

# Feeding And Rearing Practices On Infants Of Thoubal District In Manipur: A Study

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## ABSTRACT:

The concept of child rearing is as old as dawn of civilization. With time and advancement in technology and research this concept is continuously in a state of flux with the result what was acceptable at a certain period of time may be regarded as outdated or irrelevant today and vice versa. The child rearing practices differ in communities, depending on their social costumes, traditional beliefs and prejudices. Feeding and parenting are inextricably linked. Appropriate feeding practices are the key contributors to reducing morbidities and mortalities in under five children. The importance of child feeding practices for child nutrition is well recognized in the nutrition literature (WHO,1995). Education level of the parents also have a definite effect on the development of child and child rearing practices. Education enhances the parents to adopt the best child rearing practices. The paper is an attempt to highlight the cultural and social context of feeding and rearing among the women of Thoubal District in Manipur. According to National Health Family Survey (NFHS 4), Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) was 16 in Urban and 25 in Rural Areas of Manipur while the under-five Mortality Rate(U5MR) was 18 and 30 in Rural and urban areas respectively. Exclusive breastfeeding was done in 78.9% and 71.3% in Rural and Urban areas respectively (MHFW,2016).

## Keywords:

Child rearing, child feeding, child nutrition, social costumes, communities

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## INTRODUCTION

Feeding and rearing are inextricably linked, and infant feeding is central to the first maternal child interaction (Jansen, E, Daniels L, Nicholas J, (2012)). Both feeding and parenting contribute to a child's physical, social, cognitive and behavioral development and well-being (Satter, E, 1990). Child rearing practices were described by Bouchard (1994) and Jenni and O' Connor (2005) on "Transmission of tradition, beliefs, culture and cognitive actions from parents to the offspring" (Bouchard, T.J. Genes 1994). The subject of child rearing practices encompasses feeding practices as well as traditional practices followed during various stages of child growth and development. Factors such as religion, literacy, socio-economic status of a family influence the child rearing practices. Infant feeding and rearing practices differ in communities depending on social customs, traditional beliefs and prejudices of the community. Parents are the gatekeepers of the early feeding environment which is shaped by complex parent-child interactions in the context of feeding and eating. These interactions have been termed "food-parenting" (Vaughn A.E, Ward, D.S, Faith, M.S, et al

2016). In parallel with general parenting constructs, food parenting is considered to include feeding style and feeding practices. Feeding style is the broad emotional climate of the feeding dynamics, and feeding practices are the specific strategies and actions "when", "what" and "how" of child feeding. "Feeding" refers to what parents do to nourish their child. "Eating" is what the child does and include food preferences, dietary intake and eating behavior. Parent feeding and child eating are central to the fabric of family life and are strongly rooted in culture and traditions. Infant and young child feeding is a critical component of care in childhood. It is a major determinant of short and long-term health outcomes in individuals and hence social and economic development of communities and nations (WHO, 2003). World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that optimal nutrition practices for infants and children include early initiation of breastfeeding i.e. within one hour of birth, exclusive breast feeding for the first six months of life, followed by the addition of nutritionally adequate, safe and appropriate complementary foods with the continuation of breastfeeding for one year and longer (WHO, UNICEF, 2008). Studies have stressed the importance of human

milk and concluded that infant feeding should be considered as basic issue rather than lifestyle choice.

