

Breast Feeding Pattern of the Women with Some of Their Socio-demographic Characteristics of a Slum in Dhaka

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This cross-sectional type of descriptive study was conducted at Mohakhali slum popularly known as Sattala Basti of Dhaka city with a view to find out the breast feeding pattern of women living in the slum. A total of 493 slum women were interviewed. Majority of the respondents (62.9%) were illiterate. Among them, 57.0% were housewives and most of the working women were garment workers (33.5%). The average monthly household income of the respondents was Tk. 3057 (\pm 982). Most of the respondents (87.4%) breastfed their child but the percentage of exclusive breast feeding (EBF) was very low (12.2%). About 45% of the respondents breastfed their child for more than 2 years. Most of the respondents (80.3%) had pre-lacteal feeding practice and 81.9% fed colostrums to their babies. Honey (71.4%) was the commonest pre-lacteal food. Colostrums feeding were given more by the younger ($p < .0001$) and literate mothers ($p < .0001$). EBF was not found associated with age and income of the respondents but found inversely associated with their education and working status. This study providing a vivid picture of the pattern of breast feeding practice of the slum mothers could provide help to the concerned authority in their policy making and planning to improve the situation.

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Introduction

Breast milk is the ideal food for all infants and provides adequate nutritional requirements up to the age of 5 months.^{1, 2, 3} Virtually breast feeding is universal in Bangladesh and sustained for prolonged period specially among the women in rural community.^{4, 5, 6} But improper practice like introduction of pre-lacteal foods, rejection of colostrums, delayed initiation of breast feeding, water intake during early months (within 5 months), early weaning (within 5 months), etc. might often result to increase significantly the risk of morbidity and mortality, decrease milk intake and premature termination of breast feeding.^{6, 7, 8} Most of these might be prevented by

motivating lactating mothers to practice exclusive breast feeding (nothing even water but the mother's milk) up to 5 months of infants' age.

Strictly exclusive breast feeding is a major problem in Bangladesh due to ignorance, improper technique, lack of motivation, etc. Pre-lacteal feeding was a common practice in our society, specially in rural community and urban slums. Pre-lacteal feeds such as honey, mustard oil, sugar, glucose, water, etc. were almost universally given to the newborn babies in Bangladesh^{9,10}. Pre-lacteal foods may be harmful for the baby. If unhygienic it may create diarrhea and sometimes may be life threatening for the baby. But still some

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Bangladeshi mothers specially those who are residing in the rural community and urban slums are practicing pre-lacteal feeding to their new born without knowing its detrimental health effect. Colostrums and delayed initiation of breast feeding were major problems in Bangladesh. It was reported in early eighties, only 3-5% of the rural mothers had initiated breast feeding on the first day and majority (50-70%) on the third day. So infants were deprived of the valuable breast secretions, colostrums during this interval⁸. Though awareness has already been raised regarding feeding of colostrums among the rural mothers and urban slum mothers to a greater extent, yet some percentage of them do not feed colostrums to their babies.^{11, 12, 13}

Exclusive breast feeding (EBF) is adequate to maintain the nutrition and water homeostasis up to 5 months. No water supplementation is needed during this early life of infants. But very unfortunately, it was reported by some researchers in the last two decades that mothers in developing countries like Bangladesh, India, Peru, Ghana supplemented their milk with water, which significantly increased the risk of mortality and morbidity of the infants.^{14, 15, 16, 17} It is very much clear that the breast feeding practice of the city people is quite impossible to improve without improving the breast feeding practice of the slum mothers because they constitute a notable portion of the city dwellers. Research on pattern of breast feeding practice of urban slum mothers is very relevant and deserves in depth studies. This could help to explain many of the interrelated variables which come into play in explaining the prevailing situation amongst the urban slum mothers. The purpose of the study was to find out the pattern of breast feeding practice of the women living in slum environment. So the findings of the study might provide a comprehensive picture on that particular situation, which could inform and guide the concerned authorities for undertaking appropriate measures to improve the situation.

Methods

This cross sectional type of descriptive study was carried out in the Mohakhali slum, known as Sat-tala Basti, one of the largest slums in Dhaka city. All the married women having at least one child of the slum constituted the study population. Sample size was 493 and that was selected purposively from a total of 1716 cluster houses situated on the eastern part of Infectious Diseases hospital, Dhaka. Data were collected according to a duly pre-tested and partially structured questionnaire by face-to-face interview with the help of a key informant. The data were analysed by using the computer soft wire SPSS soft wire programme.

