

## **Infant Feeding Practices among Tribal Population in Ananthapuramu district, Andhra Pradesh**

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**Abstract:** Breast milk is the best, safest, and most nutritional feeding for infants, and the health benefits of breastfeeding was well recognized. Colostrums feeding provides nutrients and immunity to the infant. Both infants and mothers advantage with early breastfeeding initiation and exclusive breastfeeding practices. Even though breastfeeding is almost universal in India, culture and tradition exhibit great impact in breastfeeding practice. In the present study, an attempt were made to explore several aspects of infant feeding practices among the Sugali tribes of Andhra Pradesh, Ananthapuramu area.

**Background:** To assess the present study, various aspects of infant feeding practices among the sugali tribe community of ananthapuramu district, Andhra Pradesh with certain objectives such as to study time initiation of breast milk, length of breast feeding, age of introduction of supplementary feeding, type of supplementary food etc.

**Materials and Methods:** A descriptive study was conducted during June-2019 to February- 2020 among 500 tribal mothers were interviewed with the help of pre-deigned semi- structured questionnaire and also through a personal observation.

**Results:** Nearly 92.2 percent (461) of the mothers had said that they initiated breastfeeding within the first hour of birth, while only 7.8 percent initiated breastfeeding after one hour of delivery. It was observed that most (55.4%) of the mothers were continuing to breastfeed their children for more than one year. Only 10.0 percent of the mothers stopped weaning before 6 months of age. Exclusive breast feeding was practiced for a long period of 2 years and supplementary foods were introduced only after the child attained 6 months of age. Proper counselling of the mothers on infant feeding practices would help in a great way in reducing child under nutrition.

**Conclusion:** Even though knowledge and practice of breastfeeding was better, However, there is still a gap in between knowledge and practice. Age at marriage and first pregnancy for the girls seem to be the biggest social issues, because a majority of the respondents were married below the legal age of marriage. There is a need for promotion and protection of optimal feeding practices for improving the nutritional status of infants.

**Key Words:** Breastfeeding, Supplementary Feeding, Sugali, Ananthapuramu

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Breastfeeding significantly improves infants quality of life by providing nutritional, immunological and other beneficial substances<sup>1</sup>. Breastfeeding which is an ancient social custom, provides huge nutritional and immunoglobulin benefits to both the mother and the infant. Because it is free of contamination, it is the safest food for infants. Infants benefit from early initiation and exclusive breast feeding in order to achieve optimal future growth and development. Breastfeeding has numerous advantages for the mother, including as strengthening her health and acting as a natural contraception<sup>2</sup>. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommended the following guidelines for important newborn rearing, hygiene at the time of delivery, keeping the baby warm, early initiation of breastfeeding, exclusive breastfeeding, nurturing during illness, and immunization and nurturing of low birth weight newborns<sup>3</sup>. During the first six months of a child's life, only mothers milk can reduce under-five mortality by 13 percent in developing countries as estimated by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)<sup>4</sup>. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) of India reported that overall 41.6percent of children aged under 3 years were breastfed within one hour after birth, 54.9 percent of the children between 0 and 5 months were exclusively breastfed, and 42.7 percent of the children aged between 6 and 9 months were received solid or semisolid food in addition to breast milk. The practice of breastfeeding among Indian mothers is universal, but initiation of breastfeeding is quite late and the colostrum is usually discarded. In rural areas, breastfeeding practices were depended by their beliefs; the beliefs are influenced by social, cultural, and economic factors<sup>5</sup>.

The Sugalis are one of the few multilingual nomadic tribal communities, found throughout India. They are the largest notified scheduled tribe of Andhra Pradesh. In various regions of India, they are known Lambadi, Lambani, Banjari, and Brinjari<sup>6</sup>. The present study was undertaken to explore the practice of breastfeeding practices among the Sugali community of Ananthapuramu district, Andhra Pradesh. In view of the fast changing customs and traditions due to industrialization and urbanization, the study was done with the objective of exploring various aspects, in terms of initiation of breast milk, period of exclusive breast feeding, and to determine the time when supplementary feeding starts, and the type of supplementary feeding adopted.

## II. METHODS

Ananthapuramu district is one of the four districts of the backward region of Rayala seema situated in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The study was undertaken to examine tribal women's infant feeding status in the Ananthapuramu district in general and in the study areas in particular. The Ananthapuramu district constitutes five Revenue Divisions viz., Ananthapuramu, Penukonda, Dharmavaram, Kadiri and Kalyandurgam. At the stage of sample selection, two mandals from each Revenue Division have been selected. Based on the concentration of scheduled tribe women population, one village from each of the mandals was selected for the purpose of the study. The sample for the study comprises of 500 scheduled tribe women were chosen by proportionately using a simple random approach. The data coding and editing were done manually on the same day of collection, and entry was done in Microsoft Excel 2007. SPSS software version 24 was used to analyse the data.

## III. RESULTS

Early initiation of breastfeeding, i.e. within one hour of birth ensures that the infant receives breast milk which is rich in high nutritional factors. The World Health Organization suggests that breast feeding should be initiated within one hour of delivery. The information on how long after birth the respondents have breastfed to the last child has been elicited and presented in the Table 1, table shows that 92.0 percent of respondents breastfed their last child within hour, whereas 7.6 percent of respondents breastfed their last child after 1 hour and only 0.4 percent of respondents said that they had no children.