### CONCEPT OF FEEDING AND REARING ACROSS CULTURE

Child rearing is a tricky business, engaged in by all the parents, without much of empirical confirmations. The paucity of human behavior during the period of infancy and childhood affords a tremendous opportunity to parents and educators. The meaning and concept of breast-feeding, as the universally available means of feeding human infants, also vary across cultures. In the Bambara, a peri-urban patrilinear and patrilocal culture in Mali, children are thought to be of the same blood as the mother, not through birth but through nursing (Dettroyler, 1988). Thus, two children who have been nursed by the same woman cannot marry, even if they are biologically unrelated. Similarly, Fijians believe that when a woman breastfeeds a child who is not her own, a special bond and a concomitant sense of responsibility develops (Morse, 1985). However, breast milk and breastfeeding are not universally regarded as symbols of nurturance and love. In an impoverished area of North-East Brazil, breastfeeding or milk is distrusted, seen as “worthless”, dirty, sour or curdled, an image that Scheper – Hughes interprets (1984) as a metaphor related to the scarcity and bitterness of life of women there. Haitian women consider their watery milk worthless (Farmer, 1988), and they worry that it may turn into poison as a result of some malignant emotion. Thus, breastfeeding throughout history and across different cultures is not only a nutritional exchange but a complicated psychosocial cultural behavior. Its function is not restricted to the physical survival of the baby but is steeped in the expressive and symbolic configuration of every society. Feeding and rearing practices play a significant role in giving final shape to the child’s physical fitness, emotional stability, learning skills and cognitive urge. The infant continuously pushes forward in every area of development – physical, emotional and intellectual. The strides that the baby makes in the first three years become the foundations of his growth and development as a person. Parents vary in their rearing practices and are frequently unpredictable. Their interactions with children are often tinged with odd combinations of traditions, personal prejudices, emotional regards and rule of thumb procedure.

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There has been shifts in attention that the various phases of child rearing practices have attracted during the past several years. However, during the past decade consistent efforts have been made in the study of development of the child through child rearing practices. The important contribution has been done in this direction by Sears, et al (1957), Buch et al (1962), Whiting and Child (1977), Mohan C Jodhi (1977).

Pandey D.M. (1979), Ray G.S. (1980), Singh M.B. (1981), Cotteral John L. (1985), De Dorah (1985), Lowe Vandell and Kathy Shores (1987). These studies show the impact of cross-culture, traditions, social environment, living standards, socio-economic status etc., upon the development of the child. Indian studies include Kulkarni et al, A.S. Nimbalkar, V.V. Shukla, A.G. Pathak and S.M. Nimbalkar in “Newborn Care Practices and Health Seeking Behavior in Urban Slums and Villages of Anand, Gujarat, (2013). N.A. Bhosale, S.G. Deshpande, S.P. Zodpey, S.N. Jog, and N.D. Vasudeo in “Infant feeding practices in Urban population – A crime-based study (1997). Maternity illiteracy has been associated suboptimal feeding practices (U. Lawan, A. Saini, G. Amole, and Jahune, 2014). M. Chauhan. R. Bala, D. Nandan, and S. K. Mishra in “Complementary Feeding Practices in Rural Areas of District Agra, (2007)”. S. Rao, in “Study of Complementary Feeding Practices of Mothers of Children Aged Six Months to Two Years,(2011)”.

### THOUBAL DISTRICT PROFILE

Thoubal district in Manipur is one of the sixteen districts of the state. The district occupies an area of 519 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 422,168 according to 2011 Census (Registrar General, 2010-2011). Thoubal district is bounded by Senapati district on the North, Ukhrul and Chandel districts on the East, Churachandpur and Bishenpur districts on the South and Imphal East and Imphal West on the West. In May 1983, this district came into existence when Thoubal sub-division of the erstwhile Manipur central district with all its administrative units was transferred to form a new district. Thoubal district lies between 23° 45’ – 24° 45’ North Latitudes and 93°45’ – 94°15’ East Longitudes. Hindus consists of 63.28% followed by Muslims with 25.42%, Christians 1.02%, Sikh 0.03%, Buddhist 0.03%, Jain with 0.01%, others with 10.03% and lastly not stated with 0.19%.

