

Breast Feeding Practices Among Rural Mothers of Delhi

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In India for the past many centuries breast milk has been the sole food for babies. However, due to modernization, increasing urbanization, exposure to artificial baby foods and feeding bottles, commercial advertising, west trained health professionals, hospital delivery and the changing cultural image of 'motherhood', there has been a decline in breast feeding especially in cities, towns and urban slums.

Nothing can be more damaging to a child's health than the discontinuation of the practice of breast feeding, as it protects the child from higher incidence of gastrointestinal and respiratory infections, obesity in infancy, iron deficiency anaemia, allergy disorders, increased athero-sclerosis in adult life, etc.

WHO and the UNICEF have for the last three decades been emphasising the importance of the practice of breast feeding.

Material and Method

A study was carried out in six villages of West Delhi from October, 1991 to September, 1992 to find out the popularity of the practice of breast feeding. Such surveys and studies are part of the community health training for the nursing students at the Rural Health Train-

ing Centre, Najafgarh.

About 20 percent mothers, selected randomly from six villages of the Najafgarh block were interviewed through house to house contact, and their answers were recorded on a predesigned proforma prepared by the Nursing students of Lady Reading Health School, Delhi.

Observations

A total of 600 mothers in the age group of 16 to 40 years were interviewed. 14 per cent of the mothers were below 20 years, 72.3 percent were between 20-30 years and 13.7 per cent were between 31-40 years. All mothers had breast-fed their babies. The average number of children per woman was found to be 2.2. Fifty two (9 per cent) mothers said that they had discarded their colostrum, thinking that it is harmful for the new born and usually causes constipation, vomiting and other digestive problems. Eight mothers discarded the colostrum at the advice of older women of the society without having any knowledge regarding its harmful or beneficial effects. Four mothers (0.7 percent) kept squeezing out their breast milk for 3-14 days as some customary rituals could not be performed by some of the relatives due to their late arrival. Breast feeding was initiated within 6 hours by 52.6 per cent of the mothers, while 22.7 percent mothers started between 6-24 hours of delivery, and 12.7 per cent and 11.3 per cent mothers initiated breast feeding on second and third day respectively. In 47.4 per cent cases the first breast

feed was delayed beyond 6 hours and the first feed given to the new born was either cow's milk (2.3 per cent), 'Ganga' water (3 per cent), sugar solution (18.7 per cent) or honey (37.3 per cent).

The literacy status of the mothers ranged from illiterate to post graduate standard. Out of 600 mothers, 28.7 per cent were illiterate and 44 per cent were educated up to middle class. Most of the mothers, irrespective of their literacy status, opined that breast feeding should be continued till the child demands. Few primipara could allow breast feeding beyond one year (4.6 + 6 per cent) due to early pregnancy or sickness, while (22.6 per cent) multipara, had breast fed their third child for more than one year (See Table 1).

Discussion

Hundred per cent mothers have breast fed their babies in the rural community covered under the survey, however initiation of breast feeding varied from 52.7 per cent starting within 6 hours, to 0.7 per cent starting beyond third day of delivery. Katiyar, et al have observed that 71.4 per cent and 70.6 per cent mothers initiated breast feeding on second and third day respectively and colostrum was discarded by 9 per cent of the mothers. But Mahapatra, et al have observed that 92 per cent of the rural mothers of Orissa discarded their colostrum.

It was observed that the third child was breast fed for more than one year. A study by Kalra, et al indicated that

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33.72 per cent mothers fed their babies up to one year only, as compared to 49.3 per cent according to the present study.

81.6 per cent of the mothers in the present study were of the opinion that weaning should be started before six months of age. But Jaiswal, et al noted in their study that only 17 per cent of mothers start weaning before 6 months.

In conclusion it can be said that 9 per cent rural mothers were ignorant about the beneficial effects of colostrum, irrespective of their literacy status. The mothers were, however, well aware of the healthy practices of early weaning.

Table I
Duration of Breast Feeding and its Relation to Parity

Parity	Number	Less then 6 months	7-12 months	13-24 months	Above
1st Child Primipara	174 29%	5 0.8%	137 22.8%	28 4.6%	4 0.6%
2nd Child Para -2	188 31.3%	106 17.7%	38 6.3%	30 5%	14 2.3%
3rd Child Para -3	238 39.7%	64 10.7%	38 6.3%	116 19.3%	20 3.3%
Total	600 100%	175 29.17%	121 20.1%	266 44.3%	38 6.3%

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