

CULTURAL DYNAMICS OF INFANT FEEDING: A STUDY OF FULANI AND CHAMBA COMMUNITIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study was carried out in Ganye local government area of Adamawa State to analyses breast feeding and weaning pattern of infants amongst the Chamba and Fulani tribes. Four hundred indigenous nursing mothers that had infants belonging to these two major tribes (Chamba and Fulani) were studied in different maternity centers. Purposive random sampling technique was employed to select five maternity clinics and general hospital where women go for ante-natal in the study area. Similarly, stratified random sampling was used to select 200 breastfeeding and 200 weaning mothers from the selected institutions. Data were collected from the respondents by the use of a structured questionnaire and personal interview. Frequency and percentages were used to analyses the data. The study revealed among others that there were no nutritionist, dieticians and pediatrics in most of the clinics to offer specialized pieces of advice to mothers. Hence, it was recommended that government should endeavour to employ more specialists who will help in discharging specialized services to breastfeeding and weaning mothers.

Keywords: Breastfeeding, weaning, infants, nursing mothers, Adamawa

INTRODUCTION

Breast milk is perfect food for infants. It has the right amount of body building protein that the young child needs to grow. It has plenty amount of energy carbohydrates and fats as well as all the vitamins, minerals and water that the young child needs (Howard et al, 1999). Breast milk is safe always ready for the child to suck from the mother and contain non harmful micro-organism. Series of studies on the growth of infants along parallel estimation of output and chemical composition of mother has shown that even infants from poor socio-economic backgrounds can grow normal for the first four months of life on breast milk (Bowen-Jones et al, 1982). This shows that breast feeding is a way of providing ideal food for the healthy growth and development of infants. The anti-infective properties of breast milk help to prevent infants from disease and there is an important relationship between breastfeeding and child spacing. Breastfeeding accelerates post-partum uterine contraction and involution (Aarts et al, 1990). WHO/ UNICEF (1989) state that breastfeeding is the best form of infant feeding for all segments of population in all countries of the world, it is natural for infants to be fed with breast milk. Weaning is the process by which breast milk is replaced with other foods, but still available to some extent with reasonable adjustment to the adult food (Howard et al, 1999). If the child is properly fed he/she is expected to double his/her birth weight that is 7kg by six months and then triple it by the end of first year which is about 11kg as normal birth weight is 3.5kg. However, if a well-balanced diet is not provided during this stage of life, the child will not grow well,

He/she will be short of the basic or necessary ingredients for his/her age and at times the brain may not develop properly (Selley et al, 1990). As the infant begins to crawl, walk and run, his/her food needs increase. Food like vegetables, yam, meat, fruits and legumes will have to be included in the diet (Selley et al, 1990). As a result of weaning, food becomes necessary in order to enable the child to meet the increase demand for energy. That is why cereals such as rice, sorghum and maize in the form of gruel is the most common weaning foods in Africa (WHO/UNICEF, 1989). Powdered milk, imported canned cereals, animal protein, mashed beans and yam are the preferred supplementary foods by mothers. However, foods suitable for weaning infants vary from one place to another depending on availability, cost and culture as well as food preference in developing countries, nutritionally adequate weaning food may sometimes be scarce or too expensive for some section of the population such as the low income urban families. This may mean that the infants are not given adequate quality and quantity of foods resulting in various nutritional deficiencies with high prevalence in the weaning period, such as kwashiorkor, marasmus and nutritional dwarfing (Ford et al, 1994).

