

Abstract

Though the health care infrastructure, maternal and child care services achieved the targets in most areas under nutrition of children under 5 years, especially between 6 months to 2 years is a serious problem in Sri Lanka. Nutritional indicators are lagging behind compared to the other health indicators for the last 20 years. Improper feeding practices, poor knowledge of the care givers, inconsistency nutritional messages and poor targeted intervention might be the main reasons for this problem. Available data indicates children aged 6-24 months are worse affected. Hence it was decided to conduct a study under following objectives.

The Objective of the study was to describe the knowledge and practices related to feeding among mothers of children aged six months to two years in comparison to the nutritional status of the children in a selected community (Medical Officer of Health area Akuressa). The study was a descriptive Cross Sectional study. Sample size calculated was 420. Cluster sampling method was adopted to draw a sample. Field Weighing Posts in MOH area akuressa was identified as the clusters. 24 field weighing posts were randomly selected and children were enrolled to the study on the specified day. A group of 428 mothers of children 6 months -24 months of age group who came for weighing to the randomly selected 24 FWPs in Akuressa MOH area were included to the sample.

Research instruments consisted of a pre tested interviewer administered questionnaire and a data sheet to enter child's data and the height and weight measurements of the child. The questionnaire included questions on feeding practices and questions to assess the knowledge of the mothers. A scoring system was used to assess the knowledge, >75 score was considered as good knowledge. Feeding practices adopted by mothers and the knowledge of mothers on feeding practices were described in relation to the nutritional status.

Prevalence of nutritional indicators in this study were stunting 17%, wasting 17.1%, under weight 21.3%. All three nutritional indicators were significantly higher in males stunting (63.5%), wasting (68.5%) and underweight (77.8%) than the females.

The highest prevalence of stunting (18.8%), wasting (26.5%) and underweight (28.2%) was found in 18-24 months age group. Wasting and underweight has increased with the increasing age and this pattern was statistically significant.

Under nutrition was more common (70.6%) in lower income group (monthly income < Rs10000 category) and also in children whose mothers were employed (41.6% in employed mothers and 35.2% in unemployed mothers).

Exclusive breast feeding was continued for 6 months by 88% of mothers, while mean age of breast feeding was 5.8 months. Partial breast feeding was continued by 95% mothers at the time of the survey. Formula milk was started by 18.5% of mothers before the age of six months. Commonest reason for starting formula milk was the reduced weight of the child. Complementary feeding was started at 6 months of age by 75.2% of mothers and mean age of starting was 6 months. Majority (75.5%) of mothers have started mashed rice as the first food and 18.9% of mothers have started rice congee as the first food. Animal origin foods were introduced by 96% of mothers before 12 months of age. Mean age of introducing fish was at 6.7 months, meat was at 6.4 months, egg was at 6.9 months and sprats were at 6 months. Proportion of mothers not introduced meat was 21% and eggs was 13.8% and it was relatively higher than fish and sprats. A majority of mothers (96%) introduced leafy vegetables at the age of 6-7 months and 51.2% mothers introduced oils into child's diet at the age of 6-7 months. Feeding with cup and spoon has become popular (99.5%) than the bottle feeding which is an improvement in proper feeding practices. Proportion of children got Childhood infections was 42.4% and the common infections were respiratory tract infections and gastroenteritis and 75% of mothers had fed the children properly during infections.

Mean knowledge score of the mothers was 65.3% and 24.8% of mothers had >75% of knowledge score. A majority (62.2%) mothers had 51%-75% knowledge score. Knowledge of mothers had a statistically significant relationship with the nutritional status.

A majority of mothers had satisfactory knowledge on the CHDR, on exclusive breast feeding, partial breast feeding, formula feeding and complementary

feeding. According to the present study statistically significant relationship was found only between introduction of oils in to the diet and the nutritional status and other feeding practices were not significantly

The study revealed that the nutritional status among children is a public health problem. Mothers had poor knowledge on feeding practices. But the feeding practices were reported as satisfactory. It is recommended to implement programs to improve the knowledge of mothers on appropriate feeding.

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