Results

A total of 493 women having at least one child were interviewed. The mean age of the respondents was 28 (± 8.1) years and a large number of respondents (41.0%) were in the age group of 15 to 24 years. Majority of the respondents (62.9%) had no education, 19.3% had non-formal, 14.2% had primary and only 3.6% had secondary education. Among the respondents 57.0% were housewives, 33.5% were garments workers, 5.3% worked as Aya / Bua and 1.6% were lower class service holders. The average monthly household income of the respondents was Tk. 3057 (± 982). (Table I)

The male female ratio of last child of the respondents was more or less equal. Among the last child, about 20% were infants, 46% were in the age group of 1 to 5 years, 23% were 5 – 10 years and 12% were more than 10 years. About 80% of the respondents gave pre-lacteal feeding to their babies. Among the pre-lacteal feeds, honey was at the top of the list (71.4%) followed by glucose water (4.5%). About 82% of the respondents fed colostrums to their last child and the rest 18% did not feed colostrums due to their wrong or no conception about colostrums. Some of

Table I: Distribution of the respondents by socio-demographic characteristics (n = 493)

Variables	Respondents		Variables	Respondents	
	No.	%		No.	%
Age of the respondents:			Occupation		
15 - 24 years	202	41.0	House wife	281	57.0
25 - 34 years	152	30.8	Garment worker	165	33.5
35 - 44 years	139	28.2	Aya / Bua	26	5.3
$\bar{X} \pm SD = 28 \pm 8.1$ years			Labourer	10	2.0
Educational status:			Service holder	08	1.6
Illiterate	310	62.9	Others	03	0.6
Non-formal	95	19.3	Monthly family income		
Primary	70	14.2	Taka \leq 3000	60	12.2
Secondary	18	3.6	Taka 3001 – 6000	380	77.1
			Taka > 6000	53	10.7
			$\bar{X} \pm SD = \text{Tk. } 3057 \pm 982$		

Table II: Percentage distribution of the respondents by pre-lacteal feeding and initiation of breast feeding of last child (n = 493)

Variables	Respondents		Variables	Respondents	
	No.	%		No.	%
Sex of last child			Type of pre-lacteal feed		
Male	246	49.9	Honey	352	71.4*
Female	247	50.1	Glucose water	22	4.5
Age of last child			Plain water	22	4.5
<1 year	97	19.7	Cow's milk	12	2.4
1 – 5 years	225	45.6	Others	35	7.1
5 – 10 years	112	22.7	Causes of not feeding of colostrums		
>10 years	59	12.0	(n = 89)		
$\bar{X} \pm SD = 59.8 \pm 51.1$ months			Causes loose motion	20	22.5
Pre-lacteal feeding			Witchard milk	01	1.1
Yes	396	80.3	Bad for health	52	58.4
No	97	19.7	Do not know	02	2.2
Feeding of colostrums			Others	14	15.7
Yes	404	81.9	Initiation of breastfeed		
No	89	18.1	Just after birth	97	19.7
			<6 hours	168	34.1
			6 – 12 hours	107	21.7
			13 – 24 hours	73	14.8
			\geq 24 hours	48	9.7
			$\bar{X} \pm SD = 16.1 \pm 43.9$ hours		

* Increased percentage due to multiple responses.

Table III: Percentage distribution of the respondents by breastfeeding pattern of last child (n = 493)

Variables	Respondents		Variables	Respondents	
	No.	%		No.	%
Exclusive breastfeeding:			Feeding pattern:		
Yes	60	12.2	EBF	60	12.2
No	433	87.8	EBF+ Prelac. feed	396	80.3
Duration of EBF (n=60):			EBF+ Prelac. Feed + Plain water	431	87.4
<4 month	29	48.3	BF+ Other feeding	56	11.3
4-6 months	24	40.0	Feeding other than BF	06	1.2
>6 months	07	11.7	Type of feeding for not EBF:		
$\bar{X} \pm SD = 4 \pm 2.6$ months			BF+ Cows milk	21	4.3
Duration of breast feeding			BF+ Powder milk	35	7.1
<6 months	43	8.7	BF+ Plain water	431	87.4
6-12 months	81	16.4	Cow's milk + Powder milk	02	0.4
13-24 months	148	30.0	Only cow's milk	01	0.2
>24 months	221	44.8	Only powder milk	03	0.6
$\bar{X} \pm SD = 25.1 \pm 12.8$ months					

Table IV: Distribution of the respondents by weaning practice of last child (n = 493)

