

Breast-Feeding Pattern in Bangladesh and Its Effect on Lactational Amenorrhoea

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Introduction

Breast-feeding is the best form of nutrition for infants and important means of spacing birth. Breast-feeding delays menstruation, inhibits ovulation and therefore reduces the likelihood of conception. In general the longer the women breast-feeds, longer she will remain infecund. Women who do not breast-feed at all will start post-partum menstruation between 1-3 months after delivery while those women who breast-feed their children for 18 months will experience post-partum amenorrhoea for 8-13 months¹.

Breast milk has special properties that made it superior to even the most carefully made home or commercial preparations. It not only provides immunological protection against common childhood illness such as diarrhoea and respiratory disease but also helps to maintain a protective environment within the intestine. It contains the complete range of nutrients necessary to the growing infant and is easier to digest than substitutes.

Breast-feeding practice is universal in most of the developing countries and more than 90% of women breast-feed their children initially. The practice of breast-feeding varies from country to country. In Bangladesh almost 100% of the women start initial Breast-feeding and on the average continuous for 30.5 months. Similarly in India and Indonesia² more than 98 of the women breast-feed their children initially continuous on the average for 22-25 months. Breast-feeding pattern also varies in different ages and with parity. Higher the age greater is the duration of breast-feeding. In Taiwan³ it was observed that women aged 30 years and above nursed their babies for 30-36 months with an average post-partum amenorrhoea for 15 months while women 30 years and below leveled of at 12-13 months.

At any one given time about 30-40% of women breast-feed their babies in Bangladesh and these causes a reduction of fertility by about 15-20%. A decline in breast-feeding is observed in many developing countries and also in Bangladesh. These change practice of breast-feeding is expected to have an important impact on nutrition of the children and birth spacing in this country. This study expected to observe the pattern of breast-feeding and its effect on lactational amenorrhoea in Bangladeshi women.

Methodology

The data for this paper was taken from the study "Role of Village Practitioners in Family Planning Service Delivery system". Three hundred fifty married women upto age 40 were selected from the villages of the trained village practitioners under the project. The selection was done on the basis of purposive sampling. The interviewers selected three women from the village of each village practitioners keeping in view that all the women do not come from one household and each sample unit must live in a reasonable distance from the other. All the women was asked about the breast-feeding pattern of the child one before the last child. The study was done in four thanas, one from each division. The responses were obtained in structured questionnaire.

The interviewers were degree holders and almost all had previous experience of working as interviewers. They were trained for 5 days on the objectives of the survey, questionnaires, technique of interview. They had two days practice in the field. The questions were finalized after a pre-test. There were one male and 2 females interviewers in a batch. In all there were 6 interviewers. The best trained interviewer was given the responsibility of editing the responses at the end of days work. The responses were re-edited at the end of interview by the field coordinator after completion of the work in one union. Final editing was done in Dhaka in the office of the Principal Investigator. The complete answers sheets were dropped from analysis.

Result

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Mean age in the study sample was observed to be 29.94 years and mean number of living children was 3.90 Table-1 (a) & (b).

The highest majority of the respondent were illiterate (60.57%) while those educated upto primary, junior, High School and College level were 26.57%, 7.71%, 3.43% and 1.71% respectively Table-1 (c).

A large number of the husbands were farmers (27.43%) followed by Businessman (24.85%) and service holders (18.29%) and the rest were engaged in other works Table 1-(d).

Average age of the respondent at first marriage was 13.65 years and average age at first menstruation was 13.13 Table 1 (e) & (f).

Duration of Breast-feeding

Breast-feeding in the study sample was universal. All the respondent breast-fed their last child. Mean duration of breast-feeding reported by the respondent was 26.20 months and median was 26.41 months. Breast-feeding less than six months was reported by 2.57% of the women and those breast-feeding for 30 months and more were 37.7% (Table 2).

Post-partum Amenorrhoea

The median length of post-partum amenorrhoea in the study group was reported to 13.36 months and the mean was 13.52 months (Table-3). Duration of breast-feeding was observed to have definite effect on length of lactational amenorrhoea. Those who breast-fed their babies for less than 6 months, their median duration of lactational amenorrhoea was 4.50 months, while for these who breast-fed their babies for 9-11 months, 18-23 months and 3-6 and more months their median length of lactational amenorrhoea was 8.00 months, 11.0 months and 19.43 months respectively. In the study, two women became pregnant during lactational amenorrhoea.

