

Extension project “Let’s breastfeed, Mom?”: Twenty-five years of existence

Mini review

Breast feeding is considered one of the most effective practices to provide a healthy alimentation to the child during their first years of life when associated with other socially and economically oriented measures, leading to the decline of infant mortality rates. This is one of the reasons why the Health Ministry of Brazil (Ministério da Saúde, MS), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), recommend exclusively breastfeeding in the first six months of life and as a complementary diet until two years of age or more depending on the desire of the nursing mother.¹⁻³

The “Vamos Amamentar, Mamãe? (Let’s Breastfeed, Mom?) Extension Project was created in 1993, through the initiative of one of the professors of the Undergraduate Nursing Course of the Health Department of the State University of Southwest of Bahia (Universidade Estadual do Sudoeste da Bahia, UESB), as a proposal of promotion, protection and support to breastfeeding in the community of Jequié and surrounding cities, to be developed along with the disciplines Nursing in Women’s Health Care and Nursing in Child and Adolescent Health Care. With the creation of new undergraduate courses at the UESB, such as medicine, physiotherapy, dentistry and pharmacy, the insertion of students and professors from these courses in the project has been possible and of great relevance. In addition, other participants from private universities and health professionals from the public and private services of the city of Jequié have been added.

The initial point for the elaboration and operationalization of the project were the observations made in the clinical stages during the follow-up of the students by the professor who idealized it. She noted the low importance attributed to breastfeeding by puerperal women and their families and by the health professionals who performed their activities in the hospital and basic units. In addition, the professor verified the difficulties verbalized by the nursing team professionals in dealing with the issues that involve breastfeeding.⁴

The project’s philosophy is based on the assumption that women need to be aware of the issues involved in breastfeeding so that they can decide whether or not to practice it. However, they must be respected in their decision, which requires that the health professional should understand and know about the clinical management of lactation, since breastfeeding is a natural act, not merely instinctive, as women need support, encouragement and assistance to breastfeed their children successfully.^{4,5}

Thus, the main objective of the project is to provide means to promote protect and support breast feeding in the community of Jequié in order to favor a possible social change in the subject at hand. In order to do so, problematizing methodology is used, valuing the previous knowledge of the community, incorporating ludic aspects (music, theatre, pedagogical psychodrama, drawings, collages, modeling, phrases and video presentation), incorporating these active methodologies as facilitators for the teaching/learning process. It promotes care for pregnant women, puerperal women and their families (follow-up in hospitals and basic health units and at home),

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through the participation of professors and students in healthcare courses. It is providing its share of contribution to the community of Jequié in the dissemination, promotion and protection of breastfeeding and its support, being considered of great relevance to the academic and extra academic community, in demonstrating the necessity and importance of breastfeeding for the health of the human being and conservation of the planet.

In a documentary study carried out by the members of the project, it was verified that, from 1996 to 2014, 8,932 this project performed educational activities and registration of puerperal women in private clinics, a public hospital and philanthropic center; 1,313 home visits, several workshops in groups of pregnant women, several lectures in the community, training courses in breastfeeding management, production of educational material, such as the booklet entitled “How to breastfeed successfully” and folders for publicizing the project’s actions.⁶

To publicize the actions of the project and as a way to improve communication among the members, a web page (www.uesb.br/vam), a Facebook page and a Whatsapp group were created. Among the actions developed during the project’s activities, the meetings on breastfeeding deserve special mention. The first meeting was held in 1994 and the last one in 2015. In these meetings, issues related to the various health areas were discussed, such as nursing, medicine, dentistry, physiotherapy, nutrition and psychology. During the development of the four meetings, the participation of a significant audience was noted, totaling an average of 800 participants.

Other activities developed through the project include: participation in the World Breastfeeding Week (WBW), with distribution of educational material, webcasting from the project’s own webpage, an interview at the city’s FM radio, construction of educational murals, and direct mailing for the health professionals of departments I and II. In addition, the members have been participating in several scientific events, presenting research on breastfeeding that are developed within the framework of the institutions in which the project operates. The results of these research activities have led the members of the project to propose actions aimed at improving the care of the families in process of breastfeeding they tend to. It is worth mentioning that several Monographs, Course Papers, Master’s Dissertations, Doctoral Theses, articles from Scientific Initiation and Post-Doctoral Projects

carried out in the Laboratoire de Psychologie Sociale, Université d’Aix-Marseille, Aix-en-Provence, in France, were carried out through the insertion of the project’s members.

Currently, the project is called Nucleus in Breastfeeding Studies, Research and Extension (Núcleo de Estudo, Pesquisa e Extensão em Aleitamento Materno, NEPEAM), since it has incorporated teaching and research activities among the activities that are developed. It consists of 10 undergraduate students, 2 graduate students, 05 professors, 2 health professionals and 4 undergraduate students from other higher education institutions.

During all these years of the project, the members faced many difficulties in carrying out their activities. Yet, they were all circumvented in the best possible way, since the commitment and responsibility of the members has always been a key point. It is noteworthy that other projects like this one have been developed in Brazil; however, none of them have an operation time as long and uninterrupted as the “Vamos amamentar, mamãe?” Extension Project.

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None.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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