

**BREAST FEEDING PRACTICES IN RURAL UTTAR PRADESH****Arpita Verma, Ph.D.***Department of Sociology, University of Lucknow***Abstract**

**Background:** Breastfeeding is important for reducing child mortality and morbidity. It is now established that the breast feeding practices adopted in terms of duration, frequency and exclusiveness is essential for our understanding on impact of breast feeding on complete physical, mental and psycho-social development of the child. This study was aimed to describe the breastfeeding practices in rural areas of Uttar Pradesh.

**Objective:** The objective of this study was to describe the breastfeeding practices, socio-cultural factors affecting the initiation of breastfeeding and alternative for breastfeeding in the district of Barabanki in Uttar Pradesh.

**Methodology:** The study was conducted in two villages (Hazipur & Nawabpur) of Barabanki district of Uttar Pradesh. The total sample size of the study was 169 under which mother falling in the age bracket of 15-45 years & with children below 5 years were considered. The data was collected using the pre-tested questionnaire, FGD & Case Study methods.

**Findings:** It was found in both the villages that a large number of women tend to give honey to infants soon after birth. The study shows that only 14.2 percent women gave first milk to the infant in both the villages. It was found that 62.9 percent of women in Hazipur and 69.4 percent of women in Nabawpur village gave honey to the infant at the time of birth; 34 percent in Hazipur and 29.2 percent in Nabawpur village of women gave cow or goat milk and 3.1 percent in Hazipur and 1.4 percent in Nabawpur village of women gave sugar syrup to the new born babies. Majority of women had given honey to the new born baby instead of breast milk (First milk of mother- Colostrums).

**Keywords:** Breastfeeding, colostrums, duration, initiation, rural areas

**Introduction:**

Breastfeeding is one of the most important determinants for child survival, birth spacing and prevention of childhood infections. The importance of breastfeeding has been emphasized in various studies. The importance of exclusive breastfeeding and the immunological and nutritional values of breast milk have been demonstrated.

The beneficial effects of breastfeeding depend on breastfeeding initiation, its duration, and the age at which the breast-fed child is weaned. Breastfeeding practices vary among different regions and communities in India. In Uttar Pradesh, breastfeeding in rural areas appears to be shaped by the beliefs of a community which are further influenced by social, cultural, and

economic factors. Hence, the study with these relationships helps in orienting the breastfeeding promotional activities and for preventing a decline in initiation and duration of breastfeeding practices. In this study, I have taken the demographic variables and breastfeeding practices.

WHO and UNICEF have recommended that infants should be given only breast milk for the first six months of their lives. Similarly, the reproductive and child health programme of the government of India also recommends that infants should be exclusively breastfed from birth to age four months (NFHS-3). Initiation of breast feeding immediately after childbirth is also critical because it benefits both mother and infants. The relevant information regarding the socio-demographic structure of family and the breast feeding practices followed in the younger child were reordered.

NFHS-3 data indicate that in 2005-06 around 7 percent of women aged 15-34 years in rural Uttar Pradesh (UP) had initiated breastfeeding within one hour of birth, indicating no change since NFHS-2 in 1998-99 and DLHS-3 (2007-08) data for UP show that although there has been an improvement in the practice of early breastfeeding, it was only around 15 percent; the data also reveal that just 8 percent of children aged 6-23 months in rural UP were exclusively breastfed till the age of 6 months.

### **Objectives**

- To study the knowledge and practices related to breast feeding practices in rural villages of Barabanki district of Uttar Pradesh.
- To identify socio-cultural behaviors and barriers that influences breast feeding.

### **Methodology**

For undertaking this study a pre-tested questionnaire was used. The pre-tested questionnaire included various factors that had a potential effect on the initiation and duration of breastfeeding practices. The questionnaire included socio-economic and demographic data, details on the initiation and duration of breastfeeding, details on artificial feeding.

The total sample size of the study was 169 under which mother falling in the age group of 15-45 years & with children below 5 years was considered. The data was collected from two selected villages of Barabanki districts of Uttar Pradesh from 2009-2010. The villages have been selected on the basis of presence of voluntary organization and their interventions on health and nutrition discipline. The study is based on both qualitative and quantitative data. The data was collected using the pre-tested questionnaire, FGD & Case Study methods. The

mother respondents were enlisted by house to house survey with the help of anganwadi worker and medical social worker by the investigator to minimize the non-response. Data entry was done by using CSPro and analysis was done by using software STATA.