Age and Duration of Breast-feeding

The median duration of breast-feeding for women aged 20-24 was 21.65 months, while for women 35-39 and 40 and over the median duration of breast-feeding was 27.88 and 31.38 months respectively. An ascending trend with duration of breast-feeding and age of the women was observed in the study. Slightly longer duration for breast-feeding age group 15-19 years may be due to small sample size (Table-4).

Number of Living Children & Duration of Breast-feeding *

Women with 2 & 3 living children breast-fed for 24 months and women with 6 and more living children breast-feeding in group with living child one is difficult to explain however, the likely factor may be the small sample size (Table-5).

Education & Duration of Breast-feeding

College educated respondents had shorter duration (19.25 months) of breast-feeding compared to the women with no education (27.19 months). The factors could be the effect of modernization or employment of educated wives outside their homes (Table-6).

Occupation & Duration of Breast-feeding

The wives of service holders and Day Labourers breast-fed their children for shorter duration (about 23.89 months) whereas the wives of other occupations breast-fed their children for comparatively longer duration (about 30 months). The duration of breast-feeding for the wives of farmer was 27.5 months, skill labour 37.09 months and Businessman was 26.22 months (Table-7).

Discussion

The duration of breast feeding 26.41 months and length of lactational amenorrhoea 13.36 months in this study is more or less similar to the finding of the other studies in Bangladesh, Chen et al 4 reports the duration of breast-feeding as 25 months and length of lactation amenorrhoea as 19 months. It was observed that younger and educated women breast-fed their babies for shorter duration. This also collaborates with the findings of other studies. In this study two women became pregnant during lactational amenorrhoea Chen et al 5 have shown that 6.8% of the women become pregnant during lactational amenorrhoea. The other investigators have reported pregnancy rate as 3%-8% during lactational amenorrhoea. Chen et al 6 reports that after first post partum menstruation, 6% of the women conceived in the 1st months, 16% within 3 months and 61% in 12 months.

Table—1

Per cent distribution of respondents by socio-economic and demographic characteristics.

Table—1 (a)

Age (in complete years)	No. 350	%
15—19	4	1.14
20—24	66	18.86
25—29	104	29.71
30—34	99	28.29
35—39	50	14.29
40+	27	7.71
Mean age	29.94	

Table—1 (b)

No. of living children	No. 350	%
1	17	4.86
2	72	20.57
3	68	19.43
4	70	20.00
5	53	15.14
6	32	9.14
7 *	38	10.85
Mean number of living children	3.90	

Table-1 (c)

Level of Education	No. 350	%
Illiterate	212	60.57
Primary (Class I-V)	93	26.57
Junior (Class VI-VIII)	27	7.71
High School (Class IX-X)	12	3.43
College	6	1.71

Table-1 (d)

Husband's Occupation	No.	%
Farmer	96	27.43
Landless farmer	15	4.28
Day labourer	60	17.14
Skilled labour	26	7.43
Business	87	24.86
Service	64	18.29
Other	2	.57

Table-1 (e)

Age at First Marriage (completed years)	No. 350	%
L 10	17	4.85
10...12	86	24.57
13...15	157	44.86
16...18	83	23.71
19...21	7	2.00
Mean age at first marriage	13.65	

Table-1 (f)

Age at first Menstruation (in completed year)	No. 350	%
L 12	2	.57
12	43	12.28
13	226	64.57
14	71	20.29
15	5	1.43
16	3	.86
Mean	13.13	

Table 2-Distribution of respondents by duration of breast-feeding

Duration (in month)	No. 350	%
< 6	9	2.57
6 ... 8	10	2.85
9 ...11	9	2.57
12...17	53	15.14
18...23	55	15.71
24...29	82	23.43
30...35	37	10.00
36 +	95	27.14
Mean duration		26.20
Median duration		26.41

Table 3- Distribution of respondents by duration at breast-feeding and lactational amenorrhoea.

