



Breastfeeding and weaning practices among the Dogra women of the two villages of district Samba (J&K)

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Abstract

Breastfeeding is a cost effective way of feeding an infant, and provides the best nourishment for a child at a small nutrient cost to the mother. Thus, the breastfeeding not only prevents the new-born from the diseases but also promotes their health. Breast milk also contains immune components, cellular elements and other host-defense factors that provide various antibacterial, antiviral and antiparasitic protection. Breast-milk also stimulates the appropriate development of the infant's own immune system. Breastfeeding is also important for mother as it delays the return of fertility through lactational amenorrhea. The study was conducted with the objective of understanding the breast feeding practices, supplementary feeding practices, semi-solid foods given and weaning practices among the two villages Amwal and Thalori of District Samba, Jammu and Kashmir. The schedules were used to conduct in-depth interviews with 40 mothers who had at least one child below the age of 5 years. It was found during the study that 97.5 per cent of respondents breastfed their children and in 20.6 per cent, it continued up to 2 years of age, the maximum (38.4 per cent) frequency of breastfeeding was 2 to 3 times a day, 62 per cent respondents were influenced by their mothers-in-law regarding infant feeding practices, 50 per cent respondents started supplementing breast milk from 0 to 3 months, cow's milk was the first supplement given by 79 per cent mothers, *dalia* (porridge) was the first semi-solid food given by 55 per cent mothers. The study revealed that though a large number of children were breastfed but the mothers who could not breastfeed their children used traditional methods to treat the problem. As far as weaning is concerned many unconventional methods were used by the respondents.

Keywords: breast feeding, supplementary feeding, semi-solid foods, weaning

Introduction

In most situations human breast milk is the best source of nourishment for human infants, preventing disease, promoting health and reducing health care costs. Breastfeeding is a cost effective way of feeding an infant, and provides the best nourishment for a child at a small nutrient cost to the mother. Frequent and exclusive breastfeeding can delay the return of fertility through lactational amenorrhea, though breastfeeding is at best an imperfect means of birth control.

The government of India recommends that children should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life (that is, the child should be given only breast milk and nothing else, not even water) and that children should be given appropriate and adequate complementary feeding in addition to continued breastfeeding from six months of age ^[1]. Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended because breast milk is uncontaminated and contains all the nutrients necessary for children in first few months of life. Early supplementation is discouraged for several reasons. First, it exposes infants to pathogens and increases their risk of infection, especially disease. Second, it decreases infants' intake of breast milk and therefore suckling, which reduces breast milk production. Third, in a harsh socioeconomic environment, supplementary food is often nutritionally inferior ^[2].

Research Methodology

The present study was carried out in the two villages Amwal and Thalori of District Samba, Jammu and Kashmir. The unit

of study for this research was woman who had at least one child below the age of 5 years. The study is based on the data collected from 40 respondents. The interview schedules were used to collect the data.

Results

Colostrum is generally referred to as the first milk. It has been found that the 62.8 per cent of the mothers squeeze the first milk from the breast before initiating breastfeeding ^[3]. On asking the respondents about the colostrum, 72.5 per cent respondents told that colostrum was given by them, 25 per cent respondents squeezed out the colostrum (because of the view that it is harmful for the baby) and remaining 2.5 per cent never breastfed their children.

On this background respondents were asked about their knowledge about breastfeeding, 97.5 per cent of the respondents told that they breastfed their children and remaining 2.5 per cent told that they never breastfed their children due to insufficient milk.

It is a well-established fact that the early initiation of breastfeeding helps to develop a bond between mother and the baby. It ensures secretion of colostrum which is highly nutritious, prevents neonatal infections and reduces maternal post-partum bleeding, stimulates contraception and expulsion of placenta and helps to establish breastfeeding successfully. On asking the respondents about the initiation of breastfeeding, 46.1 per cent of the respondents told that they started the breastfeeding within 6 hours of delivery, 12.8 per

cent respondents told that they started within 6 to 12 hours, 20.6 per cent started breastfeeding after one day, 12.8 per cent of respondents started after two days and 7.6 per cent started breastfeeding after 3 days. It was observed that the lactating mothers in both the villages avoided eating cold foods and working in cold water.

Both duration and frequency of breastfeeding can affect the length of postpartum amenorrhoea. It is important that breastfeeding is continued for two years or more because breast milk provides useful amount of energy, good quality protein, and other nutrients [2]. The respondents were asked about the duration for which they breastfed their children, 15.4 per cent breastfed their children for less than 3 months, 12.8 per cent for 4 to 6 months, 10.3 per cent for 7 to 9 months, 10.3 per cent for 10 to 12 months, 20.6 per cent till the age of 2 years and remaining 5.1 per cent till the age of 3 years. On asking the respondents about the frequency of breastfeeding, 38.4 per cent respondents told that they breastfed their children about 2 to 3 times a day, 35.8 per cent about 4 to 5 times a day, 7.6 per cent about 6 to 7 times a day, 12.8 per cent about 8 or more times a day and remaining 5.2 per cent only breastfed their children on demand.

On asking the respondents about the breastfeeding at night, 92.3 per cent of the respondents told that they breastfed their children at night and remaining 7.7 per cent did not breastfed at night. The respondents who breastfed at night were asked about the frequency of breastfeeding at night, 8.4 per cent breastfed only once at night, 55.6 per cent breastfed 2 to 3 times, 2.7 per cent breastfed 4 to 5 times, 8.3 per cent breastfed more than 5 times and remaining 25 per cent breastfed on demand only.

