

Breastfeeding ordinance enforcement still a far cry

Our correspondent
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Pakistan took a positive child health initiative a decade ago by promulgating the Protection of Breastfeeding and Young Child Nutrition Ordinance 2002. However, World Breastfeeding Week 2012 (August 1-7) serves to remind the country's leadership of the need to show serious commitment towards enforcement of the law to protect and support breastfeeding, and regulation of the unethical promotion of baby formula milk.

This suggestion came from Nadeem Iqbal, executive coordinator of TheNetwork for Consumer Protection, at the start of the 20th World Breastfeeding Week here on Wednesday. This year's observation is based on the theme 'Understanding the Past-Planning the Future: Celebrating 10 Years of WHO/Unicef' Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding.' Nadeem admired the fact that after the devolution of health to provinces, Balochistan has taken the lead by adopting the law and establishing a provincial Infant Feeding Board for its enforcement. "Recently, Punjab has also adopted the law, while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh still lag behind. Deep concerns abound over coordination and planning between the federal and provincial ministries for an efficient enforcement mechanism and regulation of the unchecked marketing of baby formula milk," he pointed out. World Breastfeeding Week is a reminder for Pakistan to develop a roadmap to ensure the enforcement of the Breastfeeding Ordinance at the provincial and federal levels and to bridge the remaining gaps in policy and programmes on breastfeeding/infant and young child feeding (IYCF) by establishing an Infant Feeding Board at the federal level, Nadeem said.

Ironically, even though the 2002 Ordinance was implemented a decade ago, not a single complaint has been registered under the law till date because of the absence of an efficient enforcement mechanism. The baby formula industry is flourishing with unchecked marketing, which needs to be regulated on priority.

Declining breastfeeding practices are associated with increasing Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and malnutrition, which causes underage mortality (before 5 years). Many precious lives can be saved through exclusive breastfeeding up to the first six months of age.

TheNetwork has recently held a study to review infant formula labeling regulations as per International Code of Marketing Infant Formula, along with the SAARC Code for the Protection of Breastfeeding and Young Child Nutrition. For the purpose of analysis, 15 indicators were developed from the Protection of Breastfeeding and Young Child Nutrition Law 2002 and 27 samples of designated products acquired to check the status of labelling compliance in Islamabad. The purpose of the study was to highlight the violations of the provisions of the Articles 9, 10 and 11 of breastfeeding law regarding infant formulas. It was observed almost all the available baby formulas in Islamabad's markets were non-compliant and in violation of the breastfeeding law 2002.