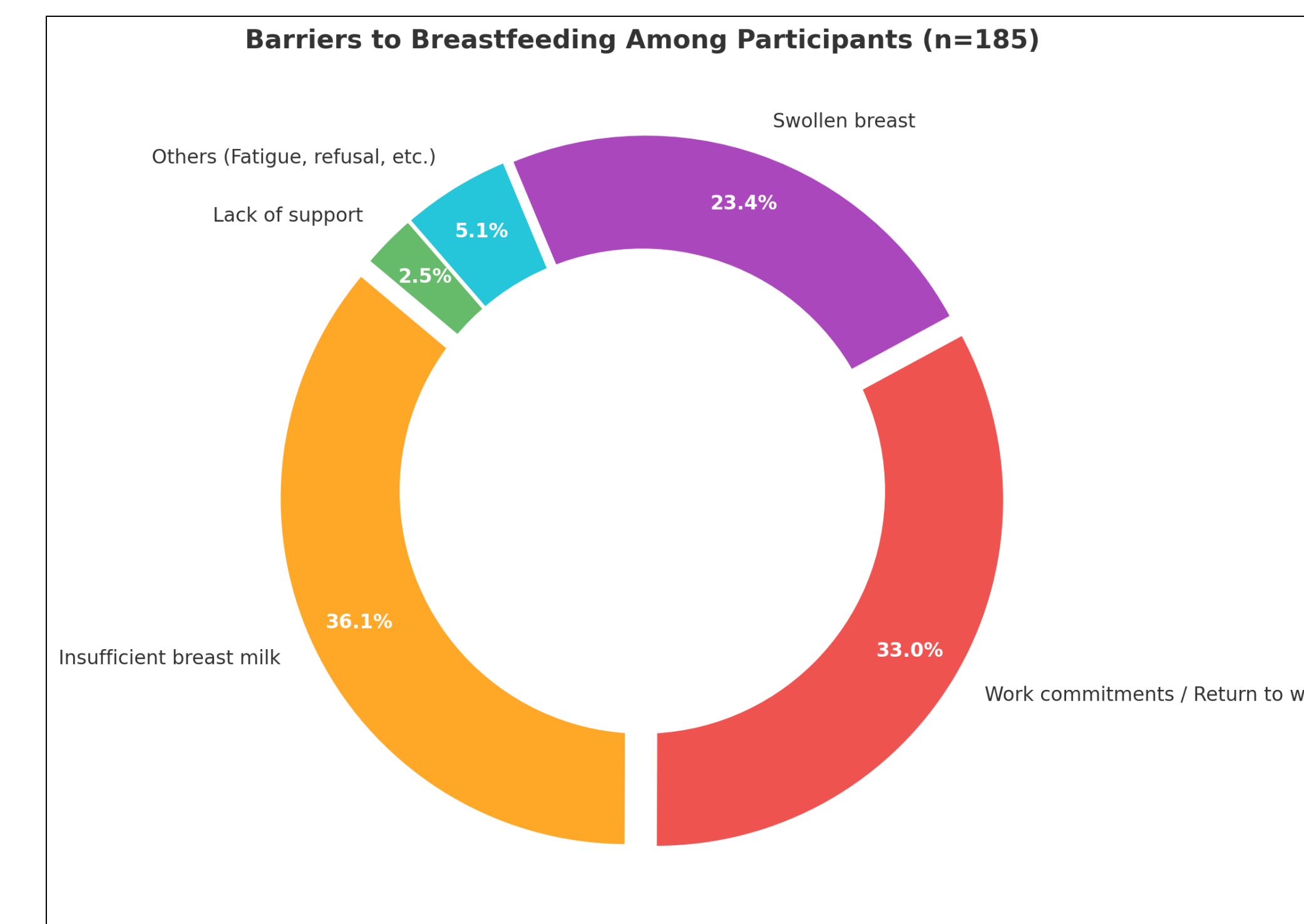
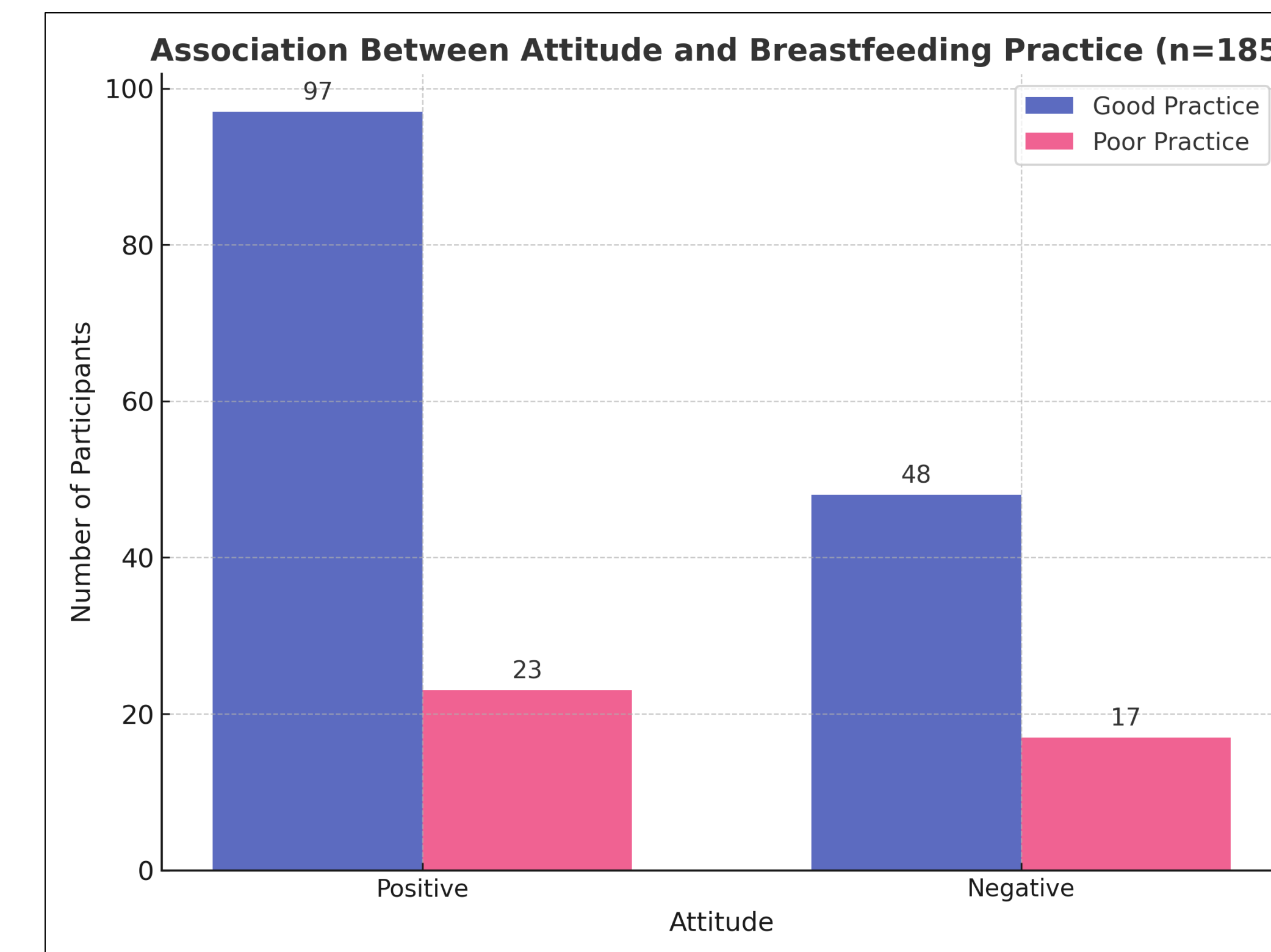
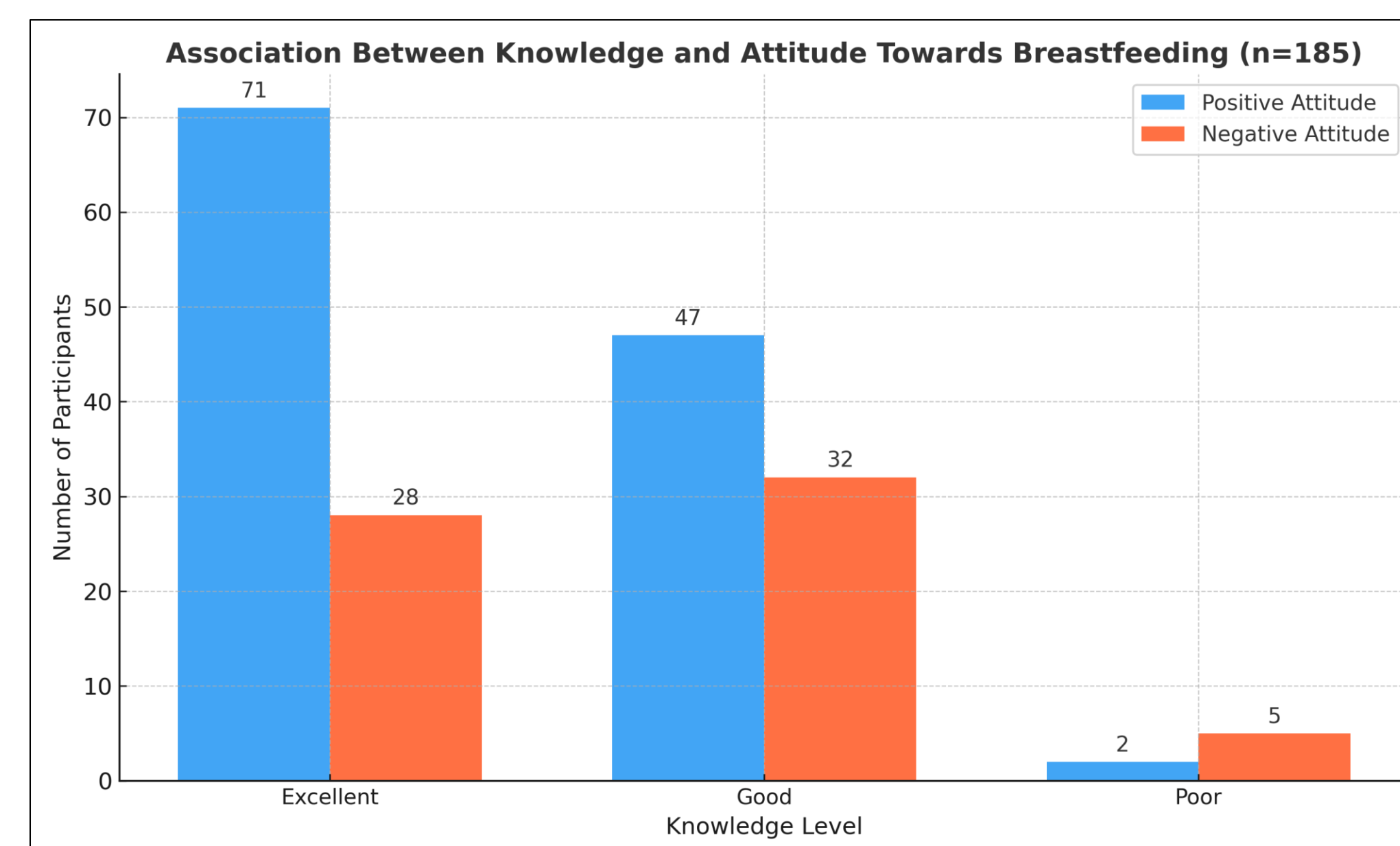
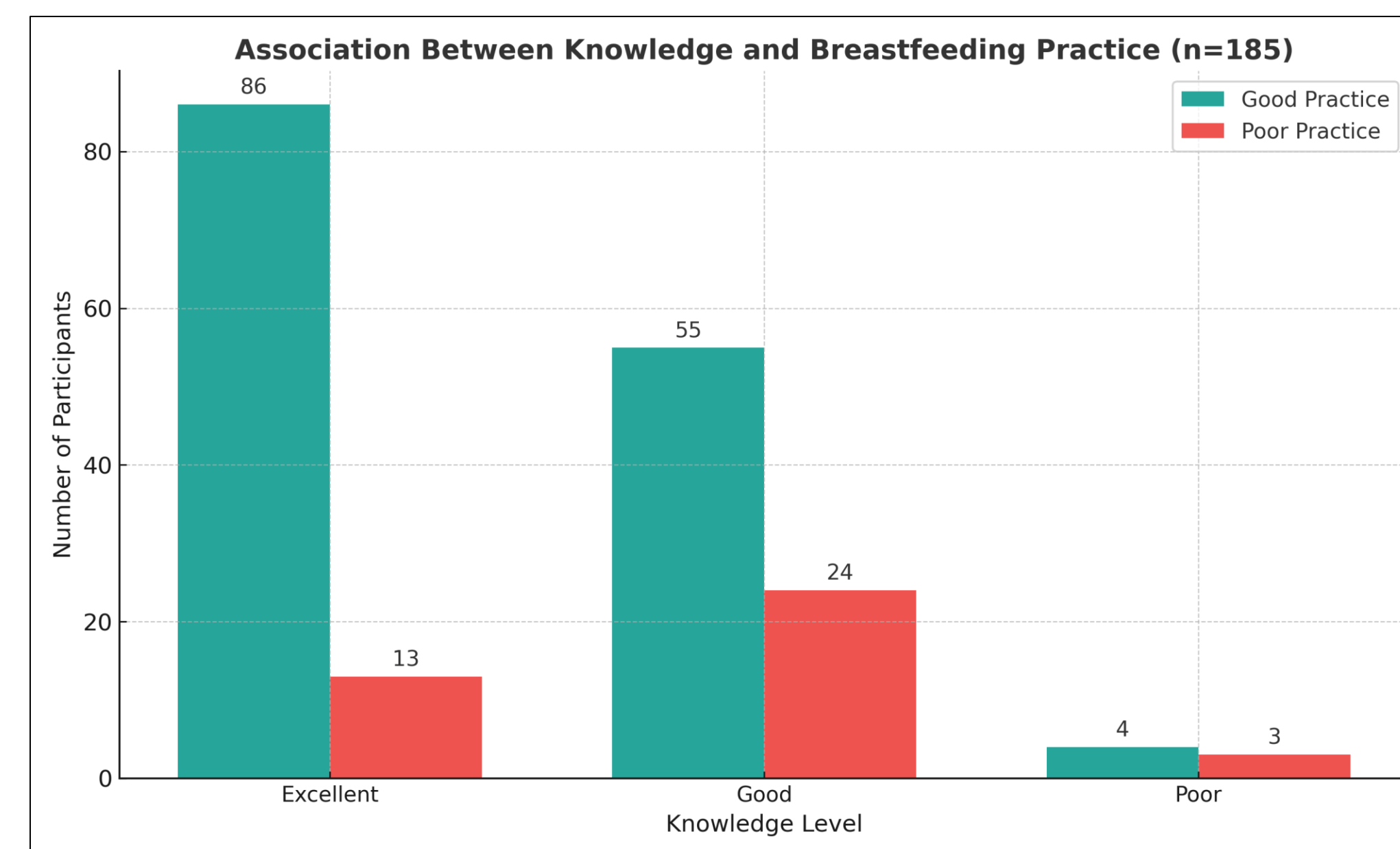
This study evaluates the knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding breastfeeding among multiparous women at a tertiary centre in Kuala Lumpur. It specifically looks at the relationship between knowledge and breastfeeding practices, assesses the correlation between attitudes and practices, investigates how knowledge and attitudes interact, identifies barriers to breastfeeding, and determines the prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding among participants. The research questions focused on understanding how knowledge influences breastfeeding practices, the correlation between attitudes and practices, attitudes held by knowledgeable mothers, barriers impacting breastfeeding, and the prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding within the department.

METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional study was conducted with 185 multiparous women who were either para two or above with live births. Participants were recruited during admission for delivery. Data regarding their breastfeeding practices in the previous pregnancy were collected via face-to-face interviews via structured, validated questionnaires assessing sociodemographic characteristics, knowledge of breastfeeding guidelines, attitudes towards breastfeeding, and actual breastfeeding practices. Knowledge, attitudes, and practices were evaluated using a Likert scoring system and statistical analyses to explore relationships among these variables.

RESULTS

The findings indicated that 59.3% of participants possessed adequate knowledge about breastfeeding and demonstrated good practices, while 59.2% exhibited positive attitudes towards breastfeeding. However, only 50.3% practised exclusive breastfeeding for the recommended duration. These results reveal a significant gap between knowledge and breastfeeding practices among multiparous women. The most commonly reported barrier was the perception of insufficient milk supply. This is due to the challenge of managing work commitments (38.4%) and return to work post-maternity leave (35.1%).



DISCUSSION

Only 50.3% of multiparous women practised exclusive breastfeeding, which is below the national target of 58%. The most common reasons for early discontinuation were perceived insufficient milk supply and returning to work, similar to findings in other Malaysian studies. Interestingly, even though 86.9% of participants had excellent knowledge, many still did not practise exclusive breastfeeding. This suggests that knowledge alone is not enough; attitude, support systems, and workplace challenges play critical roles. While higher education was linked to better breastfeeding knowledge and practices, the attitude-practice relationship was not significant. This highlights a need for interventions that not only educate but also build confidence and provide support. Support from lactation consultants, family, and workplace policies, for example, flexible hours, breastfeeding-friendly environments, are essential. Community-based breastfeeding support groups and social media outreach can further strengthen awareness and normalize breastfeeding.

CONCLUSION

The findings showed that although most of the multiparous women had a good knowledge about breastfeeding, their attitudes and practices nevertheless show clear discrepancies that can compromise optimal breastfeeding outcomes. These findings highlight the necessity of focused educational initiatives that improve multiparous women's attitudes regarding breastfeeding while increasing their knowledge.

REFERENCE

- Shohaimi NM, Mazelan M, Ramanathan K, Meor Hazizi MS, Leong YN, Cheong XB, et al. Intention and practice on breastfeeding among pregnant mothers in Malaysia and factors associated with practice of exclusive breastfeeding: A cohort study. PLoS One. 2022;17(1):e0262401.
- Tan KL. Knowledge, attitude and practice on breastfeeding in Klang, Malaysia. Int Med J. 2009;8(1):17–22.
- Tengku Ismail TA, Sulaiman Z. Reliability and validity of a Malay-version questionnaire assessing knowledge of breastfeeding. Malays J Med Sci. 2010;17(3):32–9.