

FEEDING PRACTICES IN CHILDREN AGED LESS THAN 3 YEARS AND ITS RELEVANT KNOWLEDGE AMONG YOUNG MOTHERS

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Abstract

Background & Objectives: It is highly important for the parents to be aware of the proper feeding practices so that their children can have better health condition and immunity. In this aspect, regular assessment is must regarding the awareness of the parents so that necessary interventions can be done viz-a-viz healthy feeding practices. The objective of this study is to assess the feeding practices being currently undertaken by the parents of children less than three year age in some rural and urban localities of Rahimyar Khan.

Methods: Cross Sectional survey of 213 young mothers less than 35 years of age having at least one child of age below 3 years, who presented at Pediatrics outdoor indoor, Gynecology outdoor indoor and Vaccination center of Sheikh Zayed Hospital Rahimyar Khan, were selected through Convenient Sampling. Data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire & analyzed through a software SPSS.

Results: This Cross Sectional survey was conducted amongst 213 Mothers Knowledge related to feeding practices of their children of less than 3 years of age has shown that 140(65.7%) mothers were Exclusively Breast Feeding their children and 130(61.0%) considered using Cow's milk instead of formula Milk. 102 (47.9 %) introduced solid food to their child at 6 months. Majority 119 (55.87%) were not aware of any food allergies or intolerances in their children and majority 91 (42.7%) believes in normal ways followed by 63 (29.6%) who use rewards to ensure their child takes meal. Another important finding is that 180 (84.5%) were allowing their child consume processed or fast food while 22 (10.3 %) were consuming it on daily basis while 114 (53.5 %) were not aware of the appropriate portion sizes for child's age and 158 (74.2%) were offering sugary snacks or desserts to the child.

Conclusion: Initiation of breast feeding within one hour has shown improvement but still 40 % not knowing this basic knowledge. Moreover on one hand 80% were practicing addition of variety of protein sources and almost 100% believed in fruit consumption but at the same time more than 50% were not having idea of the portion size and almost 100% were allowing Processed or fast food consumption. These statistics emphasize comprehensive educational programs for the mothers. Future research can be focused on impact of educational programs on Nutritional practices:

Key Words: Exclusive breast feeding, Weaning and Young Mothers

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Nutrition is of paramount importance for the well-being of a child. Feeding as required by different ages if done appropriately will definitely improve the health of child and reduces the occurrence of specific

diseases. To support the growth and development of infants and children, appropriate mixture of nutrients with balance, taste and texture is extremely important. Similarly, adequate amount of nutrients in this age promises optimal health too.¹ The triple burden of malnutrition (under nutrition, over nutrition and micro-nutrient deficiency) is becoming a great threat in developing countries.² This burden could jeopardize the economy and growth of the nation.³ The World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nation International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF) jointly developed

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a global strategy for infant and young child feeding practices (IYCF). That recommends the start of breastfeeding within one hour of birth, exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months, adding complementary feeds at 6 months, and continued breastfeeding at least until 2 years of age. It has been proved by some studies that compliance to these recommended practices has lessened the risk of under nutrition and over nutrition.⁴ Study from Pakistan has shown that only 45.8% of Pakistani babies were breast fed within the first hour of birth. Prevailing of the practice of continued breast feeding is highest at one year of age (68.4%) and thereafter decreases to 56.5% at two years of age.⁵ Infants and young children are at an increased risk of malnutrition when baby's diet is shifted from breast milk to solid feed that is, from six months to two years of age. Early or delayed introduction of complementary feeds also lead to malnutrition. Globally, 2 in 3 children aged between 6 months to 2 years of age are not provided food supporting their rapidly growing brain and body.⁶ Lack of adequate complementary feeding practices cause malnutrition in infancy with further consequences like weight loss, muscle wasting, stunting, difficulty concentration eventually progressing to kwashiorkor, marasmus, poor brain development, reduced learning ability, increased risk of infections owing to the low immunity, and in many cases death. Proper adherence to the recommended feeding practices (IYCF) can lessen infant mortalities up to 19% in developing countries like India.⁷⁻⁹ Thus proving the significant impact of IYCF practices on child mortality. Studies on the food consuming practices in developing countries (like India & Pakistan) show that diets of children lack proteins and essential micronutrients. In this aspect, the influence of adults (family) food choices is also noted. Children under the age of five still suffer from stunting (38%) and wasting (21%).⁶ It is not due to the unavailability of food owing to poverty but to the insufficient knowledge about feeding practices among parents.⁹⁻¹² The existence of under nutrition and obesity at the same time is paradoxical, albeit we have few explanations for this paradox. Consumption of un-healthy and highly

