

Infant feeding practices among the rural mothers of Golaghat district of Assam

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■ **ABSTRACT** : The present study was conducted in Golaghat district of Assam. A total of eighty four mothers having children below three years of age were interviewed from four different villages. Out of 130 infants, 21.5 per cent had been given prelacteal feeds. In case of 72.30 per cent of children breast feeding had been initiated within 1 hour and all of them were fed with colostrums. Exclusive breastfeeding was practiced only in 46.92 per cent infants and complementary feeding was started at 6 months for 35.38 per cent. The most common complementary food was milk banana (32.30%) followed by rice flour porridge (26.92%). Only 13.84 per cent of mothers used commercial weaning food. The study showed a strong positive correlation of infant feeding practices with mother's age and educational level.

■ **KEY WORDS** : Breast feeding, Prelacteal feeding, Exclusive breastfeeding, Complementary feeding

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Breastfeeding nourishes infant naturally. With a perfectly balanced and easily digestible food sufficient to satisfy the nutritional needs of the newborn for the first six months of life, it also immunizes them with maternal antibodies, helping very effectively to fight off infection. Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life and timely introduction of weaning foods are important for laying down proper foundation of growth in late childhood. There are various factors that lead to high prevalence of malnutrition in children and among them infant feeding practices is one of the most important (Subba *et al.*, 2007). Various socio-demographic factors play important role in infant feeding practices. Studies reported that mother's age and educational level governs the infant feeding practices (Scott and Binns, 1999). Therefore an effort was made to study the infant feeding practices among the rural mother of Golaghat district of Assam with respect to mothers age and educational level.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

The present study was conducted in 4 villages of Podumoni block of Golaghat district during 2010-11. For the

purpose, eighty four mothers having children below three years of age were interviewed. Historic recall method was used to elicit information regarding prelacteal feeding, initiation of breastfeeding. The information on complementary feeding practices was elicited by using 24 hour recall method. The interview was conducted by using a pretested, pre-structured proforma. Correlation study was carried out to find out any relationship between the variables considered under the study.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

All the mothers were literate and most of the mothers (34.62%) had High School education and majority of them were housewives. The mean age of the mothers was 33.23 with a SD of 5.82. Most of the children (86.15%) were delivered in hospital and rest at home in presence of health attendant or *dhai*. All the infants were timely immunized in the concern PHC as per the advice and guidance of ASHA worker.

It is evident from Table 1 that prelacteal feeding was received by 21.5 per cent of the infant which were mostly honey, water and cow's milk. Honey is mostly used for cleaning the tongue of new born as to prepare the infant for

breastfeeding as per cultural practices by elder and relatives. The present study revealed that breastfeeding was universal and each and every one of infant received it after birth. Most of the children (72.31%) received breast milk within 24 hour and all were fed with colostrums. Regarding pattern of breastfeeding, almost 87 per cent of the mothers reported breastfeeding on demand and used a combination of demand and regular feeding which is also evident from the study conducted by Hörnell *et al.* (1999) in Sweden where most of the mother reported that they breastfed their infant on demand. Only 46.92 per cent of infant under the study received exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months. Similar result was also reported by Manandhar *et al.* (2004). The percentage of mothers who were practicing or had practiced exclusive breastfeeding till 3 months of age was 93.07 per cent but percentage of mothers practicing breastfeeding at 5 months was declined to 56.92 per cent.

It was found that only 35.38 per cent of the mothers considered under study started complementary feeding at 6 months which is the ideal age of starting as recommended by WHO. Almost 18 per cent of the mothers started complementary feed at a much earlier age *i.e.* 3 months earlier than recommended by the WHO. Available data from other study also reported that 87 per cent of infants had been introduced complementary food other than breast milk by three month of life (Savage *et al.*, 1998).