**Result& Discussion:**

**Village 1-Hazipur**

The table 1.0 shows that a total of 21.2 percent women were advised by health workers for breast feeding of colostrum, 3.5 percent women were advised to breastfeed immediately or within one hour & majorly 75.2 percent women had not received any advice or information on breast feeding. However, weaning should start from the sixth month because breast milk alone cannot sustain the growth of infant from that age (I.C.M.R.,1997). It was also found that only 12.6 percent women breastfeed their first milk to the child. During FGDs women had mentioned that it is customary to start breast feeding only after 1-2 days of delivery. They also believe that the breast feeding should start on an auspicious occasion.

**Table 1.0 Distribution of women received advised on breast feeding**

Characteristics	Hazipur			
	Advised to feed		No advise Number (Percent)	Total Number (Percent)
	Colostrums Number (Percent)	Immediately/ within one hour Number (Percent)		
<b>Education</b>				
Illiterate	11 (14.1)	3 (3.8)	64 (82.1)	78 (100)

Up to Primary	4 (28.6)	1 (7.2)	9 (64.3)	14 (100)
Up to High School	7 (38.9)	0 (0.0)	11 (61.1)	18 (100)
More	2 (66.7)	0 (0.0)	1 (33.3)	3 (100)
<b>Age group</b>				
<24Years	7 (35.0)	2 (10.0)	11 (55.0)	20 (100)
25-35Years	15 (27.8)	0 (0.0)	39 (72.2)	54 (100)
36+Years	2 (5.1)	2 (5.1)	35 (89.7)	39 (99.9)
<b>Social Group</b>				
SC	13 (17.6)	3 (4.1)	58 (78.4)	74 (100.1)
OBC	9 (25.0)	1 (2.8)	26 (72.2)	36 (100)
Other	2 (66.7)	0 (0.0)	1 (33.3)	3 (100)
<b>Land holding</b>				
Landless	7 (23.3)	1 (3.3)	22 (73.3)	30 (99.9)
Marginal	12 (17.4)	3 (4.3)	54 (78.3)	69 (100)
Small	2 (22.2)	0 (0.0)	7 (77.8)	9 (100)
Large	3 (60.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (40.0)	5 (100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>24 (21.2)</b>	<b>4 (3.5)</b>	<b>85 (75.2)</b>	<b>113 (99.9)</b>

**Figure 1.0 Breast Feeding Advice**

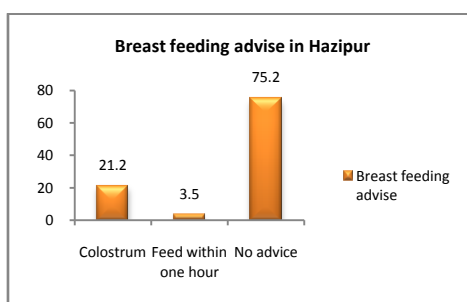


Table 1.1 shows that only 12.6 percent women gave first milk to the infant in village. It was also observed that education, landholding, caste does not play much role in the feeding of colostrums. Young mothers fed their first milk to the infant just after the birth. 30 percent of mothers belonging to the extended family gave their first milk to infant which was followed by 9.5 percent from & 8.6 percent from nuclear family.

**Table 1.1: First Milk Given To Child**

Characteristics	Hazipur	
	Number	Percent
<b>Education</b>		
illiterate	77	13.0
Up to Primary	14	7.1
Up to high School	17	17.6
More	3	0.0
<b>Age group</b>		
<24Years	18	27.8
25-35Years	54	14.8
36+ Years	39	2.6
<b>Social Group</b>		
SC	72	12.5
OBC	36	13.9
Other	3	0.0
<b>Landholding</b>		
Landless	30	16.7
Marginal	67	10.4
Small	9	11.1
Large	5	20.0
<b>Religion</b>		
Hindu	111	12.6
Muslim	-	-
<b>Type of family</b>		
Nuclear	70	8.6
Joint	21	9.5
Extended	20	30.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>12.6</b>

Table 1.2 reveals that a large number of women gave honey to infants after the birth. Total 62.9 percent of women gave honey, 34 percent gave cow or goat milk and 3.1 percent gave sugar syrup. It shows that majority of women had given honey to the new born baby instead of breast milk (First milk of mother-Colostrum). The data was calculated on parameters such as education of women, age group, social group and landholding. It was observed that they prefer to give her first milk to child. Women also reported that sometimes the first milk is not secreted on the first two days that's why she was not able to give her first milk.

