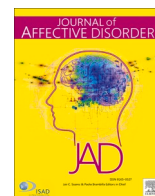




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Correspondence



In response to “COVID-19 is associated with traumatic childbirth and subsequent mother-infant bonding problems”

TO THE EDITOR: Dekel et al (2021) (Mayopoulos et al., 2021) have proven that COVID 19 is a major stressor for childbirth and postpartum, causing a lower bonding with the newborn and breastfeeding issues. These issues have been also observed in women who tested negative for COVID 19.

With regard to your interesting study, we would like to report our case experience at a “spoke” centre in northern Italy, Hospital “Sacra Famiglia”, Fatebenefratelli, Erba (Como). In Italy, hospitals are divided into two groups: “spoke” centres and “hub” centres. “Spoke” centres, i.e. hospitals are in charge of treating patients presenting simpler and milder cases. “Hub” centres, i.e. bigger health centres, are in charge of patients who require more advanced equipment and resources for the treatment. During the COVID 19-pandemic, northern Italy became sadly renowned for being one of the first cluster. We faced for the first time in the Western World the anxiety of crowded hospital, and our National Health System was close to collapse. Moreover, the first in Europe, our Prime Minister was forced to declare a national health emergency and to impose a lockdown with severe containment measures.

The “Sacra Famiglia” Hospital belongs to the global WHO/UNICEF Baby – friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) (WHO, 2018), which aims to ensure that mothers and infants receive timely and appropriate care before and during their stay in a birth point. This requires a set of early and appropriate care practices, and ongoing support from trained professionals. In Italy there are 451 birth points, among which only 30 belong to BFHI initiative. Belonging to BFHI initiative, the presence of the partner in labour and delivery was always guaranteed. Midwives have to provide personalized assistance to the pregnant woman (*personal attention*), creating a protective environment, providing her with psychological support, giving her peace of mind and reassuring her about the conditions of the foetus.

Table 1

Years	2019	2020	OR (CI 95% OR)
Skin-to-Skin contact (SSC) for at least 1 hour	535/590 (90.6%)	458/507 (90.3%)	1.04 (0.69-1.56)
Early Bonding to breast within first 2 hours	522/590 (88.4%)	456/507 (89.9%)	0.85 (0.58-1.26)
Exclusive breastfeeding upon discharge	440/531* (82.9%)	381/478* (79.7%)	1.23 (0.89-1.69)
Complementary breastfeeding upon discharge	67/531* (12.6%)	68/478* (14.3%)	0.87 (0.60-1.25)
Avoiding breastfeeding	24/531* (4.5%)	29/478* (6.0%)	0.73 (0.42-1.27)

* The following are considered non-physiological: preterm, low weight infants, newborns or mothers with severe pathologies

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The Hospital recorded 590 childbirths for 2019 and 507 for 2020. At the admission, pregnant women had to undergo a checklist and a nasopharyngeal swab test, and positive women were transferred to the hub centre. We considered the following outcomes: the skin-to-skin contact (SCS) for at least 1 hour, early bonding to breast within first 2 hours, exclusive breastfeeding upon discharge, complementary breastfeeding upon discharge and avoiding breastfeeding (Table 1). For what concerns breastfeeding, according to BFHI guidelines, we have excluded non physiological cases, such as preterm birth, small for gestational age or severe pathologies of newborn or mother. Odds ratio analysis demonstrated that the differences between the exposed population (2020) and non-exposed population (2019) were not statistically significant for all outcomes with the 95% confidence interval (CI) overlapping the null value (OR = 1).

We hypothesize that this emotional support led to no changes between 2019 and 2020 in relation to breastfeeding and bonding with the newborn. Thereby the childbirth experience was less stressful, although everybody was facing a one time in life pandemic.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

A. Inzoli: Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing. A. Zanini: Conceptualization. M. Miglietta: Data curation. U. Zanini: Formal analysis, Investigation. M. Terraneo: Data curation.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

Acknowledgment

none

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