



ISSN: 0975-833X

Available online at <http://www.ijournalcra.com>

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL  
OF CURRENT RESEARCH

International Journal of Current Research  
Vol. 12, Issue, 03, pp.10662-10665, March, 2020

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24941/ijcr.38203.03.2020>

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### CULTURAL PRACTICES REGARDING BREASTFEEDING AMONG POSTNATAL MOTHERS IN PIMS, PONDICHERRY

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#### ARTICLE INFO

##### Article History:

Received 04<sup>th</sup> December, 2019  
Received in revised form  
20<sup>th</sup> January, 2020  
Accepted 18<sup>th</sup> February, 2020  
Published online 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2020

##### Key Words:

Postnatal Mothers,  
Cultural Practices.

#### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Culture includes customs, beliefs, laws, religious practices etc acquired through generation, which impacts prosperity and sickness. Breastfeeding is influenced by economy, religion, kinship system and the growing sophistication of communications and medical technology. Though there are many advantages in feeding breast milk, there are many cultural practices regarding breastfeeding are still present. Breastfeeding is culturally well accepted but inadequately practiced. **Statement of the problem:** A Study to Explore the Cultural Practices Regarding Breastfeeding among Postnatal Mothers in PIMS, Pondicherry. **Objectives:** To explore the cultural practices regarding breastfeeding among postnatal mothers. To associate the cultural practices with selected socio demographic variables among postnatal mothers. **Methodology:** Quantitative approach with Non Experimental Descriptive Research Design was adopted for the study. Formal permission was obtained from HOD, Dept of Obstetrics and Gynaecology for conducting the main study. 60 postnatal mothers who attended OBG units of Pondicherry Institute of Medical Sciences were selected using purposive sampling technique. Data collection was done using a Semi Structured Interview Questionnaire on cultural practices regarding breast feeding among postnatal mothers. The collected data was compiled for data analysis. **Result:** In the present study, Antenatal preparation for breastfeeding reveals that most of the mothers practiced cleaning the breast with soap and water while bathing 17 (28.3%), mothers had a practice of intake of more fish and garlic to increase the breast milk secretion 51 (85%), foods recommended culturally during breastfeeding period was egg and meat 34 (56.7%), most mothers avoided the intake of mango 25 (41.7%) and cold beverages 23 (38.3%), still mothers had a practice of giving water 7 (11.5%), and sugar water 2 (3.3%) as first feed to the baby, still some mothers think that colostrums is a infectious milk and milk which has to be discarded. Mothers had a practice of temporary stoppage of breastfeeding if she was suffering from breast problem or any other ailments (fever) 25 (41.7%). Some mother had a practice of giving cow's milk / formula feed when she is suffering from fever 50 (80.3%). Mothers had a practice of giving artificial feed during night time if she is suffering from breast problem and breast milk is not sufficient 44 (40%). Most of the mothers were not had a practice of breast milk storage 40 (66.7%). **Conclusion:** The findings of the study revealed that most of the postnatal mothers were still practicing the cultural practices regarding breastfeeding. There was a significant association between some of the demographic variables with cultural practices regarding breastfeeding. Elderly in the family place an important role in determining the cultural practice to be followed regarding breast feeding. Hence there is a necessity for providing information and education on myths and facts of breastfeeding for protecting and promoting healthy practices on breast feeding.

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Citation: Ms. Senthamizhselvi, V. and Dr. Jayasankari, S. 2020. "Cultural practices regarding breastfeeding among postnatal mothers in Pims, Pondicherry", International Journal of Current Research, 12, (03), 10662-10665.

## INTRODUCTION

Culture includes customs, beliefs, laws, religious practices etc acquired through generation, which impacts prosperity and sickness. Dominant part of the social practices relies upon hundreds of years of sharp perception and experimentation (Rekha udgiri, 2017).

Culture is defined as a group of learned values, beliefs, attitudes, and practices that are passed from one generation to another generation within a community (Kittler, 2008). The development in science and technology has helped us to overcome the superstitions associated with pregnancy to some extent. But, still many of us follow them even though we realize that these lack scientific evidence. As in many other things in life, numerous traditions have been created.