Table 1: Chemical Composition of Woman Breast Milk and Colostrum's

Nutrients	Human Milk	Colostrum's
Energy (kg)	292.3	236.5
Protein (g)	1.1	2.7
Fat (g)	4.0	2.9
Carbohydrates (g)	7.3	5.3
Calcium (mg)	3.3	3.1
Phosphorus (mg)	14	14
Iron (mg)	0.1	0.09
Vitamin A (ju)	240	296
Thiamin (mg)	0.01	0.015
Niacin (mg)	0.2	0.075
Ascorbic acid (mg)	5	4.4
Riboflavin (mg)	0.04	0.029

Source: WHO/UNICEF 1989**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study was based on the farm level data and small scale maize farmers in Ganye local government in Adamawa state, Nigeria. The study area comprises different villages which are rural in nature. Ganye is located approximately on the intersection of latitude 9°8 'N and longitude 11°5' East. It has a land mass of 22,775.30km² and a population of 681,353 (NPC, 2007). Ganye is located with the savannah belt of the Nigeria's vegetation zones. Nursing mothers with their infants were the target respondents for the study. 400 nursing mothers were selected from the study area and were used for the study. The sampling technique employed is purposive random selection of five maternity clinics and a general hospital where women go for ante-natal in Ganye, Yebbi, bakariguso, Timdore, Sugu, and Gurum because of the large

number of nursing mothers in these areas. The second stage involved simple random sampling where 400 nursing mothers were randomly selected of whom 200 are breastfeeding and 200 are weaning mothers in the study area. Questionnaire and personal interview schedule were the major sources used to collect data for the study. The data obtained were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sex Distribution of Infants: Two hundred and twenty five represented by 56.25% infants were female while 175 (43.75%) were male.

Age Distribution of Infants: 135 (33.75%) were within the age range of 0-3 months, 145 (35%) were in the age bracket of 4-6 months while only 125 (31.25%) were within the age boundary of 7-12 months.

Feeding Pattern of Infants: 260 mothers representing 65% fed their infants with breast milk only, while 120 (30%) breastfed and bottle fed their babies.

Age Breastfeeding Started and Stopped: All 400 mothers started breastfeeding their infants at age 0-4 months. 30(7.5%) stopped breastfeeding at 4 months, 70 (17.5%) stopped breastfeeding at 5-8 months, 130 (32.5%) mothers stopped breastfeeding at 9-12 months while 170 (42.5%) mothers stopped breastfeeding at age 13-17 months. The study indicates that a greater percentage of the respondents practice prolonged breastfeeding.

Frequency of Breastfeeding of Infants by Nursing Mothers: 100 mothers (25%) breastfed 1-5 times daily, 140 (35%) mother's breastfed 6-10 times daily while one hundred and sixty mothers (40%) breastfed 11-15 times daily.

Ages of Infant when Weaning Started: 80 represented by 20% started weaning at the age of 0 - 3 months, 150 (37.5%) mothers wean at ages 4-6 months while 170 (42.5%) mothers weaned at the age of 7-12 months.

Types of Weaning Foods: 160 (90%) mothers weaned their infants on cereal grains. 120 (32%) mothers use maize, 100 (25%) mothers use guinea corn while 140 (40%) mothers use millet. Only 40 (10%) mothers use legumes in weaning. No mother used yam or any tuber crop in weaning their children.

Frequency of Feeding: 80 (20%) mothers feed their children four times daily; 140 (35%) feed their children six times daily while 180 (45%) mothers feed their children on demand by crying.

Food Administration: 328 (82%) mothers feed their children personally while 72 (18%) mothers were assisted by house help or nannies.

Mothers' Educational Background: 180 (45%) mothers attended primary school, 120 (30%) mothers attended secondary school and 60 (15%) mothers are illiterates only 40 (10%) mothers attended tertiary institution.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was carried out to establish the breastfeeding and weaning pattern among Chamba and Fulani tribes in Ganya local government area of Adamawa State of Nigeria. In the study most had attended primary school education which shows educational attainment is low. It also revealed that most mothers fed their children on demand. Most mothers prefer millet paste to make pap used for weaning, only 10% of mothers

use legumes in weaning children. There were no nutritionist, dieticians, and pediatricians in most clinics to offer specialized pieces advice to mothers. Government should endeavour to employ more of such specialist. Finally, health information in form of leaflets and diagrams should be made available to many anti-natal clinics to enlighten them in basic breastfeeding and weaning practices.

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