

Parental perception and experience in a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) in South East England during Covid-19 pandemic

Francis Akor, Oghenetega Edokpolor, Bushra Muhammad, Osayuwamen Egharevba, Shiranthi Jayasekara, Helen Gbinigie
Oliver Fisher Neonatal Unit, Medway Maritime Hospital, Gillingham, Kent, UK

Introduction

Family Integrated Care programs show benefits like improved weight gain, decreased parental anxiety and depression, increased parent-infant bonding, higher breastfeeding rates. This progress in neonatal care has been impacted by the covid-19 pandemic in neonatal units due to restrictions in visitation and face covering use.

Aim

To find out parental experience and perception of how these restrictions impacted upon their involvement in their baby's care, parent-infant bonding, and mental health

Methods

Paper based questionnaires were mailed to parents of babies admitted to the unit during the pandemic period between March 2020 – February 2021 (period included two national lockdowns).

Local policies and implementation of restrictions limited visitation to one parent per day. As more information about Covid-19 became available, we enabled joint parental access to their baby 24 hours a day ensuring a family centred approach, while ensuring the safety of all service users and staff.

The questionnaire was mainly close ended questions with some free text open ended questions.

The questions included, but not limited to parental involvement in their baby's care, use of facemask, bonding with infant, their mental well-being and support they received from staff during their time in the NICU during the lock down period.

Results

- 32 responses were analysed.
- Less than half felt visitation policy affected care of babies.
- 47% felt policy affected partners involvement in their infant's care.
- 12.5% of respondents self-isolated due to covid-19 exposure with negative impact on parents.
- 80% who self-isolated felt well supported by staff.
- 50% felt use of facemask affected bonding with their baby.
- Only 28% were aware of visor as alternative to facemask.
- Telephone updates on baby's progress, online baby photos and videos helped mental wellbeing.

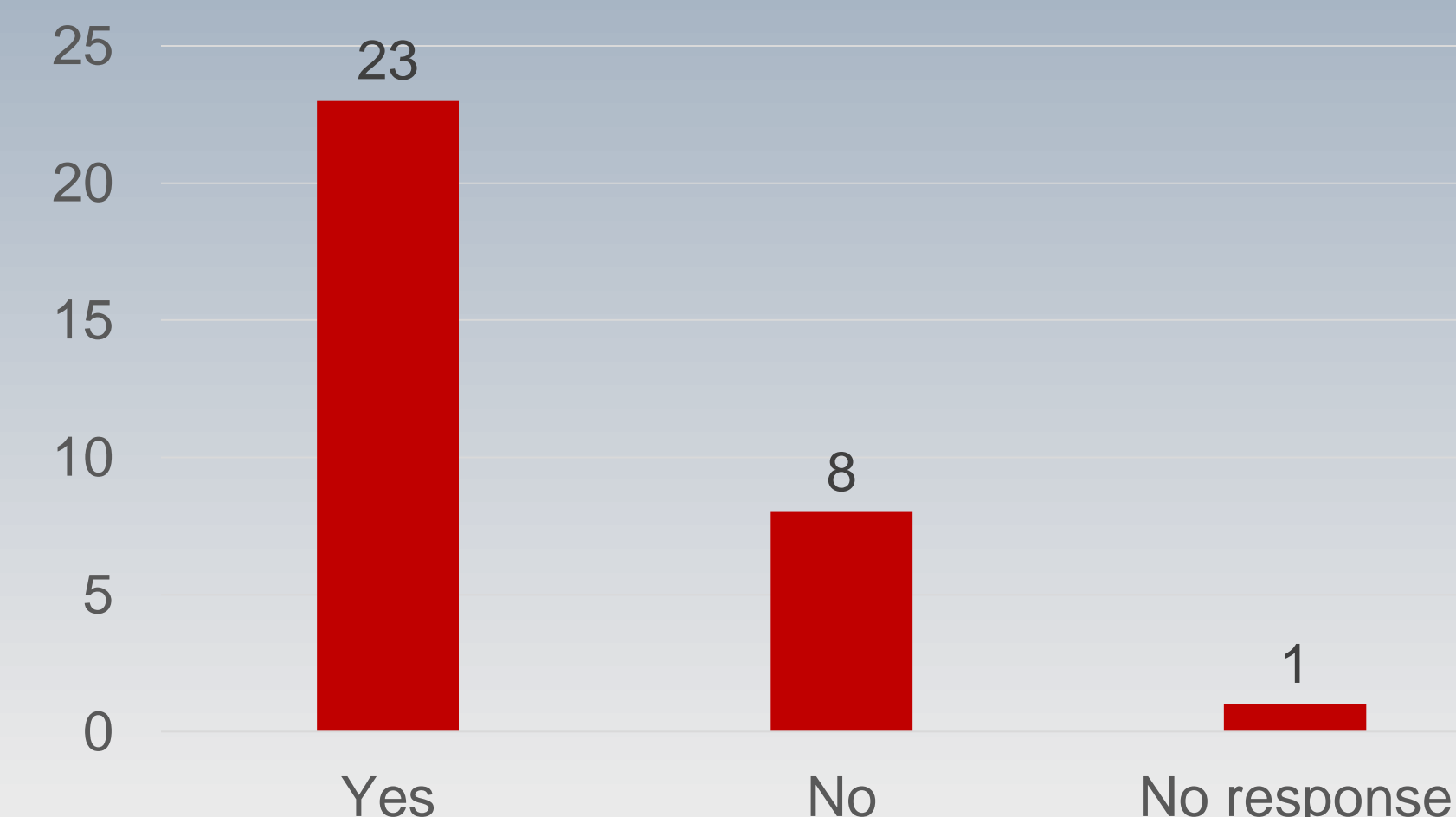


Fig.1 Feeling of mental well being supported by staff

Conclusions

- Restriction policies put in place from March 2020 in NICU were well received by parents.
- Most understood the need for restrictions and felt it did not negatively impact overall care of their babies.
- Use of face masks and self- isolation significantly impacted on child-parent bonding, parental wellbeing and mental wellbeing.
- The results of our study showed that a less restrictive visitation policy impacts positively on parental and infant outcome as against tight restrictions on parental visitation.
- This would need to be taken into account in preparation for future disruptions/lockdowns due to covid -19

References

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