

ABSTRACT

First year of life represents the most crucial period of the entire life. Malnutrition during this period is responsible for more than half of the deaths that occur in childhood globally. Inappropriate feeding practices and lack of correct knowledge regarding infant feeding among the care givers are some associated factors of malnutrition during this period. As care givers, mainly the mother and the father is responsible for timely, safe and adequate feeding practices during infant feeding. Fathers' involvement and participation in infant feeding is in low level in most of the families due to various reasons though the father can play an important role in this regard.

A community based descriptive cross sectional study was carried out to describe the level and associated factors of fathers' participation in infant feeding among 421 families having children between six months to twelve months age living with their parents in Kalutara Medical Officer of Health area. Fathers' participation was assessed by questioning the mothers of these children using an interviewer administered questionnaire.

Degree of fathers' participation regarding infant feeding was assessed in five areas; breastfeeding, buying complementary foods, baby's food preparation, feeding and storage, baby's personal hygiene and baby's growth monitoring. Mothers' level of satisfaction regarding husbands' participation in infant feeding in above mentioned areas was also assessed by interviewing the mothers.

Fathers Participation levels regarding infant feeding was at a good level (89.1% moderate and good) when helping the mother to breastfeed.

Also it was reported as moderate and good in 84.6% during buying complementary foods, 78.9% in keeping good personal hygiene of the baby and 78.4% in growth monitoring.

It was only 73.9% regarding complementary food preparation, storage and feeding to the baby.

Fathers' education level and ethnicity was significantly associated with their participation in breastfeeding, buying complementary foods, baby's food preparation, feeding and storage, maintaining baby's hygiene and baby's growth monitoring. Non Sinhalese and low educational level fathers' participation was comparatively poor in food preparation, feeding and storage, baby's personal hygiene. In addition income of the family also significantly associated with fathers' participation in above activities except growth monitoring. Families with these characteristics need closer attention regarding infant feeding when providing services by public health services. Mothers' satisfaction regarding husbands' participation in breastfeeding and buying complementary foods for the baby was in satisfactory level. But, about 72% of mothers were not satisfied regarding fathers' participation in feeding the baby, baby's food preparation and storage.

Mothers' satisfaction level regarding husbands' participation in areas of personal hygiene of the baby, food preparation, storage and feeding and growth monitoring was significantly associated with fathers' ethnicity and smoking. Non Sinhalese and smoking fathers' participation was found comparatively not satisfied level than Sinhalese and non smoking fathers. Programme planners need to concentrate more on these areas when planning interventions to promote fathers' participation regarding infant feeding.

Key words – *Infant feeding, fathers participation, Sri Lanka, breastfeeding, complementary foods*