

Factors Affecting Infant Feeding Practices Among Women of Baijnath Block of Himachal Pradesh

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KEYWORDS Breastfeeding. Feeding Practices. Post-natal. Pre-lacteal Feeding. Top Feeding. Weaning.

ABSTRACT Feeding practices refer generally to meet nutritional and immunological needs of the baby at different stages of child growth. A study of feeding practices was carried out on a sample of 100 infants in the age group of 5 months to 2 years. The results have revealed that factors like income level and caste of the family, had direct bearing on these practices. Caste was found to have direct impact on foods avoided during lactation and post-natal practices. Use of commercial foods and pre-lacteal feeding given to infants was greatly influenced by the income of the family. Top feeding practices were also having significant association with monthly family income. Health status of lactating mothers, malnourishment and environmental insanitation in the area of child care directly affected the feeding practices in Baijnath block of Himachal Pradesh.

INTRODUCTION

Child rearing practices refer generally to overall care of the child as an individual who is not merely possessing a physique but also feelings, desires and needs. There are various child rearing practices, out of which feeding practices are of vital importance. Breast milk is vital for better child survival. The composition of breast milk undergoes change in quality to meet nutritional and immunological needs of the baby at different stages of child growth. However, inappropriate feeding practices are largely socio-economic. Feeding practices are mainly influenced by customs, superstitions and socio-economic status. The effects of infant feeding practices are largely socio-economic. These factors, therefore, must be given due importance in planning and developing a secure future for infants. It is believed that the awareness of mothers regarding feeding practices affect the nutritional status and health of infants, which can be vastly improved through nutrition education, health related awareness and cooperation of mothers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Baijnath block in Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh. Ten villages of this block were randomly selected. Out of these 10 villages, 100 households having atleast one infant below two years were selected at random. In order to meet the requirements of the study, the information was collected from 100 mothers. A door to door survey was conducted. Factors affecting the feeding practices

among the women of Baijnath were assessed by interview, questionnaire and personal observation method. Appropriate statistical design was used for statistical analysis of data. Chi-square test was applied for analysing the relationship to test the impact of different factors on the feeding practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data presented in the Table 1 depict the description of the family characteristics of selected villages located in Baijnath block of Himachal Pradesh. They included caste and income of the family. Less than half of the respondents (42%) were scheduled caste and more than half of the respondent families (62%) had an income ranging between Rs. 2001-4000 per month.

Table 1: Distribution of sampled households on the basis of family characteristics in Baijnath block of Himachal Pradesh

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Respondents</i>
Caste	
Scheduled caste	42
Scheduled tribe	15
Backward class	3
Others	40
Total	100
Monthly income	
≤ 2000	9
2001-4000	62
4001-6000	20
≥ 6001	9
Total	100

Table 2: Postnatal practices and foods avoided during lactating mothers with caste of the family

Variables	Attendants at birth					Foods avoided		
	Dai	Mid-wife	Doctor	Nurse	Total	Yes	No	Total
<i>Caste</i>								
Scheduled caste	47.6(20)	23.8(10)	0.0 (0)	28.5 (12)	42	67.5 (27)	32.5 (13)	40
Scheduled tribe	33.3 (5)	26.6 (4)	26.6 (4)	13.3 (2)	15	60.0 (9)	40.0 (6)	15
Backward class	0.0 (0)	33.3 (1)	33.3 (1)	33.3 (1)	3	66.6 (2)	33.3 (1)	3
Others	22.5 (9)	22.5 (9)	15.0 (6)	40.0 (16)	40	21.0 (8)	78.9 (30)	38
Total	34	24	11	31	100	46	50	96

$$\chi^2=17.61, \text{d.f.}=9, \text{P}=0.03$$

$$*\chi^2\text{d.f.}=18.43, \text{d.f.}=3, \text{P}=3.57\text{E-}4**$$

* Significant at 5%; ** Significant at 1%. Figures in parentheses include actual number of respondents.

Post-natal Practices and Foods Avoided During Lactation

Various customs are prevalent with regard to the delivery of the child depending upon the type of society. Table 2 shows that majority of scheduled caste (47.6%) mothers availed the services of a dai as the attendant at the time of birth. Various tools such as knife, scissors and blades were used to cut umbilical cord. Results indicated that among various tools used to cut umbilical cord, sterilized blades were most commonly used ones. The association analysed by chi-square test was found significant with caste of the mother regarding postnatal practices.

Among dal, mash, *rajmash*, *rongi*, were avoided by majority of mothers who believed that these food items produced worms in infants and were considered difficult to digest as these produced gas in the child's stomach. Vegetables like potato, cauliflower, raddish were also avoided due to the belief of their being difficult to digest. Almost all respondents avoided curd during lactation because it was regarded as cold food. Sehgal et al. (1989) also observed that the curd was considered to be a cold food and was avoided by majority of mothers. As is clear from the table that caste was found to have direct impact on foods avoided. Higher percentage of scheduled caste mothers (67.5%) avoided one or other food. Caste had significant association with the foods avoided by mothers.

Top Feeding Practices

Type of Milk: Table 3 indicates that majority (81%) of mothers gave top milk to infants besides breast milk. Cow's milk was the most commonly used for top feeding. Mothers with low income level (83.3%) fed cow's milk whereas, mothers from high income level gave buffalo's milk. Findings are inconsistent with the findings of

Devgan (1997) who found that parents with high income group had started preferring bovine milk (especially cow's milk) as top milk.

