

A STUDY ON INFANT FEEDING PRACTICES IN DIFFERENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRATA

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ABSTRACT

Breast feeding is the basic foundation which has a significant impact on child's health and development. It not only helps the baby start healthy, but also helps build a very unique and strong emotional bonding between the mother and her child. Depriving infants from this invaluable nutrition leads to various undesirable consequences. The main objectives of the paper is to stimulate interest among young women to realize the relevance of breast feeding in today's changing world, to review the perception on breastfeeding of mothers belonging to different socio-economic strata, to find the impact of breastfeeding in disease prevention and its effect on individual's and nation's economic productivity, to protect and ensure environmental sustainability, to call attention of health care professionals on the importance of setting up effective health policies to protect and support breastfeeding at public and work places. This research paper adds to the existing literature on breastfeeding that is recognized as an important health issue with social and economic implications. Breast feeding offers protection against infectious diseases related morbidity and mortality in infants and children. Both physical as well as mental development are associated with productivity and economic growth of an individual and hence the country. In addition to providing invaluable benefits to infants, breastfeeding is also beneficial for the mothers. Women who breastfeed have known to have a lower incidence of hip fracture after menopause, ovarian and premenopausal breast cancer and less postpartum bleeding. Owing to all these benefits, healthcare professionals, all over the world, strongly recommend breastfeeding. Supporting new mothers, especially during pregnancy, hospital stay and early post discharge, regarding early initiation, correct positioning and attachment is crucial for successful breastfeeding. The proposed research will suggest some measures in the same directions to make the would be mother aware of the health benefits of breast feeding for her child and herself. Besides the research would also be a platform for the learnt persons to seek the attention of health care professionals to make and implement effective and friendly laws promoting breast feeding.

Keywords-Breast feeding, Infant, Socio-economic strata

I INTRODUCTION

Adequate and appropriate feeding practices are crucial for the optimal growth and development of infants and young children. Infant feeding practices comprising of both the breastfeeding as well as complementary feeding have major roles in determining the nutritional status of the child. Breastfeeding has been identified by the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organisation as the single most effective and affordable feeding practice that should be adopted for good infant health and improved survival.[11]Evidence suggests that

breastfeeding alone can improve the chances of survival of a new-born by 44% if initiated within the first hour after birth.[9] Unfortunately, recent global statistics show that only 43% of new-borns were breastfed within the first hour of birth, thereby increasing negative consequences to the infants.[10] When a mother is not able to feed the baby with her own milk, then the baby is given artificial feed like the milk of the cow, buffalo or dried milk.

Weaning is a process of gradually shifting the baby's diet from milk to the cooked, liquid or solid foods. As the infant grows in age, there is a rapid development of the baby and there is a correspondent increase in his nutritional requirements. Therefore, complementary feeding is extremely essential from the six months of age, while continuing breast-feeding, to meet the growing needs of the growing baby. Globally, breast feeding has the potential to prevent about 800,000 deaths among children under five each year if all children 0-23 months were optimally breastfed. Early initiation of breast feeding could prevent about one fifth of neonatal deaths, but less than half of infants are put to the breast within one hour of birth. WHO recommends that all infants should be exclusively breast fed for the first six months of life but actual practice is low (38%).[12]

Poor feeding practices in infancy and early childhood result in malnutrition contribute to impaired cognitive and social development, poor school performances and reduced productivity in late life. Despite the various efforts by Government of India in collaboration with the international Agencies, the breast feeding rates are declining in India.[8] The breast feeding practices vary among the different regions and communities in India. Hence an effort was made to study the different feeding and weaning practices for a child in different socio-economic strata and the effects of these practices on the child.

II METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire method was used for carrying out the research project in selected field. An interview schedule was prepared to collect the required information and was administered to the respondents personally. Data were collected from 152 respondents, belonging to low, middle and high income groups, residing in Ferozepur District. A random sampling technique was used to select the respondents. Data thus collected were coded, tabulated and percentages calculated.

III RESULTS

From the results, it was found that women belonging to lower income groups were not much aware about the importance of feeding and weaning practices of the child. Details of the results have been presented in table 1.

Table 1:

Distribution of 152 respondents according to type of feeding

Feeding	HIG (n=50)	MIG (n=46)	LIG (n=56)
Breast feeding	28 (18.04%)	14 (9.2%)	32 (21.1%)

Artificial Feeding	10 (6.6%)	14 (9.2%)	14 (9.2%)
Both	12 (7.8%)	18 (11.08%)	10 (16.6%)

HIG = High Income Group

MIG = Middle Income Group

LIG = Low Income Group

It is evident from the table that respondents belonging to the low income 21%, middle income (9.2%) and high income (18.41%) preferred breast feeding to their babies. This information was obtained using a very basic method of statistical information. It was found that 50% women have given breast feed to their babies, 25% women have given only artificial feeding to their babies.

We tried to find the reason of not giving breast feed to their babies by 25% women. It was found that the women who were working and those who cannot breast feed their babies due to ill health, lack of milk, come under the category of giving artificial feed. And the women of lower class who focus more on working, neglect their children's breast feeding so their babies are fed artificially.