Lactational Amenorrhoea (in month)	Duration of Breast-feeding (in month)								Total
	< 6	6-8	9-11	12-17	18-23	24-29	30-35	36+	
/- 3	2	4	2	5	9	13	6	15	56
3- 5	4	0	0	4	4	5	2	5	24
6- 8	0	2	3	24	11	10	2	3	55
9-11	1	1	2	6	4	1	3	2	20
12-17	1	1	0	11	11	24	8	19	75
18-23	1	0	2	2	11	18	7	14	55
24 +	0	2	0	1	5	9	9	37	63
Other	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Total	9	10	9	53	55	82	37	95	350
Median	2.4	7.50	8.00	7.50	11.00	14.80	15.12	19.43	13.26

Mean duration of lactational amenorrhoea-13.52. Mean duration of breast-feeding 26.20

Median " " " " " " -13.36 Median " " " " " 26.41

Table 4- Distribution of respondents by age & duration of breast-feeding

Age	Duration Breast-feeding (in month)								Total	Median Duration
	/ 6	6-8	9-11	12-17	18-23	24-29	30-35	36+		
15-19	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	4	26.5
20-24	3	5	4	12	13	7	8	14	66	21.65
25-29	3	1	3	18	17	24	15	23	104	26.29
30-34	1	2	0	17	15	22	10	32	99	26.84
35-39	1	1	1	2	6	18	2	19	50	27.88
40+	1	1	1	3	3	10	2	6	27	26.50
Total	9	10	9	53	55	82	37	95	350	

Table 5- Distribution of respondents by duration of breast-feeding and number living children

No. of living children	Duration of breast-feeding (in month)								Total	Mean duration
	/ 6	6-8	9-11	12-17	18-23	24-29	30-35	36+		
1	0	1	1	2	2	3	3	5	17	25.08
2	3	3	2	11	16	16	5	16	72	24.16
3	3	2	3	10	10	23	4	13	68	24.19
4	2	2	1	11	12	18	9	15	70	25.46
5	1	1	1	9	7	10	6	18	53	27.28
6	0	0	1	5	4	7	4	11	32	28.3
7+	0	1	0	5	4	5	6	17	38	30.34
Total	9	10	9	53	55	82	37	95	350	

Table 6-Distribution of respondents by duration of breast-feeding and education

Level of education	Duration of Breast-feeding (in month)									Median duration
	/ 6	: 6-8	: 9-11	: 12-17	: 18-23	: 24-29	: 30-35	: 36+	: Total	
Illiterate	3	6	4	32	31	47	22	67	212	27.19
Primary (Class 1-V)	2	3	1	16	12	30	11	18	93	26.16
Junior High School Class VI-VIII	2	0	3	3	6	5	2	6	27	23.00
High School (Class IX-X)	0	0	1	2	4	0	2	3	12	22.37
College	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	1	6	19.25
Total	9	10	9	53	50	82	37	95	350	

Table 7-Distribution of respondents by husband's occupation and duration of breast-feeding

Husband's occupation	Duration of Breast-feeding (in month)									Mean duration
	/ 6	: 6-8	: 9-11	: 12-17	: 18-23	: 24-29	: 30-35	: 36+	: Total	
Farmer	2	1	1	11	16	25	10	30	96	27.50
Landless farmer	1	0	1	2	1	1	1	7	15	35.00
Day labourer	1	4	2	13	11	13	9	7	60	22.77
Skill labour	0	1	0	2	2	2	3	16	26	37.09
Business	2	3	2	14	15	18	11	22	87	26.22
Service	3	1	3	11	10	22	2	12	64	25.02
* Other	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	38.5
Total	9	10	9	53	55	82	37	95	350	

* Other—unemployed.

Summary

Three hundred fifty married village women upto age 40 years were selected for the study. Three women were selected from the village of each village practitioners keeping in view that all the women do not come from one house-hold and each sample unit must live in a reasonable distance from the other. The study was done in four thanas, one from each division. The response were obtained in structured questionnaire.

Average (median) duration of Breast-feeding was 26.41 months and average (median) duration of Lactational amenorrhoea was 13.36 months.

Age of the women was found to be associated with duration of breast-feeding. Younger women breast-fed their children for shorter duration (21 months) compared to the older women (28 months). Duration of Breast-feeding for educated women was comparatively less (19.25 for college educated) than their illiterate sister (27.19 months). Occupation of the husbands was not found to have relation with duration of breast-feeding.

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