BREAST FEEDING PRACTICE IN EGYPT
AN UPDATED REVIEW

ESSAY

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BY

Omnia Mohamed Nassar
M.B.,B.Ch.

Uunder supervision of

Prof. Dr. Gilane Abdel Hamid Osman
Professor of Pediatrics
Ain Shams University

Dr. Sanaa Youssef Shaaban
Assistant Professor of Pediatrics
Ain Shams University

Faculty of Medicine
Ain Shams University

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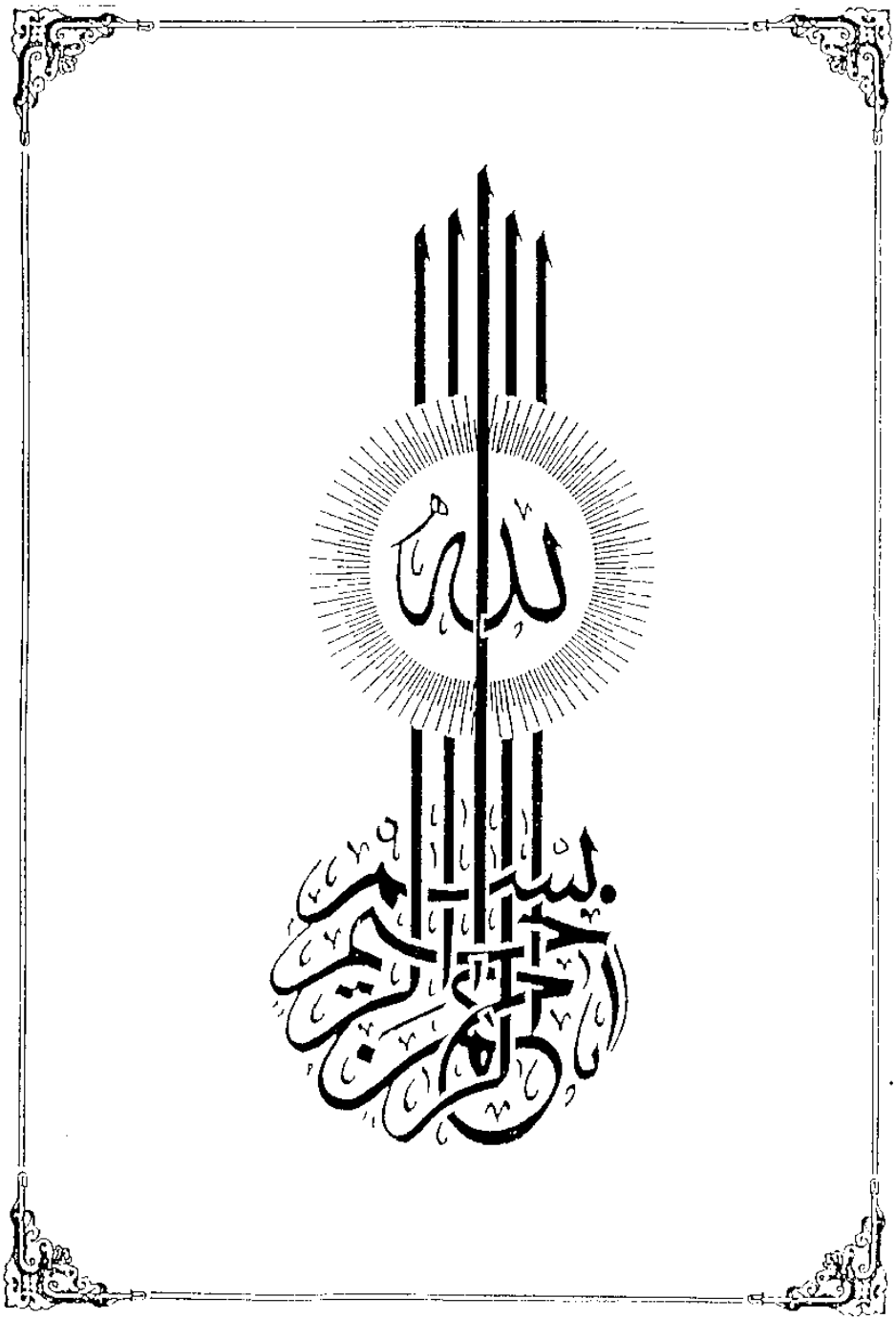
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