One of the important observations made during the study was that the villagers associated crying of child for long and not breastfeeding properly with evil eye. It was avoided to take the child out of the house in initial days after birth. There were certain ways used by the villagers to treat the evil eye. It was believed that throwing seven stones toward the backside of the child could treat evil eye. The other ways as told by the villagers was tying a *riaru* (a black thread) around the wrist and ankle of the small children, rotating the dry red chillies over the head of the child for seven times and putting into fire. If it produced smell, then it is not a case of evil eye but if it produced no smell, then it is considered to be a case of evil eye. The respondents also visited various traditional healers for the treatment of evil eye. Some people called it as *shora* and went to healer for treatment. Most of the healers took the name of the saint who blessed them with the power and prepared the sacred thread which is tied around the neck of the child.

Infant feeding practices have significant effects on both mothers and children. On asking the respondents about the person who influenced their infant feeding practices, 62 per cent respondents told they were influenced by their mother-in-laws, 17 per cent by their mothers, 10 per cent by doctors, 9 per cent by their neighbours and 2 per cent by husbands.

The purpose of supplementary feeding is to complement the breast milk and sustain the growth and development of the child. On asking the respondents about the age at which they started supplementing breastfeed, 50 per cent of the respondents told that they started supplementing breastfeed

from 0-3 months, 25 per cent of them started at 4-6 months, 5 per cent at the age of 7-9 months, 15 per cent from the age of 10-12 months and remaining 5 per cent started after one year. The data shows that the introduction of liquids other than breast milk takes place earlier than the recommended six months. It is clear from the data that maximum respondents started supplementing breastfeed from 0-3 months. The various supplements include *dal ka paani* (water in which pulses are boiled), *peesh* (rice water), soups, cow's milk and buffalo's milk. Cow's milk was the first supplement given by 79 per cent respondents to their children, 13 per cent gave *dal ka paani* and rest 8 per cent gave *peesh*. There were 45 per cent of the respondents who told that they diluted the cow's milk which they gave as a supplement, 35 per cent did not dilute the cow's milk and rest 20 per cent did not give cow's milk at all to their children.

15 per cent of the respondents gave buffalo's milk to their children and rest of the respondents did not give buffalo's milk and it was given after diluting it with water in the ratio of 1:1. On asking the respondents about the utensils with which the supplementary food were given, 80 per cent of the respondents told that used bottle to give the supplementary feeds to the children, 17.5 per cent of the respondents used the spoon to feed and remaining 2.5 per cent respondents used glass to feed the children.

Out of the respondents who used bottle for supplementary feeding, 53.5 per cent boiled the bottle every time they fed their children, 26.6 per cent boiled the bottle in water twice a day and rest of the time washed it with the cold water, 10 per cent boiled the bottle once a day and rest of the time washed it with cold water, 6.6 per cent washed it only with the cold water and 3.3 per cent of respondents boiled the bottle after every 2-3 days and rest of the time washed it with cold water.

The term weaning is used to denote the process by which an infant changes from breast milk to a mixed diet. It is shifting of the child from breast feeding to other forms of nourishment. Weaning may be partial or complete. Partial weaning starts when breast milk is supplemented with other liquid, semi-solid and solid food. Complete weaning is considered to begin only when a child is totally detached from breast's milk.

On asking the respondents about the reasons for weaning, 44.5 per cent respondents told that the child was enough breastfed, 33.4 per cent respondents told that there was not enough milk, 8.3 per cent respondents told that they were pregnant again with second child, 5.6 per cent respondents told that they were ill and stopped breastfeeding on doctor's advice, 2.6 per cent respondents told that illness of child was the reason behind weaning and 5.6 per cent of mothers were still breastfeeding. On asking the respondents about the method of weaning, 72.5 per cent respondents told the weaning should be slow process and 27.5 per cent respondents told that it should be abrupt.

The various methods of weaning used by the villagers were:

- Application of red nail polish on the nipples to scare the child.
- Application of the paste of bitter leaves on the nipples so as to make the breast milk taste bitter.
- Application of red chillies powder on the nipples.
- Introduction of supplementary feed to the children.

WHO recommends the introduction of solid or semi-solid food to infant around the age of six months because by that

age breast milk is not sufficient to maintain a child's optimal growth^[2]. *Dalia* (porridge) was found to be the most common of all the semi-solid foods given to the children. 55 per cent of respondents gave *dalia* as the first semi-solid food, 25 per cent gave Ceralac, 15 per cent gave *kheer* (rice porridge) and rest 5 per cent had not started semi-solid foods. Other common semi-solid foods given were *khichri*, *suji* (semolina), *saagu dana* (sago) etc. 2.6 per cent of the respondents started giving the semi-solid foods from the age of 0 to 3 months, 52.6 per cent from the age of 4 to 6 months, 13.1 per cent from the age of 7 to 9 months, 7.8 5 from the age of 10 to 12 months and 23.9 per cent after the age of 1 year.

Conclusion

97.5 per cent of the respondents breastfed their children. In maximum cases breastfeeding continued till the age of 2 years. The frequency of breastfeeding was scheduled to 2 to 3 times a day. Breastfeeding practices were mostly influenced by mother-in-laws. Various non-conventional methods (like application of red nail polish, paste of bitter leaves, chillies powder on nipples) of weaning were adopted apart from supplementary feeding. The concept of evil eye was very strong in the two villages and the faith healers were visited to cure the effect of evil eye.

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References

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