

## Feeding Practices During the First Eighteen Months of Life

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Inappropriate feeding practices during early life are the main causes of child malnutrition. The objective of this study was to determine the feeding practices of children 12 - 18 months of age and their association with growth faltering. A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted among 254 children aged 12 and 18 months attending an immunization clinic of a tertiary hospital. Feeding practices were assessed using interviewer-administered questionnaire. Weight and length were measured using standard methods. Data on past growth were extracted from the Child Health Development Record. There were 44.5% (n=113) girls, and 53.1% (n=135) were 12-month-olds. 20.7% (n=28) of the 12 month-olds and 14.3% (n=17) of the 18 month-olds had weight-for-length <-2SD. Exclusive breastfeeding was given at least 4 months to 87.8% (n=223) and at least 6 months to 60.2% (n=153). 91.9% (n=124) of the 12 month-olds were still breastfed. Of them, 41.9% (n=52) were breastfed on-demand (<-1SD; p=0.06) and 42.7% (n=53) were given several feeds during the night (<-1SD; p=0.09) therefore these practices were not significantly associated with nutritional status. 84% (n=100) of the 18 month-olds were still breastfed. Of them, 43% (n=43) were still breastfed on-demand and this was not significantly associated with nutritional status. Several night feeds were given to 51.2% (n=61) of the 18 month-olds and this was significantly associated with weight-for-age <-2SD (p=0.04) and weight-for-length <-2SD (p=0.006). 32.6% (n=44) of the 12 month-olds and 25.2% (n=30) 18 month-olds were on formula feeds which showed no association with the nutritional status. Introduction of foods of animal origin were delayed. Eggs, fish and meat were not given till 8 months to 44.8% (n=114), 32.7% (n=83) and 68.9% (n=175), respectively. Inappropriate feeding practices are prevalent in this population with high prevalence of growth faltering at 18 months of age.

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