

Prevalent infant feeding practices of infants among the missing tribes of Jorhat district, Assam

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Study was conducted to record the prevalent infant feeding practices of the community. Total of 120 infants (1-12 months) were selected from 6 villages, an interview schedule was constructed to elicit information on prevalent infant feeding practices. Infant feeding practices showed that higher percentage of mothers (66.66%) practiced prelacteal feeding. 33.33 per cent infants were exclusively breast fed up to 6 months. Major percentage of the mothers (60.00%) fed colostrum to the new born, while 40 per cent mothers initiated breast feeding only after 2-3 days of birth of the baby. All the newborns were breast fed for 10-12 times per day almost upto first 2 weeks of birth. The frequency of breast feeding seemed to have taken a downward trend thereafter. Supplementary feeding at 6 months were introduced only by 33.33 per cent of mothers. Supplementary foods used were mainly cereal based mixed with milk and sugar or sometimes with dal water. Banana was commonly used fruit while potato and greens were found to be the common vegetables included in infants diet within 6-9 months (60%). Faulty feeding practices such as prelacteal feeding by majority of the mothers were rampant and needs to be corrected.

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INTRODUCTION

‘A new baby is the beginning of all things_ wonder, hope, love and fulfillment. Like a mestimable blessing of Almighty, it brings a dream of possibilities to every parent’—Eda. J. Le. Shan, New York.

The baby is like the dreams of all expectations and hopes, possibilities, wonder, joy and happiness of the family. But all these dreams could be possibly brought into reality only when he grows in a sound environment with the best care possible to adorn the tomorrow's globe with all his potentialities. However, some traditional norms prescribing dietary practices, specifying rituals and practices for child birth and the immediate post-partum period and defining complex rituals and folk

knowledge applied to early infant care and child rearing have significant influence on maternal and child health (Kar, 1993). Infancy, a period of critical growth and development and an important period in human life, considered from birth to one year of age during which the foundation of future health is laid (Betty and Margret, 1982). Infant feeding practices is the current catch word in many developing countries, as adequate nutrition during infancy is the basis for child survival and good health in adulthood. Ideal infant feeding comprises exclusive breast feeding for the first six months, followed by sequential addition of semi-solid and solid food to complement breast milk at 6 months with continued breast feeding at least for 2 years (WHO, 2001 and 2002). Initiation of breastfeeding within one hour of birth is critical for newborn health and wellbeing. Colostrum or “the first milk” is beneficial to the child, rich in all nutrients essential for growth of infants and high concentration of anti-infective agents which is a must for the baby for long-term health and development. The breast milk alone, even in reasonable quantities cannot endow with all the nutrients required for maintaining an adequate velocity of growth after the age of six months. So weaning is very important to fulfill

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