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## ABSTRACT

Malnutrition is responsible for more than half of the deaths that occur in children globally. Over two thirds of these deaths occur in the first year of life and are mostly associated with inappropriate feeding practices. As the infant is not supplied with the total nutrition need from breast milk alone towards the second half of infancy, adequate complementary food, needs to be provided to fulfill the energy gap. Therefore feeding of the infant in the second half of infancy is complicated and inappropriate feeding practices are common.

Descriptive cross sectional study was designed to assess the pattern of growth, feeding practices, and association of feeding practices with pattern of growth and family characteristics among the infants completed nine to ten months of age in the MOH area, Panadura.

Mothers of infants (N = 477) were interviewed by six trained data collectors. Length and weight of infants were measured using standardized instruments. Growth curve was interpreted according to the plotted weight measurements on CHDR. Anthropometric measurements and growth curve interpretation were done by five Public Health Nursing Sisters at the Child Welfare Clinics on the days of measles immunization.

Stunted, underweight and wasted proportions in the study populations were 6.7%, 13.6% and 11.3% respectively. Only two out of every five Muslims had previous month weight measurement plotted on CHDR. Growth faltering was present in 40%. More than 95% of infants were breast fed. About 39% were formula milk fed, although formula feeding did not affect the growth pattern significantly ( $p=0.657$ ). Bottle and teat were used in 93% of infants to feed formula milk. Commercially prepared complementary foods were fed to 56%. Only 6.5% of infants were not fed complementary foods added with oil or fat. But frequency and

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type of adding oil or fat was different. Only 36% practice responsive feeding. Changing of food habits was commonest when having a diarrhoeal problem and 76% of them had given only liquid food.

Considering the results of the study, it is recommended to initiate a comprehensive package on infant feeding inclusive of both breast and complementary feeding practices. The package should ensure the delivery of uniform health messages to all care-takers equally. A supplementary qualitative study is recommended further to assess the attitudes related to various unhealthy infant feeding practices.

**Key words** – Infant feeding, complementary food, formula milk, breast feeding, Panadura