

MATERNAL BELIEFS AND HABITS REGARDING
INFANT FEEDING AND ITS RELATION TO
MALNUTRITION AT A RURAL AREA IN
UPPER EGYPT

THESIS

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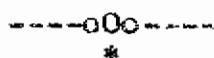
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INTRODUCTION

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Arab Republic of Egypt being one of the developing countries is characterized by a wide base population pyramid. The age group under 5 years constitute 6.2 millions and represent about 16.4 % of the population in the year 1976 (Gomaa & Bryant, 1979). 55.9 % of this very young population lives at rural areas (Result of population Census of Egypt, 1976).

Growth and development constitute the foremost characteristics of infants and children. It is evident that these processes are very much dependent on the provision of nutritional needs.

Studies on maternal beliefs and habits as regards infant feeding and its relation to malnutrition were carried out only in urban communities in Egypt (Mahmoud, 1981). However at rural areas in Egypt no comprehensive true community based population studies on this topic were carried out and we still depend on that produced following studies in other parts of the world.

AIM OF THE WORK

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The ultimate aim of this field study is to throw some light on maternal knowledge, attitude and practice as regards infant feeding and its relation to malnutrition at a rural area in upper Egypt, in order to be able to plan an intervention program for nutritional education, prevention of malnutrition and social paediatrics health actions.

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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INFANT FEEDING:

The child could be considered as the outcome of multiple interactions viz: genetic, maternal, paternal and environmental factors playing within and around him, that finally bring him to the state of health, disease or maladjustment, (Abbassy, 1981).

Adequate feeding is essential for the rapid growth and development of infants and children. It supplies the body with energy and nutrients required for growth and maintenance of cells and their biological processes, (Khalil, 1981).

The act of feeding is important to the young child not only because of the nutritive substances that are obtained from the food but also because of the emotional and psychological benefits that are derived, (Silver, et al., 1980). Successful infant feeding requires cooperative functioning between the mother and her baby, commencing with the initial feeding experience and continuing throughout the child's period of dependency (Vaughan et al., 1979).

In papyrus Ebers, the oldest medical encyclopaedia of Egypt two chapters are allocated to infant feeding (1550 B.C.).

The Talmoud and Bible contain scattered references to infant feeding. The baby was put to the breast at once and breast feeding was continued for two years, wet nurses were common and Moses was fed in this way at the orders of Pharaon's daughter. No reference to artificial methods being found in the Talmoud, (Jelliffe, 1968).

Infant feeding has also been considered within religion, in the Islamic Faith. The feeding of the infant is bound to a principle. "Mothers shall give suck to their children two full years (Sura of Cow V 232).

Prolonged breast feeding is universal in Egypt among the lower socio-economic group and this feeding is continued for 18 - 24 months. There is a wide spread belief that prolonged lactation reduces the chance of a subsequent pregnancy , (Jelliffe, 1968).

The importance of feeding infants properly is now evident in many countries of the world since malnutrition is largely responsible for the high rate of mortality of infants and children in developing countries, (Jelliffe, 1966).

BREAST - FEEDING:

During the past few years, breast feeding has become , or has regained its place as a subject of priority interest for paediatricians, nutritionists and specialists in health, and infant feeding (Berg, 1973).

Whereas for thousands of years, breast-feeding was the only means of feeding the newborns and infants, it has progressively been replaced by bottle feeding during the past few decades. Since the second world war, however, and more especially in the past twenty years, breast feeding has declined often extremely rapidly in most countries.

Breast-feeding is still very wide spread and indeed sometimes constitutes the predominant means of infant feeding, particularly in rural areas and it is the ideal food for the child up to the age of 6 months,(Park, 1971).

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF BREAST-FEEDING:

Overall growth (Judged particularly by weight and height) takes place in excellent conditions with the help of mother's milk. Specific growth factor has been identified in human milk, which helps the flourishing of bacillus bifidus which may be responsible for the better health and growth, (Abbassy, 1981).

Not only mother's milk, however, contains all the elements essential for development of the brain, also it helps in the development of jaws and teeth, (Park, 1971).

Rickets is encountered more frequently in the artificially fed than the breast fed infant, (Jeelittle and Stanfield, 1978).

Futhermore, recent studies have shown the importance of mother's milk for the prevention of a number of diseases in older children or adults: Allergic manifestations, obesity, atherosclerosis, (Raimbault, 1974, I.C.C. 1979).

Fully breast fed infants tend to have lower incidence and mortality from infection than bottle fed babies, (Thomson and Black, 1975).

Mother's milk contains many anti-infectious agents which are effective in protecting the infant, especially during the neonatal period when they are very vulnerable to infections whose consequences at this age may be disastrous, (Abidjan , 1972).

Forfar and Arneil, 1978 stated that the infant fed on mother's milk is less likely to develop gastroenteritis, kwashiorkor, neonatal tetany, hyperosmolar dehydration, cotdeath, infantile eczema, cow milk allergy, malabsorption and idiopathic hypercalcaemia.

Numerous studies have shown that morbidities and mortalities are considerably less in breast - fed than in bottle fed infants. The chief reasons for this are the gastrointestinal infections and protein energy malnutrition which occur readily with the decline of breastfeeding and the early weaning that goes with it, (I.C.C., 1979, Vaughan et al., 1979, Abbassy, 1981).

Human milk contains bacterial and viral antibodies, including relatively high concentrations of secretory IgA antibodies. It is always readily available at the proper temperature, perfectly balanced biologically, chemically and physiologically. It contains the proper amounts of

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carbohydrates, proteins and fat, (Vaughan et al., 1979 and Abbassy, 1981).

Breast-feeding is beneficial to the mother from the point of view of a low risk of acquiring cancer breast. Finally, breast - feeding is an additional guarantee that a good mother-child relationship will be established, and the child's psychoaffective future assured, (I.C.C.,1979).