**Table 1.2 Distribution of women who gave alternative of breast feeding to the infant by education, age, social group and land holding**

Characteristics	Hazipur
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	<b>Honey Number (Percent)</b>	<b>Cow/Goat milk Number (Percent)</b>	<b>Sugar syrup Number (Percent)</b>	<b>Total Number (Percent)</b>
<b>Education</b>				
Illiterate	39 (58.2)	26 (38.8)	2 (3.0)	67 (100)
Up to Primary	10 (76.9)	3 (23.1)	0 (0.0)	13 (100)
Up to High School	10 (71.4)	3 (21.4)	1 (7.1)	14 (100)
More	2 (66.7)	1 (33.3)	0 (0.0)	3 (100)
<b>Age group</b>				
<24Years	6 (46.2)	6 (46.2)	1 (7.7)	13 (100)
25-35Years	29 (63.0)	15 (32.6)	2 (4.3)	46 (100)
36+Years	26 (68.4)	12 (31.6)	0 (0.0)	38 (100)
<b>Social Group</b>				
SC	36 (57.1)	25 (39.7)	2 (3.2)	63 (100)
OBC	24 (77.4)	6 (19.4)	1 (3.2)	31 (100)
General	1 (33.3)	2 (66.7)	0 (0.0)	3 (100)
<b>Land holdings</b>				
Landless	11 (44.0)	13 (52.0)	1 (4.0)	25 (100)
Marginal	40 (66.7)	18 (30.0)	2 (3.3)	60 (100)
Small	6 (75.0)	2 (25.0)	0 (0.0)	8 (100)
Large	4 (100)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>61 (62.9)</b>	<b>33 (34.0)</b>	<b>3 (3.1)</b>	<b>97 (100)</b>

**Village 2-Nabawpur**

The table 1.3 reveals that 17.2 percent respondents received advised on colostrums feeding, 6.9 women were advised to breastfeed immediately or within one hour on breast feeding during pregnancy. Thus, it has been seen that majority of women did not receive any advice on breast feeding. In practice only 16.3 percent of respondent confirmed to have given first milk to their children.

**Table 1.3 Distribution of women received advice on breast feeding during pregnancy**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Nabawpur</b>			
	<b>Advised to feed</b>		<b>No advise</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>Colostrums Number (Percent)</b>	<b>Immediately/ within one hour Number (Percent)</b>	<b>Number (Percent)</b>	<b>Number (Percent)</b>
<b>Education</b>				

Illiterate	7 (12.1)	2 (3.4)	49 (84.5)	58 (100)
Up to Primary	4 (30.8)	2 (15.4)	7 (53.8)	13 (100)
Up to High School	1 (10.0)	2 (20.4)	7 (70.0)	10 (100)
More	3 (50.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (50.0)	6 (100)
<b>Age Group</b>				
<24Years	6 (30.0)	4 (20.0)	10 (50.0)	20 (100)
25-35Y	9 (17.0)	2 (3.8)	42 (79.2)	53 (100)
36+Y	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	14 (100.0)	14 (100)
<b>Social Group</b>				
SC	3 (7.7)	4 (10.3)	32 (82.1)	39 (100.1)
OBC	9 (21.4)	2 (4.8)	31 (73.8)	42 (100)
General	3 (50.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (50.0)	6 (100)
<b>Land Holding</b>				
Landless	4 (15.4)	1 (3.8)	21 (80.8)	26 (100)
Marginal	6 (13.3)	4 (8.9)	35 (77.8)	45 (100)
Small	2 (22.2)	1 (11.1)	6 (66.7)	9 (100)
Large	3 (42.9)	0 (0.0)	4 (57.1)	7 (100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>15 (17.2)</b>	<b>6 (6.9)</b>	<b>66 (75.9)</b>	<b>87 (100)</b>