**Table No 1: Time of initiation of breastfeeding**

S.No	Time of initiation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Within one hour of birth	460	92.0
2.	One hour after birth	38	7.6
3.	Not Applicable	02	0.4

Breastfeeding is beneficial for children because the mother's milk prevents disease and long-term breast feeding improves the child's health. The duration of breast feeding provided to the child by the mother has been presented in Table No 2.

**Table No 2: Distribution of the respondents according to breastfeeding**

S.No	Duration	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	0-6 months	50	10.0
2.	1 year	277	55.4
3.	2 years	122	24.4
4.	Till milk lasts	49	9.8
5.	Not Applicable	02	0.4

According to the above Table No 2, 10% of respondents breastfed their child for 0-6 months, 55.4 percent breastfed their child for one year, 24.4 percent of mothers breastfed their babies for up to 2 years, and a mere 9.8 percent were informed that they breastfed their child as long as they had milk.

Table No 3 shows the starting months for giving supplementary food to infants. It was seen that 27.8 percent sample respondents informed that they provided supplementary food to the child below 6 months. The majority of respondents, 61.8% percent, were informed that they began providing supplementary food to their child at 9 months, 6.8 percent at one year, and only 3.2 percent of sample mothers were informed that they began providing supplementary food after one year.

**Table No 3: Distribution of the respondents according to Start Supplementary feeding**

S.No	Start Supplementary feeding	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	6 months	139	27.8

2.	9 months	309	61.8
3.	1 year	34	6.8
4.	Later one year	16	3.2
5.	Not Applicable	02	0.4

According to the Table No 4, 31.2 percent of respondents provide mashed rice as a supplementary food for their children, 38.0 percent provide ragimalt, 18.2 percent provide boiled rice with vegetables, 6.8 percent provide bala amrutham, and 5.4 percent provide cerilac as a supplementary food for their children.

**Table No 4:** Distribution of the respondents according to Supplementary feeding type

S.No	Supplementary feeding type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Mashedrice	156	31.2
2.	Ragimalt	190	38.0
3.	Boiled rice with vegetables	91	18.2
4.	Bala Amrutham	34	6.8
5.	Cerilac	27	5.4
6.	Not Applicable	02	0.4

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The Government of India recommended that breastfeeding be initiated within 1 hour after birth, according to the Infant Feeding Practices Guidelines 2006<sup>7</sup>. As per the NFHS-4 survey, 51.3 percent of mothers in the total Ananthapuramu district initiated breastfeeding within an hour of delivering a baby<sup>8</sup>. Early breastfeeding was reported in 92.2 percent of the tribal mothers which participated in this study, which was higher than the 76 percent reported by Vijayakumari and Ramana in their study<sup>9</sup>. There is a significant association of breastfeeding within an hour after birth with the literacy of mothers and the place of delivery. This means that hospital staff and public health employees, as well as some non-profit organizations are working to improve tribal communities. Colostrum, the first breast milk, is highly nutritious and possesses antibodies that protect the newborn from many diseases. Delay in initiation of breastfeeding deprives the infant of valuable colostrum components, and worst still, prelacteal feeding may cause adverse health effects and also delay in stimulation normally provided by suckling, which could lead to decreased lactation<sup>10</sup>.

Breastfeeding for the first six months and continued breastfeeding for the second six months has been considered highly effective in preventing child death<sup>11</sup>. In our study, we observed 10 percent of the respondents exclusively breastfed till complete six months. 55.4 percent of respondents breastfeed up to one year and 34.2 percent of respondents continue breastfeeding for up to 2 years and until the milk is lost completely.

In the present study, 27.8 percent of mothers initiated supplementary feeding at the right age, which was six months. This is attributable to the fact that only 27.8% of respondents were aware of the importance of supplementary feeding and how it helps a growing child's health. Only 61.8 percent of mothers have started supplementary feeding in their infants over the age of nine months. 10.0 percent of responders started supplementary feeding after a year. Gupta et al. reported introduction of supplementary food at 6-9 months of age<sup>12</sup>. Laxmaih et al. reported introduction of supplementary food at 7-12 months of age<sup>13</sup>. The majority of mothers started supplementary feeding for a variety of reasons, such as the child's like, insufficient milk secretion, and the child's age at which solid food could be consumed.

In spite of the fact that the respondents were aware of a variety of supplementary foods, 31.2 percent of respondents were observed to feed their babies with only mashed rice preparations. About 38.0 percent of the respondents said that they feed their babies ragimalt. limited percentage of respondents (18.2%) boiled rice with vegetables, greens and mashed potato with the cereal base as supplementary foods. In a still fewer percentage of the respondents provided their children with balaamruthaam. as only 5.4 percent of them tried marketed supplementary foods. In their various areas of study, Narahari et al. also reported cereal being used as a supplementary food<sup>14</sup>. However, Singh and Singh et al observed that supplementary foods were made up of a combination of cereal and pulse preparations<sup>15</sup>.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The findings of our study that the good infant feeding practices amongst the Sugali women of Ananthapuramu district. Because of increased awareness of health programs like World Breast Feeding Week celebrated in Andhra Pradesh every year from 1- 7 August. This annual event shows the importance of breastfeeding for children around the world. Strengthening of information and counseling for tribal women, with active participation of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA)/ Anganwadi Workers (AWW)/ Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANM), on the importance and initiation of breastfeeding after delivery within one hour, and

duration of breastfeeding. After six months, introducing supplementary feeding had given positive results, because the mother's milk is not sufficient to meet the nutritional needs of the fast growing infant after 6 months.

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