

Implementation of BF Ordinance 2002 in public sector hospitals

The baseline study was conducted to assess the status of the implementation of the Protection of Breastfeeding and Child Nutrition Ordinance 2002 and the Rules 2009 within selected health facilities in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Data was collected through a sample survey with healthcare providers and with a small number of mothers visiting the health facilities to crosscheck the information provided by doctors.

Survey findings reveal significant gaps in the implementation of the ordinance and relevant information among healthcare providers. Awareness of the National Infant Feeding Board (NIFB) is extremely low. Only around 13% healthcare providers were aware of it. The percentage was particularly low among nurses and relatively junior doctors. While Benazir Bhutto Hospital (BBH) has a comparatively higher percentage of healthcare providers saying they had heard of the Board and received information on the Breastfeeding Rules 2009, they were found wanting in terms of knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding, hazards of bottle feeding and the label required on the containers of infant formula milk and complimentary food.

Majority of doctors (68%) knew the child

should be exclusively breastfed up to 6 months. However, a noticeable 28% cited 3-5 months as the age for exclusive breastfeeding contradicting the internationally recommended age of 6 months. Doctors and mid-wives seemed more aware of the recommended age compared to nurses. Among doctors, those with longer experience in the medical profession seemed more aware of the recommended age for exclusive breastfeeding. Among mothers, those in the youngest age quintile (17-20) years had a higher percentage of those who did not know that the child should be exclusively breastfed for 6 months.

Vast majority of doctors knew that feeding with a cup and spoon was a safer option than bottle feeding. The percentage was highest in Poly Clinic and lowest in BBH with Holy Family falling in between. Healthcare providers with experience exceeding 15 years in the field had a higher percentage who knew about that. Among mothers, those in late 20s and 30s had relatively higher percentages who thought bottle feeding was safer than feeding with a cup and spoon, a preference that might be related to additional child-rearing and work responsibilities.

Close to 19% healthcare providers were of





the view that it was easy to return to breastfeeding once bottle feeding had been established, which is not true. There were relatively more respondents espousing this misguided notion in BBH compared to Holy Family and Poly Clinic. Yet again,

Breastfeeding Ordinance and Rules. BBH had the highest percentage followed by Holy Family and Poly Clinic. Greater percentages of junior doctors compared to senior ones and more male healthcare providers compared to females had reportedly received

and Cow and Gate's range of complimentary food, do not have the label on the containers in contravention of the Ordinance. Not a single chemist interviewed as part of the survey had heard of the Breastfeeding Ordinance.

In both the Healthcare Providers' Survey and the Mothers' Survey, BBH comes out as the facility with a relatively high incidence of sharing of information on breastfeeding with mothers. On probing, the researcher found out that the information in question was in the form of a note on the discharge slip given to mothers. Field visits in the three hospitals elicited no evidence of any leaflets or brochures available on the topic.

With regard to marketing of baby food, relatively low percentage of healthcare providers in Poly Clinic said it discouraged breastfeeding compared to the other two hospitals. There were more among junior and fresh healthcare providers who said such marketing discouraged breastfeeding compared to senior ones. Among nurses the percentage of those who were "not sure" about the link was the highest. In terms of mothers substantive knowledge of breastfeeding, 50% or so knew mother's milk helped prevent infections and diseases. The percentage of those who knew it prevented diarrheas was noticeably low.

In the light of the fact that some well-known brands of infant formula and complimentary food do not have the legally prescribed label on the containers there is a need for renewed engagement with the baby food industry. While the data collected from pharmacies cannot be generalized due to a small number of chemists interviewed, indications are they have not even heard of the Ordinance. – *TN Report*



doctors and mid-wives had greater numbers of respondents aware of the issue compared to nurses. Slightly over 11% healthcare providers reported to have received a sample for infant formula during the past one year in contravention of the

a sample. Over 81% healthcare providers did not know of the label legally required on the containers of infant formula and supplementary food. Poly Clinic had the highest percentage of respondents who knew of the label and BBH the lowest. Visits to pharmacies showed that some brands, such as Abbot's Moriniga, Nestle's Lactogen

Breastfeeding 'protects mother'

Women who breastfeed their babies may be lowering their own risk of a heart attack, heart disease or stroke, research suggests.

A US study found women who breastfed for more than a year were 10% less likely to develop the conditions than those who



never breastfed. Even breastfeeding for at least a month may cut the risk of diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. The research features in the journal *Obstetrics and Gynaecology*. The study adds to a growing body of evidence suggesting breastfeeding has health benefits for both mother and baby. Research has found that breastfeeding reduces a woman's risk of ovarian and breast cancer and osteoporosis in later life. And the list of benefits for the

baby is long, with breast milk credited with protecting against obesity, diabetes, asthma and infections of the ear, stomach and chest. The latest US study, by the University of Pittsburgh, focused on nearly 140,000 post-menopausal women. On average, it had been 35 years since the women had last breastfed - suggesting the beneficial impact lasts for decades. As well as cutting the risk of heart problems, breastfeeding for more than a year cut the risk of high blood pressure by 12%, and diabetes and high cholesterol by around 20%.

Fat stores

It has been suggested that breastfeeding may reduce cardiovascular risk by reducing fat stores in the body.

However, the researchers believe the effect is more complex, with the release of hormones stimulated by breastfeeding also playing a role.

Researcher Dr Eleanor Bimla Schwarz said: "We have known for years that breastfeeding is important for babies' health; we

now know that it is important for mothers' health as well.

"Breastfeeding is an important part of the way women's bodies recover from pregnancy.

"When this process is interrupted women are more likely to have a number of health problems (including heart attacks and strokes). "The longer a mother nurses her baby, the better for both of them." In the UK, the Department of Health recommends exclusive breastfeeding for six months. June Davison, a cardiac nurse at the British Heart Foundation, said: "Breastfeeding has long been thought to be beneficial to baby and mother. "This research suggests that it might have also have heart health benefits for mum too. "However, it only

"The longer a mother nurses her baby, the better for both of them"

*Dr Eleanor Bimla Schwarz
University of Pittsburgh*

showed an association between breast feeding and these health benefits. We will need further research to understand why this is the case." (Courtesy: BBC News)

Editorial: Breastfeeding

Health professionals are the major stakeholders in the implementation of the Protection of Breastfeeding and Child Nutrition Ordinance 2002. Unfortunately the exclusive breastfeeding rate in Pakistan, according to Unicef report 'State of the World's Children 2009', is the lowest among South Asian countries, standing at 37.1 percent, and alarming only 13 percent health professionals are aware about the breastfeeding rules. In this scenario the awareness of health professionals about the ordinance is drastically needed. The Network for Consumer Protection, realizing this pathetic situation, launched a campaign to sensitize doctors, nurses and midwives to the importance of breastfeeding. As a part of this campaign a meeting at Islamabad Hotel and sensitization sessions at public hospitals were organized by The Network in which health professionals were exclusively invited. This initiative of The Network launched in collaboration with Unicef produced satisfactory results as health professionals in large numbers took part in all activities. This initiative needs to be continued keeping in view low breastfeeding rate and less awareness of health professionals about breastfeeding rules, and civil society organizations, UN bodies and government institutions should work in close collaboration for this cause .

Dr Arif Azad
Executive Coordinator