**Figure 1.2 Advice on breast feeding practices in nawabpur**

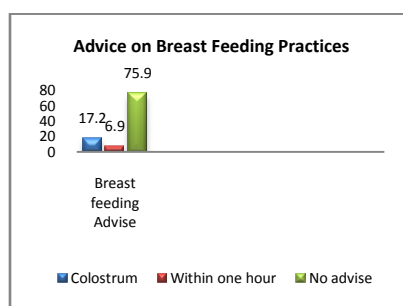


Table 1.4 shows that 16.3 percent women in Nabawpur village gave their first milk to the infant. Also, it was analysed that respondents education, age group, landholding, social group, religion, family type play important role in the breast feeding practices. The percentage of breast feeding is high among mothers who are found to be more educated (50%), young, belongs to higher caste (40%) and high economic group (42.9%), Hindu caste (16.9%) and belongs to extended family (21.4%) gave their first milk to infant

**Table 1.4: Women gave their first milk to child**

Characteristics	Nawabpur	
	Number	Percent
<b>Education</b>		
illiterate	58	12.1
Up to primary	13	23.1
Up to high School	9	11.1
More	6	50.0
<b>Age group</b>		
<24Years	20	15.0
25-35Y	53	18.9

36+Y	13	7.7
<b>Social Group</b>		
SC	39	10.3
OBC	42	19.0
Other	5	40.0
<b>Land holding</b>		
Landless	26	11.5
Marginal	44	11.4
Small	9	33.3
Large	7	42.9
<b>Religion</b>		
Hindu	83	16.9
Muslim	3	0
<b>Type of family</b>		
Nuclear	42	7.1
Joint	30	26.7
Extended	14	21.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>16.3</b>

The table 1.5 shows that most of the women gave honey to the infants after birth; 69.4 percent of women gave honey, 29.2 percent gave cow milk/goat milk and 1.4 percent respondents gave sugar syrup to the newborn babies.

**Table 1.5 Distribution of women to give alternative of breast milk by education, age, social group and land holding**

Characteristics	Nabawpur			
	Honey	Cow/Goat milk	Sugar syrup	Total
	Number (Percent)	Number (Percent)	Number (Percent)	Number (Percent)
<b>Education</b>				
Illiterate	31 (60.8)	19 (37.3)	1 (2.0)	51 (100)
Up to Primary	9 (90.0)	1 (10.0)	0 (0.0)	10 (100)
Up to High School	7 (87.5)	1 (12.5)	0 (0.0)	8 (100)
More	3 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (100)
<b>Age Group</b>				
<24Years	11 (64.7)	6 (35.3)	0 (0.0)	17 (100)
25-35Years	31 (72.1)	12 (27.9)	0 (0.0)	43 (100)
36+Years	8 (66.7)	3 (25.0)	1 (8.3)	12 (100)
<b>Social Group</b>				
SC	26 (74.3)	9 (25.7)	0 (0.0)	35 (100)
OBC	22 (64.7)	11 (32.4)	1 (2.9)	34 (100)
General	2 (66.7)	1 (33.3)	0 (0.0)	3 (100)
<b>Land Holding</b>				
Landless	12 (52.2)	10 (43.5)	1 (4.3)	23 (100)
Marginal	31 (79.5)	8 (20.5)	0 (0.0)	39 (100)
Small	3 (50.0)	3 (50.0)	0 (0.0)	6 (100)
Large	4 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>50 (69.4)</b>	<b>21 (29.2)</b>	<b>1 (1.4)</b>	<b>72 (100)</b>



## **DISCUSSION:**

Women in rural areas generally don't have very positive attitude towards initiation of breast feeding though only young mothers have positive attitude. Some women had initiated breast feeding and continued to breastfeed their child even after 9 months. Breast milk should be initiated within 30 minutes from the time of delivery. The delay in initiation will lead to delay in the development of oxytocin reflexes, which are very important for the contraction of the uterus and the breast milk reflex. It was found that in my study that most of mothers did not initiated breastfeeding within 1 hour of childbirth, which is not at all a good practice. Also, only 14.2 percent women had given first milk to the infant in both the villages. The situation was found better in Nabawpur village in comparison to Hazipur village because the social structure of this village is different from Hazipur and also the mothers were more educated in this village. An NGO named CARE was Working in Hazipur village towards the improvement of maternal and child health. Despite that it was found in the study that mothers in this village were not practicing breast feeding. Hazipur village at large was found to be an economically low, wherein women are not more educated. Though, some women are aware about benefit of first milk for newly born infant but despite that they don't practice it because of her mother in law cultural beliefs.