Variables	Respondents	
	No.	%
Age of child at weaning		
< 4 months	02	0.4
4 - 6 months	144	29.2
> 6 months	291	59.0
Not weaned at all	56	11.4
$\bar{X} \pm SD = 7.5 \pm 3.7$ months		
Type of weaning food (n=437)		
Soft rice	350	80.1
Khichuri (Hotchpotch)	25	5.7
Gruel	49	11.2
Egg	10	2.3
Others	03	0.7

Table V: Distribution of the respondents by breast feeding of children other than last child (n = 334)

Variables	Respondents	
	No.	%
No. of breastfed children		
All children	306	91.6
Not all children	26	7.8
None	02	0.6
$\bar{X} \pm SD = 2.7 \pm 1.8$ months		
Duration of breast feeding:		
Not at all	02	0.6
< 6 months	08	2.4
6 - 12 months	09	2.7
13 - 24 months	96	28.7
> 24 months	219	65.6
$\bar{X} \pm SD = 25.2 \pm 7.0$ months		

them blamed colostrums for loose motion (22.5%) and bad health (58.4%) of the baby. About 20% of the respondents started breast feeding to their babies just after birth, 53.8% within 6 hours, 75.5% within 12 hours and 90.3% within 24 hours. The mean duration of initiation of breastfeeding was 16.1 ± 43.9 hours. (Table II)

Only 12.2% of the respondents exclusively breastfed their babies and about half of them exclusively breastfed for less than 4 months. The mean duration of exclusive breast feeding was 4 ± 2.6 months. Majority of the respondents (44.8%) breastfed their babies for more than 24 months and 9% for less than 6 months. The mean duration of breast feeding was 25.1 ± 12.8 months. The percentage of EBF was very low. But if the insignificant amount of pre-lacteal feeding was ignored, then the percentage of EBF was very high (about 80%). (Table III)

Fifty nine percent of the respondents weaned their child after attaining the age of 6 months, about 29% weaned their child between 4 - 6 months and only 0.4% weaned before the age of 4 months. Different types of weaning foods were used by the respondents. Among them

soft rice was used by about 80% respondents, followed by gruel (11.2%), Khichuri (5.7%), egg (2.3%), etc. (Table – IV)

About 92% of the respondents breastfed all of their children and 8% breastfed some of their children but 0.6% breastfed none. The mean number of children breastfed was 2.7 ± 1.8 . About 66% of the respondents breastfed their children for more than 24 months. The mean duration of breast feeding was 25.2 ± 7.0 months (Table V).

Discussion

This study provided some important features of the women, specially their socio-economic, demographic characteristics and breast feeding pattern living in a slum in Dhaka. In this study it was found that about two thirds (57%) of the respondents were young and majority of them (63%) were illiterate. The mean age of the respondents was 28 years. About 57% of them were housewives and the mean monthly family income of the respondents was Taka. 3057. These findings were consistent with some studies done in different slums in Dhaka^{18, 19}. A study¹⁸ carried out in different slums of Dhaka city showed that two thirds of the respondents were young, 74% of them were illiterate and most of the families were nuclear. The mean age of the respondents was 22.8 years. Another study¹⁹ in the similar situation showed that the mean age of the female respondents was 26.1 years, personal mean monthly income was TK. 680.00 and mean duration of living in the slum was 10 years.

In this present study, it was found that pre-lacteal feeding practice was very much common among the slum mothers. About 81% of the mothers gave pre-lacteal feeding to their children and honey was the commonest pre-lacteal food. Similar findings were observed in several other studies.^{20, 21} In a study it was documented that all of the

respondents (mothers) gave pre-lacteal feed to their children and the commonest pre-lacteal food was boiled and cooled water followed by honey.²²

It was encouraging that about 82% of the respondents fed colostrums to their children whereas other researchers observed that less than two thirds of the children were feed colostrums.^{20, 22} It was highly desirable that the baby should be breastfed as soon as possible after birth, preferably within 6 hours. The findings were satisfactory in this regard. About 20% of the mothers started breastfeeding just after birth and about 90% of them started breastfeeding within 24 hours after birth. A wide variation in findings regarding initiation of breast feeding were observed by several authors.^{20, 22, 23}

Though the percentage of exclusive breast feeding in the study was very low (12.2%), yet EBF including insignificant amounts of pre-lacteal feeding and plain water, the percentage was very high (87.4%). Majority of the respondents (48.3%) breastfed exclusively for less than 4 months and similar findings were also observed by another researcher.⁸

Conclusion

This study provided some important information on the breast feeding pattern of the women of a slum within Dhaka city. This cross-sectional study showed a gloomy picture of the slum women, who constitute a larger proportion of the women in Bangladesh. So, a longitudinal study on a large scale including all the variables related to reproductive health status of the women is desirable for gaining further insight.

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