dense foods by children lead to the coexistence of overweight and under nutrition. Over nutrition, too, is a kind of malnutrition that results from the excessive intake of nutrients leading to the dysfunctioning of physical and psychosocial aspects of a child. Child becomes overweight and obese eventually resulting in serious long-term health consequences such as diabetes mellitus, hypertension, fatty liver disease, kidney disease, cardiovascular diseases, stroke and orthopedic morbidities. There are only a few studies in Pakistan and especially in southern Punjab areas like District Rahimyar Khan for assessing the feeding practices by the parents especially mothers of young children. Awareness and education of the parents is necessary so that child can be benefitted by proper diet and feeding practices. In this regard, timely and regular assessments are of significant value to evaluate the awareness level of the parents at given time and scenario so that specific interventions can be done to educate them further. This study aims at gaining information about the feeding practices being currently undertaken by the parents of children. (aged less than three years) in some rural and urban localities of Rahimyar Khan.

METHODS

It is a Cross Sectional survey of young mothers who presented at Sheikh Zayed Hospital Rahimyar Khan. The optimum focus was to explore the young mothers for feeding practices of their children less than 3 year age & mothers relevant knowledge regarding breast feeding, weaning & nutrition of their young children. Married females less than 35 years of age having at least one child of age below 3 years, who presented at Pediatrics outdoor indoor, Gynecology outdoor indoor and Vaccination center of Sheikh Zayed Hospital Rahimyar Khan were included in the study. Study conducted for two weeks from 11-07-2023 to 24-07-2023. Convenient Sampling Technique was under-taken & sample size of 196 was estimated by using a single proportion(15 %) for a finite population (about 5,00,000) by consideration of 95 % confidence level & marginal error of less than 5 % ($n = (Z\alpha/2)^2 P(1-P) / D^2$). Adding 8% non-response 213 were interviewed.

Data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire & analyzed through SPSS. Ethical certification was taken from institutional Ethical Review board & respondent’s privacy was totally protected.

RESULTS

This Cross Sectional survey was conducted amongst 213 females, majority 90(42.3%) were of age group greater than 30 years followed by 63(29.6%) between 25 to 30 years of age and majority 94(44.1) were Illiterate. As far as socioeconomic status is concerned majority 80 (37.6 %) had earnings <20000 followed by 74 (34.7%) who had 20000-50000 monthly earnings. (Table 01) Mothers Knowledge related to feeding practices of their children of less than 3 years of age has shown that 140(65.7%) mothers were doing Exclusive Breast Feeding. As a replacement to mothers milk 130 (61.0%) considered using Cow’s milk instead of formula Milk. As far as weaning is concerned 102(47.9%) introduced Solid food to their child at 6 months. Majority 119 (55.87%) were not aware of any food allergies or intolerances in their children and majority 91 (42.7%) believes in normal ways followed by 63 (29.6%) who use rewards to ensure their child takes meal. Another important finding is that 180 (84.5%) were allowing their child consume processed or fast food while 22 (10.3 %) were consuming it on daily basis while 114 (53.5 %) were not aware of the appropriate portion sizes for your child’s age and 158 (74.2%) were offering sugary snacks or desserts to your child. (Table 02)

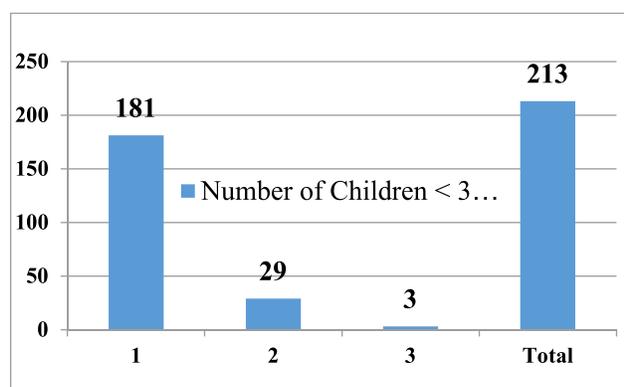


Figure 1: Number of Children < 3 Years

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Factors Of Respondents

Characteristics		Frequency	%
Socio Economic Status	<20000	80	(37.6)
	20000-50000	74	(34.7)
	50000-100000	56	(26.3)
	>100000	03	(1.4)
Education Status	Illiterate	94	(44.1)
	Under Matric	52	(24.4)
	Above Matric	67	(31.5)
Age	Less than 25	58	(27.2)
	25-30	63	(29.6)
	>30	90	(42.3)

Table 2: Mothers Knowledge about Feeding Practices of their Children < 3 Year Age

