

**Knowledge, awareness and breast-feeding practices**

<sup>1</sup>Dr Thakur Vikrant Anand, <sup>2</sup>Dr Shweta Singh

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Pediatrics, Subharti Medical College, Meerut

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Gynecology, Index Medical College, Indore

**Corresponding Author:** Dr Shweta Singh, Assistant Professor, Department of Gynecology, Index Medical College, Indore

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**Abstract**

**Background:** Breastfeeding is one of most important determinants of child survival, birth spacing, and prevention of childhood infections. The importance of breastfeeding has been emphasized in various studies.

**Materials and methods:** The cross sectional study was conducted on Mothers with infants less than 1 year who came to immunization center for vaccination were included in the study. Total 500 mothers include in this study.

**RESULTS:** Only 38% of the mothers did the exclusive breastfeeding until 6 months and started weaning after 6 months. A total 56%of mothers in our study prematurely started weaning . Only 6% mothers continued to breastfeed the baby even at 9 months.

**Conclusion:** The study emphasizes the need for breastfeeding intervention programs especially for the mothers during antenatal and postnatal check-ups. The information regarding the advantage and duration of breastfeeding need to be provided for the community as a whole.

**Keywords:** Breastfeeding , Weaning , Infants, Mothers, Immunization

**Introduction**

Extensive research in various countries has provided evidence that breastfeeding clear health benefits for infants as well as mother.

UNICEF and WHO recommended that children be exclusively breastfed during the first six months of life. Breast milk is uncontaminated and contains all nutrients necessary for children in the first few months of life. The first breast milk is known as colostrum, which has highly nutritious and has antibodies that protect the newborn from disease.

Many infants, in addition to breast milk, are given something else from an early age, such as water, tea or milk. These other food can lead to malnutrition due to inadequate nutritional content and intolerance, which increase infants morbidity and mortality rates. In India, breastfeeding appears to be influenced by social, cultural and economic factors. In 1991, breastfeeding promotion network of India (BPNI) was born to protect, promote and support breastfeeding. Further, the government of India has undertaken National Rural Health Mission, which intends to implement Integrated Management of Neonatal and Childhood Illnesses

(IMNCI) through the existing healthcare delivery system. Poor practices and attitude towards exclusive breastfeeding are especially important in developing countries with high levels of poverty, and that are characterized by a high burden of disease and low access to clean water and adequate sanitation.

Breastfeeding is one of most important determinants of child survival, birth spacing, and prevention of childhood infections. The importance of breastfeeding has been emphasized in various studies<sup>1,2</sup>. The importance of immunological and nutritional value of breast milk has been demonstrated<sup>3,4</sup>.

The beneficial effects of breastfeeding depend on breastfeeding initiation, its duration<sup>5</sup>. Breastfeeding practices vary among different regions and communities in India, breastfeeding in rural areas appear to be shaped by the belief of a community, which are further influenced by social, cultural, and economic factors. Thus, the present study was developed to examine the infant feeding practices, knowledge, and attitude towards breast feeding among postnatal mothers.

**Materials and methods**

The cross sectional study was conducted on Mothers with infants less than 1 year who came to immunization center for vaccination were included in the study. Total 500 mothers include in this study. Verbal consent was obtained. Those who are not willing to participated were excluded.

**Inclusion criteria**

- Mothers of neonates born between 37 weeks to 40 weeks gestation
- Mothers of healthy neonates who are not admitted in NICU
- Mothers of babies not with major congenital birth defects.

The pre-tested questionnaire included various factors that had a potential effect on the initiation and duration of breastfeeding practice. The questionnaire included socio-economic and demographical data, details on the initiation and duration of breastfeeding .A pre-test run was done to validate questionnaire .for socio-economic status , a standard of living index <sup>6</sup> was used that can be used for both urban and rural backgrounds.

