

ADVERTISEMENT

Recruitment for the post of Research Assistant on temporary basis for the study on 'Best practices that support exclusive breastfeeding in preterm neonates less than 32 weeks of gestation and their outcome at the initial discharge from hospital, in selected Neonatal Units in Sri Lanka conducted by the Intranatal and Newborn Care Unit, Family Health Bureau

Duties and responsibilities

- Co-ordination with the relevant hospitals to identify study participants
- Data collection – Collect data on all eligible very preterm and extremely preterm newborn mother pairs delivered during the data collection period in the selected hospitals, as per the
 - i. Hospital Data Extraction Form
 - ii. Week 1 Interviewer administered questionnaire for mothers (to be completed within 48 hours of birth)
 - iii. Week 2 onwards, weekly - Interviewer administered questionnaire for mothers
 - iv. Interviewer administered questionnaire for Nursing officer in charge of Neonatal Unit
- Support with data entering.

Desired qualifications and experience for the post

- Pre-intern medical graduate with M.B.B.S. qualification
- Hard-working and motivated individuals
- Ability to work with Microsoft Office applications (Word, Excel, etc.)
- Previous experience in scientific research, data collection, data entry and analysis will be preferred.
- Good command of English and Sinhala and/or Tamil languages.
- Excellent communication skills
- Ability to work independently and within a team

Candidates residing close to the respective hospital is preferred.

Duration

- For a period of four (4) months (15th May 2025 – 15th September 2025)

Nature of work:

- **Full time/ part time:** Full time
- **Place of work** :

One Research Assistant will be assigned for Castle Street Hospital for Women and De Soysa Hospital for Women

One Research Assistant for German Sri Lanka Friendship Hospital for Women, Galle

One Research Assistant for PGH Badulla

One Research Assistant for TH Batticaloa

One Research Assistant for DGH Chilaw – If the number of eligible newborns are very low, work will be assigned at the Intranatal and Newborn Care Unit at Family Health Bureau.

- **Working hours per day:** Eight (8) hours - 8.00 am to 4.00 pm

Monthly remuneration: LKR. 85,380.00

(Basic salary – LKR 68,380.00 + Cost of living allowance -17,000.00)

Candidates are requested to email an updated CV including copies of relevant documents, and contact details to newbornunit.fhb@gmail.com before 05.05.2025.



United Nations Children's Fund | Sri Lanka Country Office

3/1 Rajakeeya Mawatha, Colombo 07.

Telephone: (94) 11-267-7550 | Facsimile: (94) 11-267-7110 | colombo@unicef.org | www.unicef.lk

Ref: H&N/2025/10

19th January 2025

Dr. Chandima Siritunga,
Director Maternal and Child Health,
Family Health Bureau,
Ministry of Health

Dear Dr Siritunga,

Best practices that support exclusive breastfeeding in preterm neonates less than 32 weeks of gestation and their outcome at the initial discharge from hospital, in selected Neonatal Units in Sri Lanka

This refers to your letter FHB/INBU/Preterm EBF/2025 dated 16th January 2025 to the UNICEF Representative to Sri Lanka requesting support to document the Best practices that support exclusive breastfeeding in preterm neonates less than 32 weeks of gestation and their outcome at the initial discharge from hospital, in selected Neonatal Units in Sri Lanka, as discussed and agreed at the technical advisory committee on Newborn and Child Health.

We understand that this is a very important documentation, that would enable identifying the best practices in selected neonatal units in the country, to support breastfeeding the preterm newborns. This exercise would enable identification of supportive practices that support feeding the most vulnerable newborns, which in turn can be used as a document to guide the other neonatal units in the country to strengthen their own practices.

Given the national importance of this documentation which would follow an assessment in the identified units, UNICEF is happy to provide technical and financial support to conduct this assessment. The costs for data collection, data analysis and report writing can be covered through UNICEF funds.

Looking forward to support this nationally important work,

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Abner Daniel
Health and Nutrition Manager
UNICEF, Sri Lanka

Terms of reference (TOR) for the recruitment of six pre-intern medical graduates on temporary basis for the study on 'Best practices that support exclusive breastfeeding in preterm neonates less than 32 weeks of gestation and their outcome at the initial discharge from hospital, in selected Neonatal Units in Sri Lanka', conducted by the Intranatal and Newborn Care Unit, Family Health Bureau

Background and Justification

Sri Lanka, having universal healthcare and emphasis on maternal and child health, has managed to reduce neonatal and infant mortality rates considerably. Prematurity was the largest contributor to neonatal mortality in Sri Lanka from 2017 – 2019, of which 50% contribution was from extreme preterm births.

