

## Current infant feeding practices and impact on growth in babies during the second half of infancy

T. Bandara<sup>1#</sup>, M. Hettiarachchi<sup>1</sup>, C. Liyanage<sup>1</sup> & S. Amarasena<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Medicine, University of Ruhuna, Galle, Sri Lanka

# wvthush@yahoo.com

### Abstract

#### Background

Sri Lanka has made remarkable improvements in health, social and educational indices. However, child malnutrition exists as a significant health problem. Infant feeding indicators have not reached expected levels and improvements are partly constrained by a lack of data. The present study aimed to determine current infant feeding practices and their impact on growth among 6–12-month-old infants.

#### Methods

The study comprised a descriptive cross-sectional investigation conducted in randomly selected ( $n = 7$ ) Public Health Midwife areas in Galle, Sri Lanka. An interviewer-administered questionnaire was used to obtain data on sociodemographics and infant feeding. Mothers ( $n = 515$ ) attending well-baby clinics were recruited on voluntary and consecutive basis. Infants' body weights and lengths were measured using standard procedures.

#### Results

Exclusive breastfeeding rate for first 6 months was 49.0%. In total, 42.6% infants (219 out of 515) were given rice as first weaning food, followed by salt (58.6%) and sugar (42.3%). Oil had been introduced to 84.9% of infants by the end of 12 months. Most infants (over 71%) were given dairy products, whereas 62.3% were being fed various liquid foods using bottles. The introduction of commercial infant cereals, chocolates, plain tea, ice cream and deep fried snacks was noted. Age-specific body weight and length were not achieved by 30.5% and 29.5% of infants, respectively. Weight for length was not achieved by 25.5% of the infants. Delayed achievements of motor milestones were observed. Mothers' knowledge scores on basic nutrients were low.

#### Conclusions

Complementary feeding indices of the study group were not satisfactory. Maternal and child healthcare personnel need to identify causative factors for inappropriate feeding with a view to improve the complementary feeding patterns.

#### Keywords

complementary feeding; exclusive breastfeeding; first food; infant growth; motor milestones.