

Men's Role in Breast feeding: Observations from the Survey of Nepalese Men

Description

Breast feeding is one of the important components of child care because it does not only provide the essential nutrients but also shield against any infections. Breast feeding can save the life of newborn by preventing malnutrition and reducing the risk of infection. Exclusive breast feeding should practice for at least four months and preferably six months in poor countries since they have higher likelihood of getting infections through their unhealthy feeding practices (contaminated food and water). In general, newborns do not need water if they breast feed properly. Evidences show that prelacteal feeds are not necessary if newborns receive breast feeding. Therefore, one should discourage the prelacteal practices. However, the breast feeding practices among women is influenced by social, economic, religious and other socio cultural factors. Likewise, low breast feeding may be due to the poor knowledge about the significance of breast feeding among the uneducated women in developing countries and in the other hand, the diffusion of changing context of infant feeding practices among the women in industrialized countries by the mass media.

In patriarchal society, man has a significant role in decision making in all aspects of life of women. Men's role not only influences their reproductive health but also affects the breast feeding practices as well. A large number of studies reveal that a woman whose husband supports breastfeeding is more likely to breastfeed longer time to her children than one without husband's support. Being a traditional patriarchal society, men have a strong influence over women in Nepalese context as well and the domination of men over women is a Nepalese culture. So, men's role has a significant association with breast feeding practices among Nepalese women. It is therefore, essential to examine the determinants associated with men's role in breast feeding to improve the existing status.

Data and methods

The present study utilizes the information obtained from a general male survey (GEMS) 2008 conducted to examine men's involvement in partner's reproductive and child health care activities. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. The sampling for this survey was based on multistage sampling techniques. At the first stage, districts were selected purposively. In the second stage, urban (municipalities) and rural (VDCs) areas were selected randomly. At the third stage, (primary sampling unit) PSUs from each designated urban (municipalities) and rural (VDCs) areas were selected randomly with probability proportional to size (PPS). Finally, households were selected by using systematic sampling and only one man from each household was interviewed. The sample consists of 461 ever married men between the age of 15 and 59 from the western hill region of Nepal. The potential respondents had to have at least one child at the time of survey. After giving informed consent, participants were interviewed.

The content and design of these questionnaires were previously used in similar type of research. After pretest, some modification was made in the content of the questionnaire. The survey was started in February 2008 and completed by July 2008. The questionnaire collected information on household characteristics, background characteristics of respondents, men's knowledge and utilization of contraceptive methods, men's participation in reproductive and child health care, knowledge, incidence

and treatment seeking behavior of STD and HIV/AIDS. For qualitative data collection, an in-depth interview was conducted with thirty six respondents.

Data analysis has been performed in two stages using SPSS 13.0 for windows. First, bivariate analysis has been used to identify the significant variables associated with men's role and in second stage those variables which are statistically significant in bivariate analysis have been selected in multivariate analysis. For qualitative analysis, information obtained from in-depth interview and focus group discussion has been presented.

Findings

Analyses show that more than 78.0 percent of men agree that colostrum is essential components of child feeding. Similarly, 68.3 percent of men prepare hot grain beverage and other nutritious food for their partners. Similarly, more than half of the respondents advice partners for breast feeding (table not shown). Bivariate analyses reveal that education, mass media exposure, caste, socioeconomic status, parity and level of development of the area where the respondents live are significantly associated with men's involvement and advice for breast feeding. Education, mass media exposure and standard of living are positively associated while parity is negatively associated with men's involvement in preparing the nutritious food for partners and advice for breast feeding among men. As described previously, education, mass media exposure, standard of living and spousal discussion are positively associated, while parity and type of marriage is negatively associated with men's advice for breast feeding (table not shown).

