

## SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF EXCLUSIVE BREAST FEEDING PRACTICES

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### Abstract :

#### Objectives :

1. To find out extent of exclusive breast feeding.
2. To study the factors affecting exclusive breast feeding practices.

**Study design :** Cross-sectional community based study

**Study Period :** November 2004 to April 2005

**Setting :** Slums of Rishikesh

**Material and Methods :** All the house holds of sheeshamjhari slum were included in the study. All available mothers of under 5 children were interviewed by house to house survey using predesigned and pretested questionnaire.

**Participants:** Mothers and under five children

**Study variables:** Exclusive breast feeding, religion, caste, family type, educational status.

**Statistical analysis:** Proportions, Chi-square test.

**Results:** Exclusive Breast Feeding was found to be 26.0% and Educational status of mother has significant influence on EBF.

### Introduction :

Malnutrition of child begins from infancy itself, if the infant do not receive enough nutrients. This may be due to poor infant feeding because of poor knowledge about significance of breast feeding, especially of exclusive breast feeding.

The change in the infant feeding practice occurred initially in the industrialized countries. Soon the educated women in the

underdeveloped countries began curtailing duration of breast feeding<sup>1-3</sup>. Soon uneducated poor women from urban and rural areas began to follow the footsteps of their more educated counterparts<sup>4-5</sup>. W.H.O. took the lead and recommended ten steps for promoting, protecting and supporting breast feeding<sup>6</sup>.

Exclusive breast feeding (EBF) takes care of two essential elements of newborn care-nutrition and infection control. EBF can save

many lives by preventing malnutrition and reducing the risk of infections and hypothermia. EBF should be practiced for at least four months and preferable six months in poor countries since they have a high risk of infection through contaminated water and food<sup>7</sup>. Exclusively breastfed babies do not require water even in hot climates<sup>8</sup>. Pre-lacteal feeds are not necessary as breast milk is easily digestible. Such feeds carry the risk of infection and also delays the establishment of lactation<sup>9,10</sup>. In this study, it was attempted to find out the exclusive breastfeeding behavior and social factors affecting the exclusive breast feeding practices.

#### **Material and methods :**

This study was conducted in Shesham Jhari slum of Rishikesh. House to house survey was conducted and an oral questionnaire was used to collect the socio demographic data and information about exclusive breast feeding practices, total of 806 households were surveyed, 394 mothers having children under five years of age were found out of which only 361 mothers could give the information.

#### **Results :**

Table no.1 shows practices of exclusive breast feeding according to religion and caste. It can be seen that majority of mothers i.e. 94.7% are Hindu out of which 27.2% practiced

EBF and only 5.9% muslim mothers practiced exclusive breast feeding but this difference was found to be statistically insignificant. 27.7% mothers belonging to general caste and 15.4% from SC/ST practiced exclusive breast feeding but this difference was statistically insignificant.

The practice is seen increasing with educational status of mother (table 2). EBF practice is seen more in mothers who were educated upto post graduation (60%), Intermediate 41.2% and mothers educated upto to High School 34.6%. Only 19.4% of illiterate mothers practiced exclusive breast feeding and this difference was found to be statistically significant. ( $p < 0.05$ )

Table No. 3 depicts practice of exclusive breast feeding by type of family. It can be seen from the table that 31.8% of mothers belonging to joint family practiced EBF whereas only 24.7% from Nuclear family practiced EBF however this difference in practice of EBF was not found to be statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ).

The number of siblings of children did not have any effect on practice of exclusive breast feeding. 28.8% of children having no sibling were exclusively breast fed where as 33.8% having one sibling had exclusive breast feeding and 27.5% of children with three siblings were exclusively breast fed.

TABLE - 1

Practice of Exclusive Breast Feeding by Religion and Caste

	Religion and Caste Mothers Interviewed		Exclusive Breast feeding	
	No.	%	No.	%
Hindu	342	94.7	93	27.2
Muslim	17	4.7	1	5.9
Others	2	0.6	0	0
	361	100	94	26
SC/ST	26	7.2	4	15.4
OBC	43	11.9	9	20.2
General	292	80.9	81	27.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>26</b>

$\chi^2 = 4.18$  df 2  $p > 0.05$  EBF vs. Religion

$\chi^2 = 2.71$  df 2  $p > 0.05$  EBF vs. Caste

TABLE - 2

Practice of Exclusive Breast Feeding by Mother's Education

	Educational Status Mothers Interviewed		Exclusive Breast feeding	
	No.	%	No.	%
Illiterate	170	47.1	33	19.4
Primary	34	9.4	8	23.2
Junior High School	60	16.6	16	26.7
High School	26	7.2	9	34.6
Intermediate	34	9.4	14	41.2
Graduate	32	8.8	11	34.4
PG	5	1.3	3	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>26</b>

$\chi^2 = 13.18$  df 6  $p < 0.05$

TABLE - 3

## Practice of Exclusive Breast Feeding by Type of Family

Type of Family	Mothers Interviewed		Exclusive Breast feeding	
	No.	%	No.	%
Nuclear	295	81.7	73	24.7
Joint	66	18.3	21	31.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>26</b>

$$\chi^2 = 1.26 \text{ df } 1 \text{ p} > 0.05$$

TABLE - 4

## Practice of Exclusive Breast Feeding by No. Of Siblings

Siblings	Mothers Interviewed		Exclusive Breast feeding	
	No.	%	No.	%
0	52	14.4	15	28.8
1	133	36.8	45	33.8
2	84	23.3	13	15.5
3	40	11.1	11	37.5
4	32	8.9	6	18.7
5	14	3.9	3	21.4
6	6	1.7	1	16.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>26</b>

$$\chi^2 = 9.75 \text{ df } 6 \text{ p} > 0.05$$

**Discussion & Conclusion :**

In this study EBF practice is found to be 26.0% which is less as compared to another study<sup>11</sup> which reported that 49.0% of urban mothers practiced EBF. This can be explained by the illiteracy & unawareness prevailing in the slum area where this study has been conducted. Exclusive Breast Feeding was found slightly more

in general caste as compared to OBC and SC/ST but this relationship was not found statistically significant. Effect of type of family and number of siblings was not found to be a significant factor and this finding was in accordance with another study<sup>12</sup>. In the present study literacy status of mother was the only factor which has shown significant effect on EBF practices.

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