Variable	Fre-quency	%	
Do you know breastfeeding should be started 1 hour of birth	130	61.0	
Do you know what is “exclusive Breast Feeding	140	65.7	
Other than Breast milk, which one is better?	Cow Milk	130	61.0
	Formula Milk	68	31.9
How often the child should be breast fed?	On demand	180	84.5
	Others	22	10.3
Do you know at which age you have to introduce “Thos Ghiza” / solid food to your child?	4 months	102	47.9
	6 months	111	52.11
Are you aware of the appropriate portion sizes of food for your child?	99	46.48	
Do you Know that new foods should introduce gradually to child?	148	69.5	
Do you Know that Processed / fast foods shouldn’t be introduced to child?	80	37.56	
Do you Know that you should sit with your child during meal?	211	90.06	

DISCUSSION

The WHO’ and UNICEF’s IYCF recommends beginning of breast-feed within one hour of birth, exclusive breast feeding for the first six months of life, adding complementary feeds at 6 months with continued breastfeeding at least until 2 years of age. In our study only 130(61.0%) started breast feeding within one hour of birth 140(65.7%) mothers were exclusive breast feeding their children and 130(61.0%) considered using Cow’s milk instead of formula Milk. 102 (47.9%) introduced Solid food to their child at 6 months while another study has shown that⁴ Less than half

Figure 01: Number of Children < 3 years Frequency

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(45.8%) of Pakistani babies start breast feeding within the first hour of birth. Prevailing of the practice of continued breast feeding is highest at one year of age (68.4%) and thereafter decreases to 56.5% at two years

Table 3: Mothers Feeding Practices Of Their Children < 3 Year Age

Variable	Frequency	%
Had you started breast feeding your baby within hour of birth	130	61.0
How Often Do You Breast Feed Your Child?	Exclusive Breast Feeding	140
	1-3 Times Per Day	38
	More Than 3 Times Per Day	25
	Not Breast feeding	10
If not breast feeding, what type of milk you primarily used for your child?	Cow's milk	130
	Formula milk	68
	NA	15
At what age did you introduced "Thos Ghiza" / Solid food to your child?	Before 4 months	20
	4 – 6 months	91
	After 6 months	102
Are you aware of any food allergies or intolerances in your child?	Yes	94
	No	119
	Don't know	8
Do you use any reward or punishment to provide food to your child?	Reward	63
	Punishment	59
	Normal way	91
How often does your child consume processed or fast food?	Daily	22
	Occasionally	180
	NA	01
Are aware of the appropriate portion sizes for your child's age?	Yes	99
	No	114
Do you introduce new food gradually to your child?	Yes	148
	No	65
How often do you sit with your child during meal times?	Always	118
	Occasionally	93
	Never	2
How many servings of fruits and vegetables does your child consume daily?	Less than 1 serving	102
	1-2 servings	101
	More than 2 servings	10
Do you offer sugary snacks or desserts to your child?	Yes	158
	No	53
How often do you offer water to your child?	Throughout the day	176
	With meals	12
	Occasionally	25
Do you offer a variety of protein sources to your child? (e.g., Meat, Beans, Daal, etc)?	Yes	173
	No	40
Do you encourage your child to eat slowly and chew their food well?	Yes	181
	No	32
Do you provide healthy snacks between meals?	Yes	130
	No	83
Have you ever tried to gain knowledge about feeding practices from various sources .	Yes	85
	No	128
Do you limit your child's intake of high-sodium snacks (Aalo chips, Slanty, Kurkary, lays etc) or processed food?	Yes	177
	No	36

of age.⁵ Complementary feeds if introduced earlier or later than.. Almost, 2 in 3 children between 6 months and 2 years of age across the globe are not fed food that supports their rapidly growing brain and body.⁶ The best part of this study is that 173 (81.2%) offer a variety of protein sources to their child (e.g., Meat, Beans, Daal, but 180 (84.5%) were allowing their child consume processed or fast food while 22(10.3%) were consuming it on daily basis while 114(53.5%) were not aware of the appropriate portion sizes for your child's age and 158 (74.2%) were offering sugary snacks or desserts to your child. According to a data, provided by UNICEF about the studies on food consuming practices in developing countries (like Pakistan & India) show that diets of children lack proteins and essential micro nutrients. In this aspect, the influence of adult (family) food choices is also noted. Children under the age of five still suffer from stunting (38%) and wasting (21%). It is not due to the unavailability of food owing to poverty but to the insufficient knowledge about feeding practices among parents.⁶ This can ascribed mainly to improper knowledge about appropriate feeding practices among parents rather than the lack of food due to poverty.

CONCLUSION

Initiation of breast feeding within one hour has shown improvement but still 40 % not knowing this basic knowledge. Moreover on one hand 80% were practicing addition of variety of protein sources and almost 100% believed in fruit consumption but at the same time more than 50% were not having idea of the portion size and almost 100% were allowing Processed or fast food consumption. These statistics emphasize comprehensive educational programs for the mothers. Future research can be focused on impact of educational programs on Nutritional practices

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