

## The father's participation in the breastfeeding process

Dear Editor,

The timely publication of an excellent article by Silva *et al.*<sup>1</sup> on the influence of the father's participation in the breastfeeding process brings to light the necessity to reflect on a very relevant topic, which is the importance and the role of the father, especially during the first six months of the child's life, a period in which all efforts should be directed towards feeding the child exclusively with breastmilk. The relationship between the father and breastfeeding has been studied sporadically and, unfortunately, the results of these studies have not been given the importance they deserve in terms of contributing to the success of breastfeeding.

Although the undeniable benefits of breastmilk and the practice of breastfeeding for the child, mother, family and society have been known for a long time<sup>2,3</sup> and various strategies have been adopted, such as the *Política Nacional de Aleitamento Materno* (National Breastfeeding Policy), the *Iniciativa Hospital Amigo da Criança* (Baby-Friendly Initiative Hospital), the Human Milk Bank and the *Norma Brasileira de Comercialização de Alimentos* (Brazilian Standard Food Marketing), it can still be seen that both the prevalence and duration of breastfeeding are below the parameters that are considered appropriate and desirable, making it clear that all efforts must be combined and directed towards achieving this goal.

Several studies have highlighted the important role that fathers can play with breastfeeding mothers in a variety of ways and situations.<sup>4,5</sup> Whether it is simple attitudes such as taking on daily household chores together with or in place of their partner, reducing their physical and emotional effort, providing more time to spend with the child and strengthening the mother-child-father bond, or demonstrating understanding, acceptance, affection and kindness with motivating actions and words<sup>6</sup> that can contribute in giving the mother more security. These attitudes have been shown in being a great importance both for starting and maintaining breastfeeding for longer periods of time.

Parents also benefit from these attitudes. There has been an improvement in the quality of life and a high level of satisfaction among parents, who see themselves exercising their family role to the fullest, monitoring the development and growth of their children in good health and also contributing to the child's emotional structure.<sup>7,8</sup>

For this purpose, it is important to emphasize that it is necessary to involve parents in this mission. Health care services, especially at the primary level, it is necessary to be prepared and able to offer guidance and opportunities so that fathers are capable and safe to take part in these moments with the mothers and children, through activities such as group meetings, individualized and/or family care and educational campaigns, especially for younger fathers and fathers who have just had their first child.<sup>9,10</sup>

In this regard, it should also be noted that such services can be included and offered in traditional primary health care programs such as Prenatal Care, Antenatal care and Child Care, in which the father's participation is always desirable and should be encouraged and facilitated, including legal actions that can support those fathers that work. The benefits of these programs will certainly be verified and reversed so that better health and living conditions can be achieved for the whole family.

### Authors' contributions

All the authors participated in the drafting of the letter to the editor and approved the final version. The authors declare no conflict of interest.



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