They often have nothing with science. They are usually prejudices that became part of local culture (Gatrad, 2004; Choudhry, 1997). About 10 million children in the world die before reaching the age of five and of this one fifth are from India. Breast feeding is considered to be natural food for the infant, but due to various cultural beliefs and practices in India, only one fourth of the infants are breast fed during the first hour after delivery (Black, 2003). Childbirth is a period of transition and social festival in many societies. Postnatal period is considered to be very important part in every woman's life. Breast milk is nature's most precious gift to the new born, an equivalent which is yet to be innovated by the scientific community despite tremendous advancement in science and technology (Vallenas Constanza, 1998). Important recommendations given by WHO includes early initiation of breastfeeding, exclusive breast feeding for first 4-6 months, continuation of breast feeding for at least two years. Breast feeding has declined worldwide in recent years as a result of 2 urbanization, marketing of infant formula feed, and maternal employment outside the home (Faridi, 2008). Breast feeding is impacted by economy, religion, family relationship and the growing advancement of communications and medical technology. Dietary and lifestyle habits differ greatly among various nations and cultures. Elders have an imperative impact on breastfeeding. Breastfeeding practices are not attractive in India despite the fact that breastfeeding is universal. Various socio cultural practices, exists regarding breastfeeding which vary from one region to another region. Practice like discarding colostrums and promoting pre lacteal feeds are based on the beliefs that the first milk is not good or there is decrease in secretion of milk for first three days.

Practices like denial of colostrums, the first immunization of child, early and unnecessary introduction of formula feeding in incorrect preparation are also quite prevalent in many communities. Breast feeding practices are influenced by socioeconomic, cultural & educational background of the child's parents. Factors affecting breastfeeding include socioeconomic status, maternal education and employment, prenatal intention, maternal age, attitude and confidence, ethnicity, residence and type of family, emulating Western lifestyles, the influence of health-care professionals, and availability of infant formula feed. In spite of being a common practice in India, is associated with myths and superstitions such as discarding colostrum, prelacteal feeding, and early initiation of complementary feeding (Reshma garje, 2016). Globally, 44% of newborns are breast fed within first hour of birth<sup>11</sup>, nationally just 39% of the babies are exclusively breast fed by the mothers, 40.5% are 3 initiated breastfeeding soon after birth.<sup>12</sup> In Pondicherry 63.9% newborns are exclusively breast fed by mothers.<sup>13</sup> Breastfeeding is influenced by many cultural practices like colostrums should not be given, hot water has to be given to infants for digestion, honey has to be given, sugar water can be given, cow's milk can be given, these are some of the beliefs still prevalent in practices.

**Need for the study:** Optimal breastfeeding has been depicted as one of the best effective interventions in reducing infant and child mortality rate globally (Kamath Sowmini, 2016). Cultural beliefs and standards have a powerful influence on human nutrition and have been recognized as among the determinants of breastfeeding practices (David Napier, 2016; Bandyopadhyay, 2009). Advantages of breast milk are,

- It provides natural antibodies that help the baby to resist illnesses, such as ear infections. □ It's usually more easily digested than formula feed. So breast fed babies are often less constipated and gassy.
- It lowers the risk of infant death syndrome in the first year of baby's life.
- It raises child's intelligence. Studies shows that breastfed babies have higher levels of cognitive function.
- Breast milk help the child in later years, by reducing the risk of being overweight, and of developing asthma, Type1 and Type2 diabetes, high cholesterol, Hodgkin's disease, leukemia, and lymphoma (Nivin todd, 2018)

