



Quality of Maternal and Newborn Health Care Translating research into policy initiatives in the WHO European Region

Marija Čatipović, Josip Grgurić, Anita Pavičić Bošnjak, Milan Stanojević

Expert Team, UNICEF Office Croatia



Breastfeeding intention, attitudes and knowledge in secondary-school students in Croatia: how to improve?

Why did we decide to educate high school students on breastfeeding?



- It was an **evidence-based decision**
- What evidence?
 - The results of the research we conducted in 2016 (154 students (101 female/43 male) from two secondary schools in Bjelovar)*, which confirmed:
 - insufficient level of knowledge of high school students about breastfeeding
 - insufficient quality of their attitudes and intentions on breastfeeding
 - non-existence of a unique breastfeeding education program for all high school students; instead, current programs (where they exist) are based on a teacher's decision and design, they are not unified and they do not provide a sufficient level of knowledge and positive attitudes and intentions of students about breastfeeding
 - absence of validated tools for measuring the effectiveness of education programs for high school students
 - absence of evaluation of breastfeeding education in schools

*Research results are published: Čatipović, M., Voskresensky Baričić, T., Rokvić, S., & Grgurić, J. (2017). Adolescents' knowledge of breast-feeding and their intention to breast-feed in the future. *Children*, 4(6), 51.

What policy/ies and at what level are we focused on?



- In 2019, the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia rendered a Decision on Adopting a Curriculum for an Inter-subject Health Education Course for high schools in the Republic of Croatia, in which the topic of breast-feeding is taught as part of the "Physical Health" module – in cycle 5, with the expected teaching outcome of "taking care of and responsibility for reproductive health"
 - our research was conducted and the papers cited on the previous and the following slides were published before the Ministry decision and they contributed to the public debate on the Ministry decision for breast-feeding education to be included in the curriculum
- since the Curriculum for Educational program for an Inter-subject Health Education Course for high schools (which includes the topic of breast-feeding) has not been „translated” into a specific educational modul/program on how to teach about breastfeeding, we developed such program

What policy/ies and at what level are we focused on?



- We made 4-hour structured course on breast-feeding (one hour per semester in the final grades)

The first topic was Breast-feeding saves lives consisting of short video 'Five Facts about Breast-feeding', the analysis of student associations linked to photographs entitled '800,000 Lives', and the Famous People's Opinions on Breast-feeding'.

The second topic was on the importance of breast-feeding in a child's diet.

The third topic was on student attitudes towards breast-feeding.

The fourth topic was on student life choices dealing with intentions, effort and habits concerning breastfeeding.

- this program has (for now) been implemented as a pilot project (locally, in high schools in Bjelovar) and is still active in Bjelovar
- our intention is to implement it nationally: The educational course had been presented at the session of the Committee for Protection and Promotion of Breast-feeding of the Ministry of Health, held on 25.02.2020.

How did we translate evidence into policies?



➤ By collaborating with relevant stakeholders, advocating, developing the educational program and publishing papers in relevant journals

- Based on the research results, we participated through the activities of civil society organizations and professional societies in the initiative to introduce breastfeeding education in high schools.
- The initiative yielded results and the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia has included breastfeeding education in the curriculum (for an Inter-subject Health Education Course)
- The research also confirmed the lack of a unique tool for validating the effectiveness of educational programs and the general failure to evaluate the effectiveness of previous educational procedures. Therefore, the BIAKQ questionnaire was developed and validated, which was also published.

(Čatipović, M., Marković, M., & Grgurić, J. (2018). Development and validation of a questionnaire on the breast-feeding intentions, attitudes and knowledge of a sample of Croatian high school students. *Children*, 5(5), 56.)

- The paper confirmed that there is a lack of a quality and unique breastfeeding education program for all high schools, which means that in each school each teacher conducts education at its own discretion
- A breastfeeding education program tailored to the needs of high school students has been developed in cooperation with several professional teams. Its effectiveness has been confirmed in research, which has been published Čatipović, M., Voskresensky Baričić, T., Rokvić, S., & Grgurić, J. (2017). Adolescents' knowledge of breast-feeding and their intention to breast-feed in the future. *Children*, 4(6), 51., Catipovic, M., Markovic, M., & Grguric, J. (2018). Educational intervention about breastfeeding among high school students. *Health Education*.

Who were the involved stakeholders of this process



- Key actor: Association for a Healthy and Happy Childhood
- Relevant stakeholders:
 - Ministry of Health ➔ included the issue of students' education about breastfeeding in the National program for the protection and promotion of breastfeeding
 - Ministry of Science and Education ➔ gave approval for the conducting the research among students
 - UNICEF Office in Croatia ➔ UNICEF team for Baby-friendly maternity wards participated in the research/ supported our work (The leader of that team and my mentor in this work Professor Josip Grgurić)
 - County Teachers Council for Biology and Chemistry ➔ participated in creating a 4-hour structured course on breast-feeding
 - high schools in Bjelovar ➔ enabled the organization of education and student participation in research

What were the key activities?



- Assessment of the curriculum of the secondary school on breastfeeding topics
- **Setting-up the plan for the research with the aims, investigated group, preparation testing of the questionnaire, expected results, conclusions**
- Activities after the introduction of the course on breast-feeding to the curriculum of secondary school students in Croatia
- **Development, adoption and implementation of a single program on breastfeeding for all high school students in Croatia (still in progress)**

- *Bold - the most useful activities

The success of the initiative



Why was it successful?

- The management and staff of the public school were very eager to cooperate
- Students were very interested in the topic, cooperative, and interactive
- Examining the intentions, attitudes and knowledge of students with the BIAKQ questionnaire before and after breastfeeding education confirmed the effectiveness of the offered education program
- Help on defining the topics on breastfeeding to be discussed with the Committee on Breastfeeding of Ministry of Health was very important
- People involved in the creation of the curricula for secondary schools at the national level were cooperative

What were the constrains?

- Very busy administrative work-up with lots of constrains during planning of the research
- It was not easy to ensure intersectoral cooperation of governmental bodies
- Bureaucracy during the adoption of the curriculum

Lesson learned



- For introduction of structured and uniformed education on national level, stronger intersectoral cooperation is necessary
- decision makers e.g. (Ministries) should make additional efforts to initiate the actual introduction of structured and unified breastfeeding education in schools at the national level
- The need for flexibility and adaptability to unforeseen circumstances - Covid 19



The Beauty
of
Motherhood