" قالوا سبحانك لا علم لنا الا ما علمتنا انك انت العليم الحكيم"

صدق الله العظيم

سورة البقرة ٣٢



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The prevalence of breast feeding varies from decade to decade and from community to community throughout the world (Avery and Taench, 1984). In the last few decades in Egypt, reports received from different centers showed that breast feeding was declining in both urban and rural societies. To account for this decline, various reasons might be accused; urbanization, industrialization, wrong beliefs of mothers, lack of knowledge about breast feeding and lack of support during post-partum period (Eissa, 1985a ; Eissa, 1987a). During this period of decline in breast feeding, bottle feeding was viewed as a "modern technology" and breast feeding was regarded as an "old fashion" (WHO & UNICEF, 1989).

Where bottle feeding culture prevails, girls and young women are typically deprived of positive role of breast feeding in their every day experience. So, it is not surprising that adult women frequently arrive at their own child bearing experience with little or no information about feeding together with lack of confidence about their ability to breast feed their off-springs (Ellis, 1986 ; WHO & UNICEF, 1989).

In the last two decades, a great deal of research has been carried out in Egypt and many other countries, all indicating the superiority of breast feeding for the health and well-being of the child, mother and community. Thus breast feeding is a healthy behavior which should be promoted through informal and formal education (Ellis, 1986 ; Eissa, 1987b).

In spite of recent increment in the prevalence of breast feeding in our community and many other countries, lactation difficulties and lactation failure are consistently reported as the most significant problem in the pot-partum period. This ineffective breast feeding is still due to lack of knowledge of the art of breast feeding, lack of motivation of breast feed, faulty advice and negative attitude toward breast feeding (El-Gendy, 1983 ; Turner et al., 1988 ; Tsang and Nichols, 1988 ; Thompson et al., 1989).

The decision to breast feed is often made long before a woman becomes pregnant and even before being married and is greatly influenced by the values that have been acquired in childhood and adolescence, experience and education of girls from earliest childhood and the attitude of the family and society regarding breast feeding (Ellis, 1983 ; Ellis, 1986 ; WHO & UNICEF, 1989).

A study done by Radius and Joffe (1989) on the adolescent girls' feeling about breast feeding, showed that 19.3% of girls indicated their intent to breast feed and 80.7% indicated they were going to bottle feed. A previous study done by Ellis (1983) on attitude and beliefs of secondary school students about breast feeding, showed that 17% only said that they will breast feed their infants; 72% will bottle feed and breast feed and 9% will bottle feed their infants. This reflects their lack of knowledge about the importance and benefits of breast feeding. Therefore, it is important that girls from early childhood and into adolescence should be positively oriented toward breast feeding through both their life experience and formal education (El-Gendy, 1983 ; Ellis, 1986 ; WHO & UNICEF, 1989).

Breast feeding is a natural "safest net" against the worst effects of poverty in developing countries. If the child survives the first month of life (the most dangerous period of childhood), then for the next four to six months exclusive breast feeding will go along way towards canceling out the health difference between being born into poverty or into affluence.

Unless the mother is in extremely poor nutritional health, the breast milk of a mother in an African village is as good as that of a mother in a Manhattan apartment. So, even under the poorest roof, a child who is breast fed is likely to be as healthy and to grow as well as a baby born into European or North American home. It is almost as if breast feeding will take the infant out of poverty for these first few months of life so as to give the child a better start in life and compensate for injustice of the world into which he was born.

AIM OF THE WORK

The aim of this work is to review the updated Egyptian field studies dealing with breast feeding practices, customs and beliefs in rural and urban areas. Their results will be studied and analyzed so as to clarify the different patterns and aspects of breast feeding, and to come up with conclusion and recommendations relevant to our society based on our local experience.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE