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A Study on Breast Feeding Practices among Jatapu Tribals of Vizianagaram District in Andhra Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

Breast milk is very essential to the new born babies, which gives resistance against infections apart from its nutritional value. But some sections of Indian population have not realized the importance of breast milk, due to ignorance of illiteracy and other cultural barriers. By considering the above facts, the present study was aimed to elucidate the breast feeding practices among Jataputribals of Vizianagaram in Andhra Pradesh. The lactating mothers aged between 15 and 30 years were selected at random from 6 villages of Komarada Mandal. Majority 75.0 per cent of the respondents are illiterates and on average they conceived two children. More lactating mothers 40.0 per cent have not initiated the breast milk to their new born till 24 hours and some were delayed up to 72 hours. Only 35.8 per cent of mothers squeezed out the first breast milk (which contains colostrum's) before initiation. In view of the findings of the present study, there is an urgent need to educate mothers regarding benefits of breastfeeding, especially exclusive breastfeeding during the first 6 months, importance of colostrum and timely introduction of supplementary feeding in this tribal community.

KEY WORDS: Jatapu, Breast feeding, Colostrum, Tribals, Andhra Pradesh

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INTRODUCTION

Breast milk is the best food available and is tailor made to suit the child's needs. Breastfed babies get the most nutritiously balanced diet and are less susceptible to infections. Exclusive breast feeding is essential for the healthy growth of the child. Only breast milk provides proteins, essential fatty acids and other substances needed for optimal brain development. It provides natural immunity against infections and protects the infant from micronutrient deficiency diseases such as anaemia and keratomalacia (irreversible blindness). As recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), breastfeeding should be initiated immediately after birth and should be continued up to a minimum of six months. The WHO also suggests that the yellowish milk, known as colostrum, should be given to the baby because it provides protection against certain infections. Afterwards, it has to be supplemented with other semi-solid and solid foods at proper time intervals¹.

Although UNICEF has been promoting breast-feeding as a most important strategy for improving infant and child survival (Grant 1984)², improper breast-feeding pattern is still a big problem in South Asian countries including India, and tribal communities are probably the most vulnerable group (Ramachandran 2004)³. From time immemorial, many tribes living in isolated pockets in the mountainous areas have been practicing a distinctive way of feeding their babies due to their ignorance and underlying cultural beliefs and practices (Morse 1984)⁴.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study was purposefully conducted in Komaradamandal, Vizianagaram district. The subjects are randomly selected from the Allu Vada, Kamba Valasa, Kancharapadu, Poduguvalasa, Saruguduguda and Tummaivalasa (6) villages of Komaradamandal. A total of 120 lactating mothers were considered in the present study. Anthropological techniques of data collection like participant observation, unstructured interview, canvassing schedules and collecting case studies were employed during the field work. The present data were analyzed through SPSS11package.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Health is a function, not only of medical care but of the overall integrated development of society cultural, economic, education, social and political. Each of these aspects has a deep influence on health, which in turns influences all these aspects. The common beliefs, customs and practices connected with health and disease have been found to be intimately related to the treatment of disease. It is necessary to make a holistic view of all the cultural dimensions of the community. In

most of the tribals communities there is a wealth of folklore related to health. Maternal and child care is an important aspect of health seeking behavior which is largely neglected among the tribal groups.

To be eligible for participation in the present study, the mother had to be aged between 15-30 years old with children age ranges between 0-5 years. The mean age of the mothers is 21.02 years and mostly with 1-2 children. Literacy is universally recognized as a powerful instrument of social change. The level of literacy is undoubtedly one of the most important indicators of social, cultural and health development among the tribal communities. Literacy is important for the young girl; it had correlation with the survival of her children. Infant mortality is found to decrease significantly when the mother is educated up to the primary level and above. In the present study, most of them are illiterates (75.0%) and nearly 15 per cent of women have had primary education and 9.16 per cent have studied up to secondary education.

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents

Sociodemographic characteristics	No	%
Age of the mother		
15-19	35	29.17
20-24	71	59.17
25-30	14	11.66
Mean age	21.02	
Education		
Illiterate	90	75
Primary	18	15
Secondary	11	0.84
Higher	1	0.84
Occupation		
Housewife	23	19.17
Labour	93	77.50
Agriculture	2	1.67
Business	2	1.66
Monthly income of the family		
1000 and below	19	15.83
1001-2000	78	65.00
2001-3000	19	15.83
3000 and above	4	3.34
Type of family		
Nuclear	47	39.17
Joint	53	44.17
Extended	20	16.16

Most of these tribal men are engaged in agricultural activities, while 77.5 per cent of women are working as agricultural labourers and in other allied activities. Very few women 19.17 per cent are the house wives. The monthly income of the Jatapu population was more than 1000/-.