Preterm birth, particularly very preterm (28 weeks – 31 weeks + 6 days) and extremely preterm (<28 weeks), is a significant public health issue across the globe. These children have a greater risk of death and long-term health issues due to the immaturity of their organ systems. Nutrition also plays a critical role in improving survival and developmental outcomes in this high-risk group, and exclusive breastfeeding has been recognized as a cornerstone of care in neonatal intensive care units (NICUs).

Exclusive breastfeeding of preterm infants has numerous short and long-term benefits. Breast milk, particularly the mother's own milk (MOM), has essential nutrients, bioactive substances, and immune protection, which is crucial for the preterm infant to grow and develop. It is shown to reduce the risk of necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC), late-onset sepsis, and chronic lung disease and to cause better neurodevelopmental outcomes. Moreover, the amount of breast milk consumed has been positively associated with early behavioural neurodevelopment in extremely preterm infants, emphasizing its utmost significance in neonatal care. Furthermore, unpasteurized maternal breast milk has been associated with improved growth outcomes in extremely preterm infants.

Despite these benefits, exclusive breastfeeding of very preterm and extremely preterm infants remains a challenge. Preterm mothers are often faced with the challenges of physical and emotional stress, limited lactation support, and less-than-ideal breastfeeding policies within NICUs. It has been shown that individualized support systems, such as counseling and staff encouragement, are instrumental in facilitating mothers to initiate and maintain breastfeeding during NICU hospitalization.

Currently, there is no mechanism for national surveillance for hospital-based practices known to support breastfeeding among very and extremely preterm neonates. There are no publications on breastfeeding among preterm neonates in Sri Lanka except for Hassan et al who describes better outcomes when fed breastmilk within the first 24 hours. Considering these findings, it is crucial to investigate the best practices that enable exclusive breastfeeding in very preterm and extremely preterm infants in Sri Lankan neonatal care units. This study aims to delineate the best practices to support exclusive breastfeeding of very preterm and extremely preterm neonates in Sri Lanka in addition to their outcomes at the time discharge from the hospital. These results will provide

significant evidence to influence the policy and programs to support exclusive breastfeeding in babies born less than 32 weeks of gestation.

Activity

Descriptive follow up study will be carried out in Castle Street Hospital for Women, De Soysa Hospital for Women, Sri Lanka German Friendship Hospital for Women, Teaching Hospital/ Batticaloa, Provincial General Hospital/ Badulla and District General Hospital/ Chilaw.

It will be implemented for a period of four months from 15th of May 2025 to 15th September 2025. All eligible very preterm and extremely preterm (<32 weeks) newborn mother pairs, delivered in the hospitals with selected Neonatal Units during the study period will be recruited into the study on day one of life.

Data will be collected prospectively from all eligible very preterm and extremely preterm newborn mother pairs delivered during the data collection period, throughout the hospital stay by trained data collectors by interviewing mothers, Nursing Officer in charge of Neonatal Unit and perusing medical records and maternal health records. A hospital data extraction form will be used to collect information on mothers and newborns via medical records. Medical problems of the newborns will be gathered on weekly basis.

Data analysis will be conducted using descriptive statistics. Continuous variables will be summarized with means and standard deviations or medians and interquartile range. Percentages will be used to describe categorical variables. Newborn outcomes will be described in relation to maternal and neonatal characteristics.

For these activities, additional human resources are required for data collection, and performing data entry. A pre-intern medical graduate is needed at each hospital to handle the following duties and responsibilities for a period of four months.

Duties and responsibilities

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NB :

- The selection of pre-intern medical graduates will be conducted via interviews, with final decisions made by the Family Health Bureau, Ministry of Health.
- The pre-intern medical graduate is eligible only for the benefits specified by the Ministry of Health or the funding agency, with no additional privileges or claims.
- The Director, Maternal and Child Health reserves the right to adjust or amend the scope of work as needed.


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Director, Maternal and Child Health
Family Health Bureau

Date: 29.04.2025


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Dr. Nethmini Thenuwara
Coordinating Consultant

Date : 29.04.2025

Director Maternal and Child Health
Family Health Bureau
231, de Seram Place,
Colombo - 10.