Table 1 shows the odds ratios from the logistic regression models of men's involvement in breast feeding by selected background characteristics. It is observed that education, mass media exposure and spousal discussion are significantly associated with men's participation in preparation of hot grain beverage after controlling for other variables in the model. For example, men with SLC and above education are about 3.0 times more likely to engage for preparing hot grain beverage than their illiterate counterparts. Likewise, a higher likelihood of exposure to mass media leads to greater involvement in breast feeding as compared with men who are not exposed to any media. Similarly, men who discuss with partners are more than 4.0 times likely to support for preparing hot grain beverage than those who do not practice it.

Table 1: Odds ratio from logistic regression model of men who prepare hot grain beverage for their partners by selected background characteristics, Nepal, 2008

Characteristic	Odds ratio	Characteristic	Odds ratio
Age		Low (r)	1
15-29 (r)	1	Moderate	0.6
30-39	0.5	High	1.5
40+	0.4*	Parity	
Education		1 (r)	1
Illiterate (r)	1	2-3	1.2*
Primary	0.8	4 or more	0.7
Up to secondary	1.5*	Spousal Discussion	
SLC and above	2.9***	No (r)	1
Mass Media Exposure		Yes	4.3***
None (r)	1	Level of Development	
Any one	1.4	Less (r)	1

Any two	1.5	Moderate	0.9**
All three	1.8*	More	1.1
Occupation		Place of Residence	
Not working (r)	1	Rural (r)	1
Agriculture	1.3	Urban	0.5**
Non agriculture	2.9**	- 2LL	507.1
Standard of Living		N	461

Note: * ** = $p < 0.001$, ** = $p < 0.05$ and * = $p < 0.10$

r = refers to reference category

Similarly, table 2 presents the odds ratios from logistic regression models of men who advice partners for breast feeding by selected background characteristics. Education, mass media exposure and spousal discussion have more or less similar type of relationship as described previously after controlling for other variables in the model. Other variables, for example, men who work in non agricultural sector are more likely to advice their partners for breast feeding than their not working counterparts. This may be due to the fact that men working in non agriculture have better opportunity to be exposed with different mass media and other source of information than men who do not work anything. Likewise, men living in urban areas are less likely to advice partners than their rural counterparts. The possible explanation of this reason may be due to the high literacy of women and exposure to mass media due to which less proportion of men may suggest them for breast feeding.

Table 2: Odds ratio from logistic regression model of men who advice partners for breastfeeding by selected background characteristics, Nepal, 2008

Characteristic	Odds ratio	Characteristic	Odds ratio
Age		Low (r)	1
15-29 (r)	1	Moderate	1.4
30-39	0.8	High	1.5
40+	0.7	Parity	
Education		1 (r)	1
Illiterate (r)	1	2-3	1.3
Primary	1.3	4 or more	0.8
Up to secondary	1.9*	Spousal Discussion	
SLC and Above	2.4*	No (r)	1
Mass Media Exposure		Yes	4.3***
None (r)	1	Level of Development	
Any one	2.0	Less (r)	1
Any two	2.1*	Moderate	0.9**
All three	2.4***	More	1.1
Occupation		Place of Residence	
Not working (r)	1	Rural (r)	1
Agriculture	0.7	Urban	0.5**
Non agriculture	2.4**	- 2LL	557.1
Standard of Living		N	461

Note: * ** = $p < 0.001$, ** = $p < 0.05$ and * = $p < 0.10$

r = refers to reference category

Finally, this study highlights three important determinants that influence men's involvement in breast feeding. First, education is one of the important factors that has direct or indirect association with men's role. In fact, education not only makes men aware towards the breast feeding but also helps to become more responsible to the various aspects of living healthy life. Secondly, mass media exposure is also a significant determinant that has positive impact on men's participation in breast feeding. Indeed, mass media generates awareness towards the importance of breast feeding on child health as well as mother's health among the general population. Lastly, it is obvious that spousal discussion facilitates couples to understand and seek the treatment of any health problems and other familial matters. Therefore, it has a significant influence in men's role in breast feeding. In conclusion, Information, education and communication (IEC) may be one of the immediate strategies which could promote men's participation in breast feeding among Nepalese men.