Though there are many advantages in feeding breast milk, there are many cultural practices regarding breastfeeding are still present. Some of them are first milk (colostrum) should not be given to neonate, because it looks so different from mature breast milk, some cultures have traditionally perceived colostrum as dirty, unhealthy or even infectious. Sugar water or honey has to be given before the first breastfeeding, because it gives a feeling of fullness to the baby thus causing changes in the feeding pattern of the baby either less feed or no feed at all. Breast feeding should be withheld if mother is suffering from fever or infection, because the infection may spread to the infant. Infants need water in addition to being breast fed, because it helps indigestion. The volume of milk secreted in the lactating mother depends on the breast size. The male babies will breast fed more than the female, because male baby has more value than the female baby. Neonate cries predominantly because of inadequate breast milk. Breastfeeding is easy,

breastfeeding is useful for birth control, c- section mother doesn't require to feed, mother should not be disturbed during night time so formula feeds can be given to infants during night time, twin baby's need more milk, mother has to eat only bland diet for 3 postpartum days, hot water should not be given to c- section mothers, these are the beliefs still existing. In the context of millennium development goal 4, scientific evidences have highlighted initiation of breastfeeding immediately after birth without discarding colostrums and exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months (Who And Unicef, 2003). The National Family Health Survey data published in India in 2005-2006 revealed that only 46.3% of babies are exclusively breast fed in India (Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India Bulletin, 2007). In India, breastfeeding is culturally well accepted but inadequately practiced, due to ignorance, lack of knowledge, misconception and cultural taboos such as delayed initiation, discarding colostrums, ritual purity, avoidance of hot and cold foods, restricted diet after child birth.

A descriptive study was done to determine the Socio-cultural beliefs influencing breastfeeding practices among primi postnatal mothers residing in urban slum area of Delhi. The study was conducted among 405 primi postnatal mothers by using structured interview schedule. Study reveals that 57% of mothers said that they drink milk added with more ghee and jaggery in the last few days of pregnancy as it facilitates easy delivery and promotes milk secretion soon after delivery. 13.1% of them expressed that they do not take any fatty diet during pregnancy as it increases the weight of the baby in the womb. About 51.9% of them informed that they wait for the rituals to initiate the breastfeeding. 58% of them had a practice of giving pre lacteal feed to the baby as first feeding because

the baby needs something to satisfy thirst. The study concluded that there is a necessity for providing information and education regarding breast feeding practices for protecting and promoting healthy practices on breast feeding.

A cross-sectional study was conducted to assess the socio cultural factors affecting breast feeding practices and decision in rural women at Shivanagi. 240 mothers with children less than 2 years age were selected by purposive sampling. Survey was done to collect information, using pre tested and pre designed pro forma. Study results reveals that almost all mothers breast fed their child. 91.6% of mothers had a practice of giving pre lacteal feeds. Only 35% of mothers gave colostrums. In spite of giving health education in mass media, mothers told that their decisions on exclusive breast feeding were influenced by the elderly females in family. The study insists that there is a need for health education on importance of colostrums and exclusive breast feeding.

With this reference, this study is done to explore the cultural practices regarding breast feeding among postnatal mothers.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the cultural practices followed by the postnatal mothers with regard to breast feeding?

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A Study To Explore The Cultural Practices Regarding Breast feeding Among Postnatal Mothers In PIMS, Pondicherry.

## OBJECTIVES

- To explore the cultural practices regarding breast feeding among postnatal mothers.
- To associate the cultural practices with selected socio demographic variables among postnatal mothers.

## OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

- **EXPLORE:** It is a systematic process of collecting data from a postnatal women with regard to cultural practices regarding breast feeding by using Semi Structured Interview Schedule.
- **POSTNATAL MOTHER:** It refers to all women from the time of delivery till 6 months of postpartum period admitted in OBG wards and attending OBG OPD at PIMS.
- **CULTURAL PRACTICES:** It includes broad range of activities such as religious practices, customs and dieting with regard to breast feeding.

Assumption Postnatal mothers may follow various cultural practices with regard to breast feeding.

**HYPOTHESIS H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant association between cultural practices regarding breast feeding among postnatal mothers and selected demographic variables of the postnatal mothers.

## DELIMITATIONS

- The study sample limited to 60 postnatal mothers

- The study was limited to 4 weeks

## SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The participants will be given information on myths and facts about cultural practices regarding breast feeding, which will increase their awareness and enable them to adhere to exclusive breast feeding.