Joint family system is still existed 44.17 per cent and presently inclined towards nuclear family system 39.17 per cent. This trend may definitely have some impact on the health status of the tribals.

Table 2: Initiation of Breast feeding

S. No	Initiation of breast feeding	No.	%
1	Within in 1 hour	55	45.80
2	Within 2-6 hours	5	4.20
3	Within 7-12 hours	4	3.30
4	Second day	48	40.00
5	Third day	7	5.9
6	After third day	1	0.8
	Total	120	100.00

The information on the initiation of breast milk to the new born is presented in the table 2. it is noted from the results that 45.8 per cent of mothers have initiated breast feeding to their babies within one hour after delivery and about 40 per cent of mothers have initiated breast feeding to their babies on second day but low percentage of women (0.8 %) have taken time to initiate breast feeding on third day.

Table 3: Duration of lactation

S. No	Duration of lactation in months	No.	%
1	Still continue	36	30.00
2	9 months	20	16.16
3	1 year and above	47	39.17
4	2 years	17	14.17
	Total	120	100.00

The duration of lactation is noted among 120 women of their earlier issues, the details are presented in table nearly 30 per cent of children are successfully still continues the breast feeding practice and majority (39.17%) of children had their breast feeding from their mothers up to 1 year and above, while 16.16 per cent of mothers fed their children up to 9 months and 14.17 per cent of them breast fed up to 2 years.

Table 4: Squeezing out Colostrum's

S. No	Squeezing	No	%
1	No	43	35.80
2	Yes	77	64.20
	Total	120	100.0

Majority of women 64.2 per cent are practicing colostrums from their breast before initiating the breast milk to their newborns and 35.8 per cent women are not practicing.

Table 5: Pre-lactating food

S. No	Pre-lacteal feed introduced	No.	%
1	Sugar candy water	2	3.30
2	Honey	43	71.70
3	Castor oil	8	13.30
4	Glucose with plain water	2	3.30
5	Packet milk	1	1.70
6	Sugar candy water & Packet milk	1	1.70
7	Cow milk	1	1.70
8	Sugar candy water & Honey	2	3.30
	Total	60	100.00

Before initiating the breast milk to infants, the study population has the tradition to offer some oils and water as pre-lactating food for the expulsion of feces of the baby. The different feedings and their combinations are present the above table. Nearly 71.7 per cent of mothers are giving Honey as the pre-lacteal food to their infant 3.3 per cent of new born are given the sugar candy water as pre lacteal foods.

Table 6: Frequency of Breast feeding on previous day

No of times	Exclusive breast feeding		Breast feeding & Complements foods	
	No	%	No	%
1 to 4	-	-	82	79.61
5 to 9	5	29.41	21	20.39
10 to 14	12	70.59	-	-
Total	17	100.00	103	100.00

Information about the frequency of breast feeding to the children on previous day was recorded and is treated under two group's i.e. exclusive breast feeding and second continuation of breast feeding and initiation of complementary food. Out of 120 children, majority about 103 children are having breast feeding and complementary food, whereas very low no of children (about 17) are still on exclusive breast feeding state.

CONCLUSIONS

Breast milk is very essential to the new born babies, which gives resistance against infections apart from its nutritional value. But some tribal population has not realized the importance of breast milk, due to ignorance, illiteracy and other cultural barriers. The present study shows the majority 75 per cent of the respondents are illiterates and on average they conceived two children. More lactating mothers 40 per cent have not initiated the breast milk to their new borne till 24 hours and some were delayed up to 72 hours. Only 35 per cent of mothers squeezed out of the first breast milk (which contains colostrums) before initiation.

This study reveals that the practice of breast feeding is predominant among Jatapu women. Both breast feeding and weaning practices being followed are conducive to the proper growth of the child. The study shows that initiation of breast milk by some women is delayed and the few drops of colostrums are discarded due to traditional beliefs. The mode of pre lactating feeding is generally unhygienic. Exclusive breast feeding often continues for months after delivery, often resulting in malnutrition of the children owing to inadequate feeding. In view of the findings of the present study, there is an urgent need to educate mothers regarding benefits of breastfeeding, especially exclusive breastfeeding during the first 6 months, importance of colostrum and timely introduction of supplementary feeding in this tribal community.

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