In today's time the survival of a new born baby has become a major priority. Specific programs for enhancing the maternal and child health have been in place since the early 1950s; some are still there like MCH program, immunization, ORS for the control of diarrheal disease, anaemia, and vitamin A prophylaxis program, CSSM and RCH.

It is generally advised that pre lacteal feeds should not be given to a new born baby but still majority of mothers tend to give either sugar water or honey. Discarding the colostrum is still practiced widely in rural villages. The colostrum is rich in vitamins, minerals, and immunoglobulin that protect the child from infections. Discarding the colostrum and feeding the child with sugar water, honey rather makes the child more vulnerable to infections. Other studies have also found similar practices in the rural areas.

It was also observed that women fed their child after 3 to 4 days of childbirth because of many reasons being cited as cultural practices and few women said that milk was not secreted at first day so they give honey or cow milk or sugar syrup instead of breast milk. Lack of knowledge and ignorance was prevalent among women about the breast feeding practices. During FGD, one woman mentioned, *"as my breast milk did not start, I fed the infant with*

*honey for two days.*” Another woman added that *“it is customary to feed the baby with honey in beginning rather than breast milk for 2-3 days after the birth.”* A young woman remarked, *“The first two days milk is not secreted that is why I am not able to feed the baby.”*

Mothers did not feed colostrums (first milk of mother) in both the villages. There were many reasons behind that some cultural practices like colostrums are not pure milk and considered as dirty milk; & child first should be fed with honey. Only after three days a mother starts feeding her milk to child. Another reason reported by respondents was that in some cases milk was not secreting until two to three days, so mothers were not able to feed colostrums to their infants. Also, it was told that in some families mother gave her milk to child only after doing some rituals.

#### **CASE STUDY:**

#### **BREAST FEEDING PRACTICES, COLOSTRUMS**

During the field survey it was observed that most of the women do not feed their first milk to the newly born child, there are many misconceptions behind that. The old lady in the family plays major role as she advised the initial diet to be given to the infant such as honey, goat or cow milk.

In most of the cases women doesn't feed the colostrums for 3-5 days, afterwards she gave her milk to the infant. During the personal interview as well as in focus group discussions, it was found that mothers do not feed their first milk to the infants as there are many misconceptions and superstitious beliefs behind that. A respondent named Janaki had said that first milk is poisonous; some says it's dirty milk; we can't give it to our infant. Few women complained that the milk secretion has not begun on the very first day as it takes some time to secrete milk, hence she could feed after three days.

It was observed that only educated women and some women who were aware about breastfeeding gave colostrums to their infants. The awareness level is found to be high in the village Hazipur in comparison to Nabawpur village. The colostrums practices are low in both the villages. This case study reflects that in spite of many government and NGOs efforts, the sufficient behaviour changes have not been seen.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

The overall study reveals that the recommendation of breastfeeding new born within 30 minutes is not properly implemented in the rural area of Barabanki district of Uttar Pradesh.

Mothers are not aware of it at large and only young and educated mothers know the importance of breast feeding in both the villages.

Despite having many awareness programs especially for spreading breast feeding practices & its implementation by government and various NGO institutions; the deep rooted rituals in society & old traditional practice are actually hindering optimal feeding. Pre-lacteal feeds, animal milk feeding, non acceptance of colostrum are still major problems in rural areas. So, the idea behind conducting this study was to know the breast feeding pattern in the Uttar Pradesh and its relation with age of mother as it will reflect impact of government intervention for the promotion of breast feeding practice. And from the outcome of this study we can contribute in filling the gap/pitfalls and strengthen the awareness programs for breast feeding practices.

Thus, it can be concluded from the results that breast feeding was popular in rural women though there is an utmost need to improve their knowledge about the health & useful steps to be taken soon after birth. Since, their perceptions regarding the feeding practices directly influences health of the child it is important that their false cultural beliefs & myths at large & root level needs to be replaced by a sound approach which is scientific & improved in practice.

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