

Breast Feeding Practices

This communication is in response to the article 'Breastfeeding practices in scheduled caste communities in Haryana state' by Kapil, *et al.*(1). Of 107 infants below 4 months of age, 16 were exclusively breast fed, 81 were predominantly breastfed, and 'presumably' 10 were predominantly non-breast fed. The other feeds that these infants were receiving have not been detailed. Water, tea, camomile or fennel infusion have been mentioned as common fluids for supplementation but animal milk of any kind has not been mentioned.

Only 55 out of 130 infants received proper complementary food, at 6-9 months age, apart from mother's milk. The remaining 75 (58%) must have received some kind of animal milk (non-human milk) along with insufficient breast milk for a prolonged period. It is well recognized that both exclusive breast feeding upto 4 months of age followed by complementary feeding gradually started from 5th to-6th month of age are important in prevention of malnutrition. The details of feeding habit, between 5-6 months of age are missing from the study.

The authors report that 32 out of 345 infants were bottlefed. The number of infants getting animal milk without the use of bottle has not been specified. A large number of these infants may con-

sume animal milk(2), especially so in Haryana where fresh animal milk is so easily available.

It has been stated at the end of the article that 'infant formula' (breast milk substitute) was received by 2% of infants below one year of age. This does not give us the actual gravity of the situation which is much more disheartening and gloomy as many more infants below one year of age are receiving some kind of animal milk all of which are covered by the Infant Food/Infant Milk Substitute, Act, 1992(3).

The methods used in studies on breastfeeding must suit the sociocultural situation and try to identify the root causes of improper feeding practices in order to initiate corrective action. Right now is the time, tomorrow will be too late.

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