**Statistical analysis used:** data analysis was done according to descriptive statistics.

**Results**

Percentage distribution of study population by socio demographic characteristic

Total participants=500mothers

Table 1: Socio demographic profile

	Groups	Number	Percentage
Age of mothers	<21 years	120	24
	21-25 years	300	60
	26-30 years	48	9.6
	>30 years	32	6.4
Formal education	none	180	36
	Primary to secondary	230	46
	college	90	18
employments	working	118	23.6
	Not working	382	76.4
Socio economic status	low	180	36
	medium	220	44
	high	100	20
parity	one	320	64
	two	80	16
	three	74	14.8
	More than three	26	3.2

In our study, the majority of the mothers were between the ages of 21 and 25 years old(60%). About 36% of mothers were illiterate and 36% belonged to low socio-economic class. The majority of mothers were housewives(76.4%)and mothers who were employed were(23.6%). Most of the mothers initiates breast feeding (98%)and the others(2%)were not able to initiates due to separation from mother or due to advice from the mother-in-law.

A total of 36% mothers initiates breastfeeding within 30 minutes with normal delivery and 44%mothers delay of 2 to 3hours in our study . A total of 20%of the mothers in our study did not breast feed even after 24 hour after the delivery. They were given pre lacteal feed and discarded colostrums. Sugar water, honey and ghee are commonly used pre lacteal feed.

Table 2: Duration of breastfeeding

Duration	Number	Percentage
<6 months	280	56%
>6 months and started weaning	190	38%
>6 months and not yet started weaning	30	6%

Only 38% of the mothers did the exclusive breastfeeding until 6 months and started weaning after 6 months. A total 56%of mothers in our study prematurely started weaning.

Only 6% mothers continued to breastfeed the baby even at 9 months.

### Discussion

Women have a very positive attitude towards initiation of breastfeeding. in this study almost all the women had initiated breastfeeding and continued to breastfeed beyond 6 months. Benakappa DG et al <sup>7</sup>Chandrashekhar TS et al <sup>8</sup> also show similar pattern.

Breast milk should be initiated within half hour of delivery <sup>9</sup>.The delay in initiation will lead to a delay in the development of oxytocin reflexes, which are very important for the contraction of the uterus and the breast milk reflex. In our study, initiated breastfeeding within 30minutes of childbirth, which is a good practice.

Pre lacteal feeds should not be given but still the majority of mothers gives either sugar water or honey .discarding the colostrums is still practiced widely . the colostrums is rich in vitamins ,minerals ,and immunoglobulins that protects the child from infectins<sup>10</sup>. Discarding the colostrums and feeding the child with honey or sugar water makes the child vulnerable to infection. Sharma M et al have also found similar practices in the community and it is largely influenced by the relatives and the primary care providers during childbirth<sup>11</sup>.

Exclusive breastfeeding should be continued for 6 months<sup>12</sup>. It protects the child from malnutrition, infection and helps the overall development of child. The prematurely start weaning the child, which may lead to development of infection and may have a long term effect on the physical growth of the child<sup>13</sup>. The main reason given for the mother to start early weaning was insufficient milk, which may be due to the early age marriage (those who were yonger than 19 years old) and early child birth. Studies indicate that adolescents breastfeed less often than adults and they hold positive and negative attitude toward breastfeeding that influence decision making and breastfeeding<sup>14</sup>. Most of the mothers received information regarding breastfeeding from health workers and doctors. The development of counselling skills among doctors helps in conveying the right message to mothers about breastfeeding and weaning practices<sup>15</sup>. The influence of

the mother-in-law and self assumption about lack of milk for the baby are cited as major reasons for early and late weaning. Limitations of the study : The limitations of our study is sampling bias .Relatively small sample size cannot to be extrapolated to the whole population.

### **Conclusions**

The study emphasizes the need for breastfeeding intervention programs especially for the mothers during antenatal and postnatal check-ups. The information regarding the advantage and duration of breastfeeding need to be provided for the community as a whole. Practices such as discarding the colostrum and early or late weaning should be discouraged and community based health education programs is needed.

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