### STATUS OF WOMEN IN THOUBAL DISTRICT

The place of women in the Manipuri society is very respectable and high. The dignity of the husband and family depends upon her (Chand, K.N.,2005). Since time immemorial, Manipuri mothers have been playing significant roles in the society. Manipuri women are laborious, economically self-reliant and are good in trade and commerce. They have skills and takes part in many social, economic, political and cultural activities which are dominant characteristics of a great mother. They take care of the family as a mother, wife, daughter, sister and a daughter-in-law. A woman’s self-worth is not dependent on her sexuality on youth, but on her personal achievement in life as a mother and a provider for the family in society. Breast feeding is closely linked to female psychology loaded with complex cultural symbolic values in Manipuri society. In every society, it is an act of culture which assumes an absolute priority over any other role, expectancy or need of a woman. To

give the breast, to give one's own milk, to have a healthy baby were to project a woman into a series of belief about the quality of milk, dependent on behavior, obligations and rules which aims at defining the correct growth of the baby, behavior of the nurturer and finally the mother. A prerequisite for good quality of the nurturer's milk and correct growth of the baby is observing a series of post-partum taboos of which total sexual abstinence during the breastfeeding period is considered priority (Mabilia, 2007). The socio-cultural value attached to feeding and rearing is manifested in the way how the quality of maternal milk acts as control mechanism over a woman's behavior in her role as a nurturer and mother, thereby regulating her sexual behavior as a wife and as a woman in Manipur society. Feeding and rearing is a psychological process steeped in culture, social and psychological instances which sees a woman's action responding to introjected expectations, formal and informal, day after day, through community life. It is not a mere nutritional "matter", but a complex exercise in which mother-child couple is fully integrated into social dynamics and in the bearer of cultural teachings. As a mother, she who is asked to breastfeed and wean the children, to be she who, many months, gives her breast milk, a nutrient which in the artificer of her very own survival, to her own child, her person is invested with a series of responsibilities, made object of a series of attentions, for the interlacing of different types of ties – physiological and social of which she herself is considered the bearer. When a woman give birth to a child, she has fulfilled her task of reproducing new beings for her husband's line of descent. Naturally, with this birth, motherhood is the first act of the articulated process which is mothering, starting from knowing how to give "good" nutrition. It is with breastfeeding that a woman starts a new period, marked by a series of rules obligations and taboos. Majority of the women give birth at home, helped by other women of the family or neighborhood with the intervention of traditional birth attendant "Quack", unqualified doctor or "maibeas". Immediately after birth, a wet mother "khom-enbee", who herself is breastfeeding her own child will volunteer to feed the newborn as breastfeeding by the mother is initiated on the third day after birth. It is believed that the milk started coming out from the breast on the third day after giving birth. Women folk will ask whether the woman giving birth experience "khom-mi-lakpa" or "khom-da-lakpa". Women perceive that the 'first milk' which is yellowish in color and dense in consistency is "bad milk" and hence is not given to the baby. However, now-a-days colostrum is considered to be good for baby's health and given to the baby. From the third day onwards, the mother started feeding the baby with her milk. The women of Manipur do not breastfeed their baby immediately after washing clothes or exposed outside with the commonly held belief that the milk is

cold after interaction with cold water and outside temperature. Mothers make and take some time to warm their body before breastfeeding their child. "It is the woman's duty to give their milk to their baby. It is natural for mother to breastfeed her children". Breastfeeding is defined as the "ultimate bio-cultural phenomenon; not only a biological process but also a culturally determined behavior (Stuart-Macadam, 1995). Breastfeeding is repeated giving in time and is responding to the material needs, nurturing the infant with a food that is appropriate for the child. To give one's milk is a social action and is viewed as such, "for its symbolic nature, held to mean actively and indissolubly mixing obligation and freedom, interest and disinterest (Mauss, 2002). With the birth of a new baby; a mother is expected to respect sexual abstinence and fulfill obligations for the whole breast feed period. "When a woman breastfeeds her baby while having sex the baby will be "khomkhalai-chuba", the breast milk becomes "bad" and "bitter" for the baby to drink. After consuming the milk, the baby will continue to have diarrhoea, vomit and becomes weak and cannot even suck the mother's milk and affects the child's health. "Sexual abstinence is observed in the first three months after giving birth for good health of mother and child. Non observance is onerous and shameful. It is manifested when woman suffer from "Nupa mangba". In this condition, the baby cannot be breastfed thus the child's health will deteriorate. Becoming pregnant during the period dedicated to breastfeeding especially during the first year of the newborn is a matter of shame for the mother. Weaning is also practiced by the Manipuri women, which is a process of introducing supplementary food other than breast milk into the diet of the child ultimately to give up suckling. The supplementation of food should be done gradually and not abruptly.