The results are encouraging because the babies who are breast fed do not suffer from stomach ailments as it is light and they show rapid development because mother's milk contains all the required nutrients but it is a cause of serious concern that some mothers (25%) give artificial feed to their babies and thus deprive them of the precious milk of mother and their interference level is low. Mothers who do not breast feed their babies may suffer from breast and ovarian cancer and osteoporosis.

It was also noted that 93% women know the importance of breast milk. Only 30% women of the lower class are aware about the importance of breast feeding. Human milk is the optimal source of nutrition for the infant and young children and has bioactive components that safeguard infant growth and development. It not only helps the baby start healthy, but also helps build a very unique and strong emotional bonding between the mother and her child.[1,2] Depriving infants from this invaluable nutrition leads to various undesirable consequences.[5] Infectious diseases, particularly, diarrhea and respiratory tract infections, contribute significantly to infant mortality.[4] But the majority (66%) women of lower class do not know importance of breast milk because of lack of awareness as they are uneducated.

While asking for the importance of breast milk, we also noted that 85% women feel that breast feed helps to maintain their body figure and general health. It was found that 75% women give feed to their babies by taking them in lap and others feed their babies by lying down.

We have attempted to find out that whether women have given first milk (Colostrum) to their babies and whether they know the impact of colostrum. Eighty four percent women have given first milk to their babies, out of which only 30% belong to lower class.

Eighty three percent women know the impact of colostrum. Colostrums, known as liquid gold produced by the mother during the first few days after delivery, provides essential nutrients as well as antibodies to boost the

baby's immune system, thus reducing the likelihood of death in the neonatal period .Beyond saving lives, early initiation of breast feeding promotes stronger uterine contractions, reducing the likelihood of uterine bleeding. Fewer than half of new born globally are put to the breast within the first hour of the birth, though early initiation of breast feeding is higher in least developed countries(52% in 2011).[7]Studies show that the babies who have taken colostrums do not suffer from diseases and show rapid development because it contains globins, proteins and anti bodies and it stimulate the digestion.

But the babies who are not given colostrums are deprived of all the necessary nutrients present in it and show low development. Studies show that women who have not given colostrums to their babies may have some pain in their breasts.

The survey also made an attempt to find the number of times the babies are given feed and whether they (women) have prepared schedule of their feeding. Data are given in table 2.

Table 2

Distribution of respondents on the basis of number of times the babies are given feeding

Options	Frequency	Percentage
4 Times	48	31.6%
5 Times	38	25.0%
6 Times	36	23.7%
7 Times	30	19.7%

It is evident from the table that 64% women feed their babies on demand and others have prepared a schedule of the feeding. Thirty one percent women give feed 4 times a day and 19% women give 7 times a day. Rest of the women varies from 5 times to 6 times a day. Women, who are working, give feed 4 times because of the shortage of time and the poor people, due to the unavailability of food, give minimum feeding to their babies.

We have also surveyed the type of artificial food given to the babies and how it is modified before giving to the child and whether the women know the nutritive value of artificial milk. Data are provided in table 3.

Table 3 Distribution of respondents according to artificial feed given to the baby

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Cow's milk	28	18.4%
Buffalo's Milk	90	59.2%
Dried Milk	34	22.5%

Fifty nine percent women give buffalo milk, out of which 30% are of lower class 48% give cows milk while others prefer dried milk. Cow's milk is light and contains less fats than buffalo's milk. But due to unavailability of cow's milk buffalo's milk is preferred. Dried milk is equally beneficial as it is made by supplementing it with vitamin D and Iron.

Sixty five percent women give milk to their babies after boiling, others by adding water while the women of the lower class give milk without modifying as they are unaware of the modifying methods. Eighty nine percent women know the nutritive value of artificial milk, out of which 70% are of lower class.

Studies lay emphasis on some precautions which are to be taken while modifying the milk like cleanliness, otherwise the child may suffer from infections.

Then we discussed the weaning practices. In this, we tried to find out the age when supplementary foods are started. Data are given in table 4.

Table 4: Distribution of 152 respondents on the basis of age of starting supplementary food

Age options	HIG (n=50)	MIG (n=46)	LIG (n=56)
4 months	12 (7.8%)	8 (5.2%)	4 (3%)
5 months	18 (11.8%)	14 (9.2%)	14 (9.2%)
6 months	20 (13.11%)	24 (15.8%)	38 (25%)

These supplementary foods help the children to develop the habit of taking food with a spoon and the required nutrients for the development of children are obtained by introducing supplementary food in the diet, as it is shown by studies.

The table 5 shows that mostly daal and fruit juice are given daily by high and middle group women. Khichadi is given weekly and sujkheer monthly. But due to poverty, the people of lower class are unable to give fruit juice and daal daily. More ever, they are uneducated and so they are unaware of the value of these supplementary foods.

Studies shows that these supplementary foods affect the child's development as fruits and vegetables provide iron, vitamin C and carbohydrate and prevent constipation. By introducing such supplementary foods, a complete nutritious diet can be provided to the child.

Vitamins and minerals are essential nutrients required for our body as they prevent many deficiency diseases.