Top Feeding Equipment Used: Regarding the equipment used for top feeding, majority of mothers from low income group used cup (83.3%) and spoon (16.6%) for feeding the baby. All mothers belonging to income level more than Rs. 6001 p.m. used bottles for top feeding. Higher the income of family, higher was the percentage of mothers who used bottles and lower the income of family higher was the percentage of mothers who used cups and spoons. There was significant association with monthly family income. Vimala and Ratnaprabha (1987) also reported that old ordinary glass bottles filled with rubber nipples known as palada were used as feeding equipment and that mothers hardly spent any money towards feeding equipment.

Dilution of Milk: Perusal of the Table 3 reveals that majority of the respondents (75.3%) diluted the milk mainly because they believed that this facilitated digestion. Mothers from high income families did not dilute the animal milk while majority of mothers from low income level diluted the animal milk in the ratio of 50:50. There was a significant association of dilution of milk with income level. The results of the present study are in conformity with the results of the study conducted by Kumar et al. (1989) in whose sample majority of the mothers diluted the milk feeds excessively.

Pre-lacteal Feeding and Commercial Food Given to Infant

The practice of giving the infants some special type of feeds before initiating breast milk is widespread in rural areas. Traditionally, a good proportion of mothers fed honey as laxative. Mothers (44.4%) from low income level gave water as a pre-lacteal feed to infant, whereas,

Table 3: Prevalent top feeding practices with family income

Variables	Type of milk				Equipment				Dilution of animal milk			
	Buffalo	Cow	Goat	Powdered milk	Total	Bottle	Cup	Spoon	Total	Yes	No	Total
Monthly Family Income												
≤ 2000	0.0 (0)	83.3 (5)	16.6 (1)	0.0 (0)	6	0.0 (0)	83.3 (5)	16.6 (1)	6	100.0 (6)	0.0 (0)	6
2001-4000	0.0 (0)	92.3 (48)	0.0 (0)	3.84 (2)	52	44.2 (32)	32.6 (17)	23.0 (12)	52	92.3 (48)	7.6 (4)	52
4001-6000	0.0 (0)	20.0 (3)	0.0 (0)	20.0 (3)	15	93.3 (14)	6.6 (1)	0.0 (0)	15	46.6 (7)	53.3 (8)	15
≥ 6001	50.0 (4)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	37.5 (3)	8	100.0 (8)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	8	0.0 (0)	100.0 (8)	8
Total	4	56	1	8	12	45	23	12	81	61	20	81

$\chi^2 = 100.04$, d.f.=12; P = 5.51 E-16** $\chi^2 = 28.0$; d.f.=6; P=9.37E-5** $\chi^2 = 42.06$, d.f.=3, P=6.33E-9***

** Significant at 1%.

Figures in parentheses include actual number of respondents.

Table 4: Pre-lacteal feeding and commercial food given to infants with monthly family income

Variables	Pre-lacteal feeds						Commercial food given to infants				
	Animal milk	Honey	Honey with water	Janam ghutti	Jaggery with water	Sugar with water	Water	Total	Yes	No	Total
Monthly Family Income											
≤ 2000	0.0 (0)	22.2 (2)	0.0 (0)	11.1 (1)	11.1 (1)	11.1 (1)	44.4 (4)	9	0.0 (0)	100.0 (8)	8
2001-4000	6.4 (4)	53.2 (33)	0.0 (0)	32.2 (20)	3.2 (2)	3.2 (2)	1.61 (1)	62	40.0 (0)	60.0 (8)	50
4001-6000	0.0 (0)	50.0 (10)	10.0 (2)	40.0 (8)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	20	100.0 (19)	0.0 (0)	19
≥ 6001	0.0 (0)	25.0 (2)	0.0 (0)	75.0 (7)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	9	100.0 (9)	0.0 (0)	9
Total	4	47	2	36	3	3	5	100	48	38	86

$\chi^2 = 78.34$, d.f.=18, P=1.11E-7** $\chi^2 = 37.3$, d.f.=3, P=1.53E-7***

** Significant at 1%.

Figures in parentheses include actual number of respondents.

Janam ghutti was given by all mothers in the income group of above Rs. 6000 p.m. Income had significant association with pre-lacteal feeding (Table 4). In survey of 942 women in Coorg district in Karnataka, it was found that 22.1 per cent of the women gave oils and purgative feeds as a pre-lacteal feed which were not fed in the interest of providing food and nutrition, but as laxatives and cleaning agents.

Results reveals that majority of the respondents gave commercial foods to child. Cerelac was mostly given as it was regarded as widely available product. The results of the present study are in line with a study carried out by Pant and Chothia (1990) whose findings revealed that 50 percent of mothers used farex, cerelac and nestum as commercial baby foods. Use of commercial foods was greatly influenced by the income of the respondents. Thus it was observed that as the income level increased percentage of mothers who gave commercial foods to infants also increased. χ^2 -analysis indicated that family income level had significant association with commercial foods for infants.

CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded from the perusal of the

results that majority of the mothers were aware that breastfeeding is better than bottle feeding. Significant association was found between family income and caste with infant feeding practices. Health status of lactating mothers, environmental insanitation and lack of education in the area of childcare directly affected the infant feeding practices in Baijnath block. Thus it can be concluded that factors such as family income and caste of mother affect the infant feeding practices among mothers.

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