

Breast feeding in Kelantan

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Introduction

THE IMPORTANCE OF breast feeding especially in a developing country has been emphasised by many authors (Addy - 1976) (Gerrard - 1974). In these developing countries the trend is towards artificial feeding because of the ignorance of the advantages of breast feeding as well as the influence of advertisement through the mass media and the Mothercraft Nurse. The incidence of breast feeding in the urban population has been studied in Kuala Lumpur (Dugdale - 1970) and Singapore (Wong - 1971). There has been only one paper on Breast feeding in a rural area (Teoh - 1975) in which the incidence of Breast feeding was studied in relation to age, race, parity, income and education of the mother. In our paper we have studied the incidence of Breast feeding in relation to duration of breast feeding without added compliments, the age when solids were introduced and to assess the awareness of the mothers of some of the advantages of breast milk.

Material and method

All mothers with infants attending the Maternal and Child Health Clinics at the Main Health Centres in North Kelantan were interviewed using a questionnaire consisting of 12 questions. The interview was conducted in the month of May, 1976 by three doctors including the authors. A total of 461 mothers were interviewed during this period. Insufficient information were obtained from three questions and hence were not analysed.

Analysis of the data

Incidence of Breast Feeding - Table I

A total of 438 mothers or 95% were found to breastfeed their children at least once or twice a day.

But only 86 mothers or 18% were breast feeding fully up to three months and 45 mothers or 9% were breast feeding without added solids up to six months. Our figure of 95% compares well with those in Perlis (Teoh 1975) where 84% of all mothers were breast feeding.

Table I

Incidence of Breast Feeding

Breast feeding only up to 3/12	86
Artificial formula only up to 3/12	6
Breastfeeding and Artificial formula up to 3/12	18
Breast feeding + Artificial Formula + solids before 3/12	334
Artificial formula + Solids before 3/12	17
Total mothers interviewed	461

Introduction of Solids

It was disappointing to note that as many as 351 mothers or 78% introduced solids before the end of the third month. Of these 117 or 26% have introduced the solids as early as the first month.

Artificial Formula

As expected only 23 mothers or 5% were giving artificial formula and of these 75% or 17 of them introducing solid before the child is three months. The reasons for not breastfeeding are shown in Table II.

Table II
Reasons for Not Breastfeeding

		23
No Milk	11	
Bottle milk is better	0	
Not enough milk	3	
Working mother	1	
Others – Baby refuses	6	
– Fever in mother	1	
– Child in Hospital	1	

Awareness of the Advantages of Breast Milk:

We used the following four questions which we thought were appropriate for a rural population to assess the awareness of the advantages of breast milk.

Table III: It is interesting to note that 399 mothers or 86% agreed that Breast milk was the best milk for their children but only 275 mothers or 59% agreed that breastfed children get infection less frequently than bottlefed children. 302 mothers or 65% were aware that after 6 months, the infants should be given solid foods like cereals along with the milk. However only 222 or 48% of all mothers were aware that a well balanced diet is essential for an adequate supply of breast milk.

Advice on Breast Feeding

It is encouraging to note that as many as 232 mothers or 50% said that they were advised by nurses and bidans to breastfed their children.

Table III
Awareness of the Advantages of Breast Milk

	Yes		No
Do you know breast milk is the best milk for your child?	399	59%	59
Do you know breast milk helps to keep your child free from infection in the first 6/12 of life?	275	59%	183
Do you know it is important to give your child other foods after the age of 6/12?	302	65%	157
Are you aware that an adequate milk supply depends on a well balanced diet?	222	48%	234

Table IV: However only 172 mothers or 37% had any instruction on the technique of breast feeding.

Table IV
Advice to Breast Feed

Breast feeding advised by Doctors	11
Nurses & Bidans	232
Friends and Relatives	17
Others (Mothers and Tradition)	193

Table V
Instruction on Technique of Breastfeeding

Nurses	153
Mothers	10
Doctors	4
Books	2
Unspecified	3
Total:	172 (37%)

Discussion

A number of studies have shown that breast feeding not only supplies the infant with nourishment but gives him immunologic protection against infection as well. Breast-fed infants are less likely to develop respiratory and gastro-intestinal infections and allergic reactions. Infants slowly develop their immunologic defenses in the months after birth, and breast feeding is a hygienic, gradual method of protection during the transition to immunologic independence. Best protection is achieved when the infant receives breast milk alone for at least the first six months of life. This is particularly important in areas where contamination of cow's milk and other foods is likely and where medical facilities are inadequate.

The area under study has relatively more health facilities than other parts of Kelantan. The sample in this study reflects only those mothers who come to the clinics. A total of 95% were breastfeeding but only 18% up to six months. This is extremely low for a rural population and we feel that adequate steps should be taken in the Breast Feeding Campaign due to be launched soon by the Ministry of Health, to promote breast feeding at least for 4-6 months.

78% of the mothers were found to introduce solids before the third month and of these one third as early as the first month. This is not only uneconomical for a poor rural population like Kelantan but also significantly contributes to the high morbidity and mortality of infants. Solids should

be introduced after the 4th month and preferably after six months and this should be stressed in the health talks in our Maternal and Child Health Clinics.

Even though 86% of mothers agreed that breast milk was the best milk for their children less than half appeared to understand the real advantages of breast milk and this could be a useful area to stress during the campaign. It was satisfying to find that 50% of the mothers said that they were motivated by health staff to breast feed their children.

Summary

The incidence of breast feeding in a rural community was studied in relation to duration of breast feeding without added compliments, the age when solids were introduced into their feeds and to assess the awareness of the mothers of some of the advantages of breast milk. It is recommended that when the Ministry of Health launches on the breast feeding programme, special attention should be given to discourage early compliment feeding and introduction of solids especially in the East Coast States.

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