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**Original article:**

**Evaluation of various socio-cultural factors affecting breastfeeding practices in a rural area of North India**

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**Abstract**

**Background:** Breastfeeding is beneficial for both mother and child, as breast milk is considered the best source of nutrition for an infant. Lack of knowledge, prevailing misconceptions and cultural taboos significantly contribute to undesirable breastfeeding practices such as delayed initiation and discarding of colostrum. In India since large number of babies born are of low birth weight, proper breastfeeding practice is a major concern.

**Objectives:** To study the effect of socio-cultural factors on breastfeeding practices.

**Methodology:** This descriptive cross - sectional study done among mothers who had children aged less than 2 years, in the catchment area of the Rural Health and Training Centre (RHTC). A total of 213 mothers were included in this study for socio-cultural factors and breastfeeding practices. Data collection was done for the last child born.

**Results:** Mean age of mothers was 25.90 (± 5.15) years. 39.0% of the mothers were illiterate and 31.5% belonged to socioeconomic class III. 27.7% of the mothers had initiated breastfeeding within 4 hours of delivery and 34.3% had provided colostrum. Exclusive breast feeding for ≥ 6 months was provided by 36.6%. Only 12.2% had not offered any pre-lacteal feeds. Elderly females in the families had major influence (54.5%) for breastfeeding practices. Source of information had statistically significant relation with pre-lacteal feeds (p<0.001), and with exclusive breastfeeding (p<0.001).

**Conclusion:** Socio-cultural factors play a significant role in breastfeeding practices, therefore, breastfeeding intervention programmes should take into consideration the socio cultural factors to promote exclusive breastfeeding.

**Key words:** Breastfeeding practice, rural area, socio-cultural factors