The most common complementary food included were milk with “*Vim kol*” a kind of banana 32.33 per cent followed

by rice flour porridge (pithaguri luthuri), khichidi, commercial weaning food and others. Only 13.07 per cent mothers in the study were found to use bottle to give milk or water to their infant (Fig. 1). Its use was seen right from three months of age to two years. Commercial infant formula was used as a weaning food by 13.84 per cent mothers which was much less than that observed by Bavdekar *et al.* (1994) who reported it to be 23 per cent in their study. Frequency of complementary feeding ranged from 2-5 times. Majority of mothers (72.30%) reported that they used to give complementary feeding three times a day.

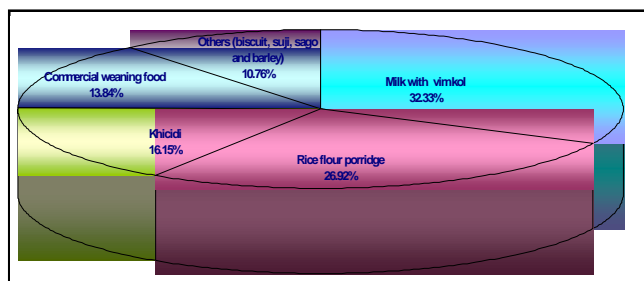


Fig. 1 : Type of complementary feeding

From Table 2, it is observed that there is a difference in breastfeeding practices of mothers of different age groups. It is seen that percentage of practicing exclusive breastfeeding, start of complementary feeding at 6 months and initiation of breast milk within 1 hour of birth was more among the mothers

Educational level	Total number of children	Prelacteal feeds given	Initiation of breast milk <1 hour	Exclusive breast feeding	Complementary feeding started at 6 th month
Middle School	20	6 (30.00)	11 (55.00)	6 (30.00)	5 (25.00)
High School	45	17 (36.17)	30 (66.67)	18 (40.00)	16 (35.56)
Class X pass	28	2 (7.14)	21 (75.00)	15 (53.57)	10 (35.71)
Class XII pass	37	3 (8.11)	32 (86.49)	22 (59.46)	15 (40.54)
Total	130	28 (21.54)	94 (72.31)	61 (46.92)	46 (35.38)

Figures in the parentheses are percentages of total number of children within a class

Age in years	Total number of children	Prelacteal feeds given	Initiation of breast milk <1 hour	Exclusive breast feeding	Complementary feeding started at 6month
>20	26	12 (46.15)	15 (57.69)	9 (34.61)	7 (26.93)
20-30	40	7 (17.50)	29 (72.50)	16 (40.00)	12 (30.00)
> 30	64	9 (14.06)	50 (78.12)	36 (56.25)	27 (42.18)
Total	130	28 (21.54)	94 (72.31)	61 (46.92)	46 (35.38)

Figures in the parentheses are percentages of total number of children within a class

	Initiation of breast milk <1 hour	Exclusive breast feeding	Complementary feeding started at 6 th month
Mother’s education level	0.5472**	0.7465**	0.7968**
Mother’s age	0.2286*	0.5432**	0.4983**

* and ** indicate significance of values at P=0.05 and 0.01, respectively

of age more than 30 than the younger groups, while the practice of giving prelacteal feed was less in the older group of mothers.

The result of correlation analysis is presented in Table 3. It reveals that the practices including initiation of breast milk within 1 hour, exclusive breast feeding and complementary feeding started at 6 months had statistically significant positive correlation as against mother's educational level and age. Scott and Binns (1999) also reported a strong, positive correlation between maternal age and education level and breastfeeding initiation and duration and they specified that older, and more educated women were the most likely to choose breastfeeding as their preferred infant feeding method.

Conclusion:

Low rate of exclusive breastfeeding and early introduction of complementary feeding was striking facts emerging from the study. Prelacteal feeding practices were also prevailing in the study area, chiefly governed by the advice of the elders. Positive association of infant feeding practices was observed with maternal age and educational qualification. Thus, education can change the scenario in infant feeding practices which will lead to improvement of health of children and society in large. Therefore, Government as well as non-government organization and civil societies should take necessary steps for implementation of Government policies of education in true spirit so that the education level of rural populace especially the women folk is increased to such an extent that they can realize the importance of health care of children as well as women.

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