## METHODOLOGY

Quantitative approach was used for this study, to assess the cultural practices regarding breast feeding among postnatal mothers. The study design adopted for the present study was non experimental descriptive research design. Socio demographic variables includes age, education qualification, occupation, income, religion, area of residence, type of family, number of children, and duration of married life. Independent variable refers to breast feeding practices of the postnatal mothers. The study was pursued in the OBG units of Pondicherry institute of medical sciences. The OBG unit includes antenatal ward, postnatal ward, antenatal clinic and postnatal clinic, with bed strength of 90. Average census of postnatal mothers is postnatal ward is 10-15 per day and 20-30 per day in OPD. The investigator specified setting is convenient to conduct the study. Population of the study includes postnatal mothers in OBG units at Pondicherry Institute of Medical Sciences. The sample for this study comprised of 60 postnatal mothers in OBG units of Pondicherry institute of medical sciences. Sampling technique adopted was purposive sampling technique. Semi Structured Interview Schedule was used for exploring the cultural practices regarding breast feeding among postnatal mothers.

## DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The data collection was done in OBG units Pondicherry Institute of Medical Sciences from 01.9.18 to 30.9.18. Formal permission obtained from the Director – principal, Dean, College of Nursing and HOD – Dept. of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Pondicherry Institute of Medical Sciences. 60 postnatal mothers were selected by using Purposive sampling technique. Nature and objective of the study explained and informed written consent was obtained from the participants. A semi structured interview was conducted among the participants to explore the cultural practices regarding breast feeding. The time spent for the interview of each participant was 15-20 minutes. Per day 3 participants were selected. Participants were assured that their identity will be kept confidential. The collected data was compiled for data analysis.

## Data Analysis Plan

The data obtained in the study was analyzed by both inferential and descriptive statistics.

Socio demographic variables and response of the participants regarding breast feeding practices were described in terms of frequency and percentage. The association between Sociocultural practices on breast feeding among postnatal mothers with Socio demographic variables was analyzed by using Chi – square test.

## RESULTS

Among the population 33(55%) of postnatal mothers belongs to 20-25 years of age, 28(46.7%) were educated upto degree, 51(85%) of mothers were home maker, 41(68.3%) of them had a family income of Rs.10000-20000 per month, 56(93.3%) of mothers were hindus, 31(51.7%) of mothers were from rural area, 41(68.3%) of mothers were from back round of joint family, 34(56.7%) of mothers has 1 children, 45(75%) of mothers duration of married life was 0-5 years. In the present study, Antenatal preparation for breast feeding reveals that most of the mothers practiced cleaning the breast with soap and water while bathing, mothers had a practice of intake of more fish and garlic to increase the breast milk secretion, foods recommended culturally during breast feeding period was egg and meat, most mothers avoided the intake of mango and cold beverages, still mothers had a practice of giving water, and sugar water as first feed to the baby, still some mothers think that colostrums is a infectious milk and milk which has to be discarded. Mothers had a practice of temporary stoppage of breast feeding if she was suffering from breast problem or any other ailments (fever). Some mothers had a practice of giving cow's milk / formula feed when she is suffering from fever. Mothers had a practice of giving artificial feed during night time if she is suffering from breast problem and breast milk is not sufficient. Storage of breast milk was not practiced by most of the mothers.

In the present study there was association between initiation of breast feeding ( $p=0.032$ ), giving artificial / cow's milk ( $p=0.035$ ) to the baby's and age of postnatal mother and. Most of the mothers aware that early initiation of breast feeding prevents neonatal mortality rate. In the present study there was association between area of residence with exclusive breast feeding ( $p=0.003$ ). Almost all mothers were from rural area. In the present study findings showed that there was association between educational status of the mother with type of feed given to the baby during fever ( $p= 0.028$ ). In the present study found an association between type of family with artificial / cow's milk ( $p=0.002$ ). Higher numbers of the mothers were from a back ground of joint family. Elderly in the family plays an important role in implementation of cultural practices regarding breast feeding among postnatal mothers.

## Conclusion

Culture is the distinctive way of life for group of people. Culture is a system of goals, beliefs, attitude and role that are showed by a distinct human group learned by succeeding generations. The study revealed that large number of the postnatal mothers follows cultural practices regarding breast feeding. Elderly in the family place the important role in practicing the cultural practices regarding breast feeding.

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