Proper training of young child to control defecation and urination so as to release at proper place and time plays an important role in child rearing practices. The toilet training of the child should be helped by the mother; to prevent bed wetting parents should use cotton-based materials to avoid infection and rashes to the delicate skin of the child. The baby should be kept clean and massaged before bathing. The toiletries should be hygienic and fixed schedule of bathing is preferred to form the bathing habits of the child.

Play is an important aspect for cognitive and motor development of the child. Parents should be conscious about providing the child with appropriate toys occasionally rather than always or never. The child should be trained to keep the toys at proper place with love, freedom to play, if the child does not play according to likings of parents, child should be made to understand with love rather than scold and diverting attention of the child. Parents should sometimes, involve themselves in the play of the child. It is ideal to

make the child sleep according to a fixed schedule. It is preferred that the child should sleep with the mother rather than any other family member. No fixed schedule should be allowed for waking up the child. Ideally, child should be made to sleep during the day regularly. During pregnancy, mothers should take tetanus toxoid vaccine to protect the child and herself from tetanus infection during and after delivery. Full term birth of a child is considered an ideal birth against premature or overdue. Children with low birth weight need more care in rearing. The mother should take proper care regarding the health of the child so that the child may not fall sick due to unhygienic conditions. The child may be trained to form the habits of cleanliness with love and affection.

In order to rear the children in a proper way ideal child rearing practices are a must to become the child sociable, remove shyness, obstinate, jealousy, irritable, apathetic, make the child less frolicsome etc. Parents should train the child with their own example rather than by using strict disciplinary techniques. The child should be given freedom to talk to other persons occasionally rather than always or never. No attention should be paid to unreasonable demands of the child. If the child shows resentment for not getting the demands fulfilled the parents should make the child understand with love. Child should be reared properly in terms of education, teaching the child in terms of story books, rhymes etc. is preferred by the play way method. Both the parents should involve themselves occasionally to teach the child. Child should be sent to school in the beginning with love and affection rather than using lucrative methods or sending forcefully. Parents should take care of making all arrangements, school bags, tiffin, convenience etc. for school daily. If the child shows unwillingness, he/she should be sent by making him/her understand with love and affection.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

- Early initiation of breastfeeding within one hour of birth
- Appropriate counselling of mothers by the health workers
- Knowledge of wrong perceptions and false beliefs of mothers towards the age for initializing the complementary feeding
- Limitation of strong institutional counselling of the mothers as well as the other family members who influence the mothers
- Motivation of the mother, encouragement, education regarding proper feeding of the infant feeding practices so as to sustain and maintain infant health
- Infant feeding should be a part of comprehensive child care, so child should be cared for all its health need
- Unfold the existing knowledge and trends of child rearing practices adopted and guidance may be provided to improve them
- Adopt scientific patterns of child rearing practices

- Improve upon the existing stereotyped traditional child rearing practices
- Better determination of what parents transmit to their child and how
- Improve the curriculum in schools and colleges – especially for girls, regarding mother crafts and eluted health care
- Modify and channelize the programs of child care for better co-ordination between parents and agencies involved in child care.

#### CONCLUSION

To become a good mother, proper feeding and proper rearing of a child is a must. For sound feeding false beliefs and myths such as discarding colostrum and stopping feeds during illness that are deeply rooted in all strata of community need to be replaced by sound and scientific messages. Proper immunization schedule, maternal literacy, hygienic feeding, emphasis on antenatal counselling, training of grassroot workers and outcomes of child nutrition should be encouraged. Education of parents has significant role on the adoption of various categories of child rearing practices. It is therefore, inferred that the role of education, as a vehicle of social enlightenment. There is an alarming need of a prospective educational intervention study or new innovative practices to achieve the optimum feeding and rearing practices in children under the age of five years. A good mother means a “good society”.

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