

BREASTFEEDING PRACTICES IN VILLAGES OF CENTRAL KARNATAKA

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Objective: To assess the prevailing breastfeeding and infant feeding practices in rural areas. **Design:** Stratified sampling method in a community based study. **Subjects:** 1050 infants from 0-24 months of age. **Results:** The timely first suckling rate was 03%. All the infants received prelacteal feeds. Colostrum was rejected by 29% of mothers. Delayed initiation of breastfeeding was common; 35% of babies were not breast-fed even at 48 h of birth. Exclusive breastfeeding was noted in 94% at 1 mo, 83.5% at 2 mo, 72.5% at 3 mo, 61.2% at 4 mo, 43.4% at 5 mo and 26.8% at 6 mo age. Timely complementary feeding rate was 57.3% among infants from 6 to 10 mo age. Continued breastfeeding rate was 99.7% at 1 year and 87.2% at 2 years. The bottle feeding rate was 49.4% among infants below 1 year age. The ever breast-fed rate was 97.0% and the median duration of breastfeeding was beyond 24 months. **Conclusions:** Bottle feeding is quite prevalent even in rural areas and the infant feeding practices are far from satisfactory.

Key words: Breastfeeding practices, Exclusive breastfeeding, Timely complementary feeding.

NUMEROUS advantages of breastfeeding over artificial milk have been documented. Promotion of breastfeeding is justified on firm scientific grounds. Several studies on breastfeeding have shown a general decline in breastfeeding in urban areas(1). Rural studies on breastfeeding practices are, however, lacking. Hence, the present study was undertaken in the rural areas of Central Karnataka to assess the actual breastfeeding practices.

Subjects and Methods

The survey was conducted on 1050 mothers with infants <24 mo of age. From a total population of 2,17,757 in 224 villages, 70 children each, from age groups of 0-1,1-2, 2-3, 3-4, 4-5, 5-6, 6-7, 7-8, 8-9, 9-10,10-11, 11-12,12-15,15-18,18-21 and 21-24 months were included. The survey was conducted

with the assistance of seven graduate supervisors especially trained for the study. The supervisors were provided the study proforma printed in the local language. Technical terms were avoided and instead simple terms in local language were used for easy understanding among the supervisors and parents during the data collection. Before launching the survey, a four week training programme was conducted for the supervisors at the J.J.M. Medical College.

An initial pilot study was done to standardize the interobserver variation. During the pilot work, all errors noted were corrected and by the end of one month, the data collection was reasonably free of errors. Actual field verification was carried out in 350 (40%) of the 1050 cases.

Monthly review meetings were held with the supervisors throughout the study. The collected data was analyzed according to the recent WHO guidelines(2).

Results

Of the 1050 infants, only 3 babies were offered breastfeeding within one hour of birth. *Table I* shows that there was considerable delay in initiating breastfeeding, pre-lacteal feeds were routinely given to all babies and nearly one third of mothers discarded colostrum. Three infants did not receive any breastfeeding. The causes included were extremely small child, maternal death and tuberculosis in one each. Exclusive breastfeeding was noted in 94% infants at 1 mo, 83.5% at 2 mo, 72.5% at 3 mo, 61.2% at 4 mo, 43.4% at 5 mo and 26.8% at 6 mo age. Predominant breastfeeding rate was 24.8% at four 4 mo age. Breastfeeding rate was 99% at 6 mo, 97.1% at 12 mo, 93.2% at 18 mo and 87.2% at 24 mo. The ever breastfed rate was 97% and the median duration of breastfeeding was beyond 24 months.

The bottle feeding rate was 49.4% among infants below 1 yr age. Seventeen per cent of infants were started on bottle feeding by 4 mo age, 24.9% by 6 mo and 49.4% by 1 yr age. The chief reasons for introducing bottle feeding were 'not enough milk' (58.1%), subsequent pregnancy (35.8%) and ill health of mother (20.7%). Timely complementary feeding rate was 57.3% among infants from 6 to 10 mo of age. A vast majority (94.7%) of the mothers used home made weaning foods while the remaining (5.3%) used commercial foods.

Discussion

This study shows that only 0.3% of mothers initiated breastfeeding within one hour of birth. Studies carried out from other parts of India reveal similar

TABLE I -Summary of Findings

Practice evaluated	%
<i>Initiation of breastfeeding</i>	
Timely first suckling rate (Initiated within one hour of birth)	0.3
By 4	6.2
By 24	29.0
By 48	64.9
By 72	90.9
Beyond 72	9.0
Never started (3 cases)	0.3
Administration of prelacteal foods	100.0
Rejection of colostrum	28.6
Exclusive breastfeeding rate at 4 mo	61.2
Predominant breastfeeding rate at 4 mo	24.8
Timely complementary feeding rate from 6 to 10	57.3
Continued breastfeeding rate at 1 yr	99.7
Continued breastfeeding rate at 2 yr	87..2
Bottle feeding rate among infants < 1 yr	49.4
Ever breastfed rate	87.0

figures(3,4). Thus, delayed initiation of breastfeeding is common in our country and this custom has perpetuated administration of pre- lacteal feeds. A similar prevalence of pre-lacteal feeds (50 to 100%) has been reported from other studies (5,6). Some studies (3,5) have shown that mothers discard colostrum in the belief that the first three days milk is not good for the baby.

The exclusive breastfeeding rate was 61.26% at 4 mo in the present study. Seventeen per cent of the mothers practiced exclusive breastfeeding in a study from Punjab(7). Another nation wide study found that only 20% of mothers practiced exclusive breastfeeding at 4 mo(4). In Haryana(8) only 15% of mothers practiced exclusive breastfeeding at 4 mo.

In the present study, bottle feeding rate was 49.4% at the end of one year. Other studies have shown that between 57%-

100% babies in our country are bottle fed (4,9,10). The breast feeding rate was 99.7% in the present study. Benakappa *et al.*(3) reported a breastfeeding rate of 80.3% at the end of 12 months. Awasthi *et al.*(11) found that 85.1% of mothers at 12 months, 72.4% at 18 months and 57.2% at the end of 24 months were breastfeeding their children. Gupta *et al.*(4) found that 71.5% of mothers continued breastfeeding for 1 year or more. The widely prevalent practice of extended breastfeeding in rural parts of India must be protected. Use of commercial weaning feed was done by 5.3% of the mothers in the present study, which is comparable to report of 8.3% in a similar study from Haryana(12).

From this study it is clear that delayed initiation, rejection of colostrum and use of prelactel feeds are prevalent among rural mothers of Karnataka. Bottle feeding has infiltrated quite widely into the villages and even commercial weaning feeds are used by many mothers.

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