

## BREASTFEEDING AT WORK PLACE

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### Introduction

World Breastfeeding week is celebrated every year from 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> August and it is an important annual health event which highlights the importance of breastfeeding for children across the globe. The theme of World Breastfeeding Week-2015 is 'Breastfeeding and work – Let's make it work' which emphasizes the need for better support systems and policies to enable working mothers to breastfeed.<sup>1</sup> Breastfeeding gives children the healthiest start in life and it is one of the simplest, smartest and most cost-effective way that ensures all children survive and thrive. It is estimated that in India, 16.5 lakh children die every year due to easily preventable diseases. Under nutrition contributes to nearly one third of deaths among children in India. Early initiation of breastfeeding can alone save the lives of 13% of babies. Hence it is considered that breastfeeding is one of the single most effective nutrition intervention for saving lives.<sup>2</sup>

### Statistics on Breastfeeding practices

The breastfeeding practices in India is gradually falling down and it is estimated that in India only 8 million mothers breastfed their neonates within an hour of birth and 46% of newborns were breastfed within the first 24 hours of their birth. Compare to neighboring countries the percentage was found higher in Sri Lanka (75.8%), Bangladesh (64%), Afghanistan (54.3%) and Bhutan (58.5%).<sup>3</sup>

In India twenty six million children are born every year, out of which 20 million children do not get exclusive breastfeeding for first six months, whereas 13 million do not get good, timely and

appropriate complementary feeding after 6 months with continued breastfeeding.<sup>4</sup>

Tamil Nadu tops the list in the proportion of children who were not breast-fed in all age groups covered. In the 0-5 month's category, 5.8% of children are not breast-fed. This increases to 16.7% in the 6-11 months category and about 70% in the 12-35 months category. Kerala stands in second place among the 0-5 month's age group who were not breast fed and its proportion is 2.3% which is less than half of that of Tamil Nadu. Similarly, Madhya Pradesh stands second with 3.5% among 6-11 months age group, as well as 51.8% in 12-35 months age group and the overall national average stands at just 0.8 per cent.<sup>5</sup>

### **Breastfeeding mothers at work place**

Approximately 830 million women workers are working all over the world.<sup>6</sup> According to World Bank report (2013) 27% of the female population are working in India. Among these 3/4 women drop out from work during post motherhood period<sup>7</sup> and only 1/4<sup>th</sup> part of the female workers continue in work after delivery. Globally around 35.5% mothers of infants work full time in their first year and 16.1% of mothers work part time.<sup>8</sup> Among the developed countries maternal employment rates up to 3 years of child is higher i.e. Netherlands 76%, Sweden 72%, Denmark, US 54%, Italy, UK 57%.<sup>9</sup>

As per the study conducted at work place it is reported that 94% of mothers returned to work after giving birth and 78% of mothers attempted pumping milk at work place up to 6 months.<sup>8</sup>

### **Benefits of breastfeeding**

- Early and exclusive breastfeeding helps in child survival but it also supports development of healthy brain, improves cognitive performance which is associated with better educational achievement.
- Breastfeeding provides good nutrition foundation which protects children against disease and develop to their full potential.<sup>8</sup>
- Breastfeeding prevents infant from death, childhood illness and

non-communicable diseases, supports brain development and protect maternal health.

Breastfed children have at least six times greater chance of survival in the early months when compared to non-breastfed children.<sup>10</sup> 14 times less likely to die in the first six months as compared to non-breast fed child and breastfeeding drastically reduces deaths from acute respiratory infections and diarrhea which are considered as two major child killers.<sup>11</sup>

### **Recommendations by WHO and UNICEF to promote breastfeeding at work place**

#### **What employers can do?**

1. Respect national laws on paid maternity leave.
2. Provide place and time to express (pump) milk.
3. Support colleagues while they are breast feeding.
4. Provide options for mothers on-flexible work schedule, part time work, let mothers bring their babies to work.

#### **What law makers can do?**

- Ensure breastfeeding mothers getting minimum of 4 months paid maternity leave.
- Require employers to provide places to express/pump breast milk at work place.
- Prevent discrimination against

women and breastfeeding mothers in the work place.

#### **What employers can do?**

- Be supportive to the breastfeeding mothers who need time and flexibility to breastfeed.
- Encourage new mothers with a positive accepting attitude.
- Recognize that the mother after having a baby are special.

#### **What trade unions can do?**

- Inform women employees about their rights.
- Ensure breastfeeding women's Voices are heard through consultations and negotiations.
- Advocate for maternity provisions through collective agreements.<sup>12</sup>

### **Promotion of Breastfeeding at various levels**

**1. At national level:** ensure appropriate policies and legislation that are implemented and enforced. This includes support for:

- development and implementation of national infant and young child feeding policies and strategy frameworks.
- development and enforcement of appropriate legislation such as the International Code of Marketing of breast milk substitutes and maternity protection legislation.
- encouraging and facilitating

strategy for public and private partnerships with other inter-national and country level for improvement of infant and young child nutrition.

**2. Health system level:** provide support to institutionalize interventions in the health care system, such as the "Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding" and "the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative" (BFHI), developing curriculum, training and supporting health workers and health information systems. To facilitate this resources are jointly produced with the World Health Organization which include the BFHI training course.

**3. Community level:** support to be provided through counseling, communication and mother support activities with the involvement of community health workers, lay counselors and mother to mother support groups.

**4. Communication and advocacy:** UNICEF supports those countries conduct formative research, which is used to the design strategies for social and behavior change communication. UNICEF also supports the implementation of the strategies through multiple communication channels. World Breastfeeding Week is an annual health event celebrated

across the world with support from UNICEF, WHO and other partners.

**5. IYCF (Infant and Young Child Feeding):** UNICEF supports interventions to address infant feeding in emergencies and infant feeding in the context of HIV/AIDS.

#### **Role of nurse in promotion of breastfeeding practices**

- Support in formulation of policies that promote breastfeeding practices
- Develop curriculum and provide training to peripheral workers at institutional level.
- Counsel breast feeding mothers with the involvement of peripheral workers and women support groups at community level.
- Co-ordinate with various voluntary agencies that provide support to promote breastfeeding.

#### **Conclusion**

Balancing work and breastfeeding is increasingly necessary for women's rights and a strong, healthy work place and better society. Today's global economic and labour conditions are changing rapidly, with some positive but some negative implications on women's health

and livelihoods, as well as that of their children and their families.

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