The survey was also conducted to know about the effects of artificial foods on child's health and the type of these effects. Data are provided in table 6.

Forty two percent women feel that the artificial food i.e. packed food, fast food, tinned food, cold drinks etc. affects the child's health. Fraudulent advertisements are the main reason.

Table 5 Distribution of respondents according to behavior about supplementary food

Food	Daily				Weekly				Monthly			
	L	M	H	Total	L	M	H	Total	L	M	H	Total
Veg Soup	9 11.8%	5 6.5%	8 10.5%	22	1 1.3%	6 7%	12 45.8%	19	1 1.3%	3 3.9%	2 2.6%	6
Khichari	6 7.8%	5 6.5%	3 3.9%	14	7 9.2%	11 14.4%	15 19.7%	33	2 2.6%	5 6.5%	1 1.3%	8
SujiKheer	2 3%	5 6.5%	6 7.8%	13	1 1.3%	8 10.5%	12 15.8%	21	4 5.2%	2 2.6%	3 3.9%	9
Fruit Juice	6 7%	14 18.4%	16 21%	36	2 2.6%	5 6.5%	6 7.8%	13	1 1.3%	1 1.3%	2 2.6%	4
Dal	15 20%	16 21%	17 22.05%	48	3 3.9%	1 1.3%	3 3.9%	7	1 1.3%	-	1 1.3%	2
Dalia	6 7.1%	8 10.5%	15 19.7%	29	5 6.5%	7 9.2%	8 10.5%	20	5 6.5%	3 3.9%	-	8

*multiple response

Table 6 Distribution of respondents who know the effect of artificial foods

Effect	Frequency	Occasionally	Rarely
Vomiting	6	26	42
Diarrhoea	8	14	44
Cold and cough	24	38	24
Other	-	4	34

The effect of vomiting may be because the child finds it difficult to digest artificial food. Other effects are due to carelessness in cleanliness while preparing the food because it causes infection.

Seventy nine percent women feel that artificial food affect the weight and height of the child, 86% women know the requirement of food stuff for the babies and 14% do not know it. About 32% respondents belonging to LIG know the requirements of food stuff for the babies.

IV CONCLUSION

The study was made in an attempt to understand the feeding and weaning practices among the women and children. It was found that the awareness level among the women of lower class was not satisfactory. Health experts advise that breast feeding is necessary for every child. New evidence confirms that optimal breastfeeding could save 823,000 child lives from acute and chronic disease, save 20,000 mother lives from breast cancer and add \$302 billion to the global economy annually. The fact that some women skip their children's breast feeding is the cause of concern.

Studies show that breast feed is very important to increase the power of babies to fight against diseases and the mothers who do not breast feed their babies may likely suffer from breast and ovarian cancer. The survey indicates that the frequency of giving breast feeding in lower class is low because they do not know the importance of breast feeding.

The survey further shows that babies who have taken colostrum do not suffer from disease because it contains all the nutrients like globulins, proteins and anti bodies. The survey indicates that the lower class women do not know about the important of colostrum and thus deprived their babies of the colostrum.

Moreover, the women of lower class do not know the nutritive values of food and they feed their babies with whatever is available with them.

So their babies do not get all the nutrients in required amounts and suffer from certain diseases and show low development.

The study shows that buffalo's milk is useful for baby after boiling because it has very high nutritive value. Cow's milk is light and easily digestible but due to non availability of cow's milk, buffalo milk is preferred after modifying.

The survey indicates that supplementary foods are started at the age of 6 months and these help the baby to develop the habit of taking food with a spoon. Moreover, weaning practices are healthy practices because fruits, vegetable etc. contains a variety of nutrients. But the children who have taken artificial foods are prone to disease such as vomiting, fever, diarrhea in the starting. These weaning practices also effects the weight and height of the child. It shows that majority of women know the requirement of foodstuff for the baby.

The survey shows that these weaning and feeding practices are sufficient for a healthy diet and thus for the proper development of the child. But the awareness level among the women of the lower class about the proper breast feeding and other feeding and weaning practices are not significantly good.

V SUGGESTIONS

There is a great need for awareness about infant feeding and weaning practices among the lower socio-economic class women. For this purpose, Seminars and workshops about feeding and weaning practices should be conducted in the rural areas. Owing to all these benefits, healthcare professionals, all over the world, strongly recommend breast feeding, breastfeeding is also economical due to the reduced healthcare costs (due to less illness) and saved time and wages lost while attending an ill child. Breastfeeding also contributes to a more productive workforce because mothers miss less work to care for sick infants. Employer medical costs are also lower Thus, breastfeeding should be promoted among mothers. Supporting new mothers, especially during pregnancy, hospital stay and early post discharge, regarding early initiation, correct positioning & attachment is crucial for successful breast feeding. There are five circles of support from which a mother should get assistance for breast feeding. A woman is surrounded by these circles of support which are Family and Social Network, Workplace and Employment, Government or Legislation, Healthcare and Response to Crisis or Emergency. Therefore, awareness regarding the benefits of breastfeeding is the utmost requirement of current situation.

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