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Complimentary Feeding Practices and Nutrient Intake of Children Aged 6–18 Month in Ebonyi State, South East Nigeria

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Abstract

Ebonyi State is one of the states in Nigeria. It is largely an agrarian State with less than 50% literacy level. The nutritional status of the indigenes especially the women are attracted by their low income levels, cultural beliefs and food habits. Complimentary feeding is the process of introducing other foods in addition to breast milk. Timely introduction of appropriate complimentary foods have been found to promote good health, nutritional status and growth of infants and young children during a period of rapid growth. Low quality complimentary foods combined with inappropriate feeding practices put under-twins in developing countries like Nigeria at high risk of malnutrition and its associated out-comes. A descriptive and exploratory study was hereby carried out to investigate the complimentary feeding practices used on infants of between the ages of 6–18 months in Ebonyi State Nigeria. Three hundred mothers (300) with infants attending immunisation centre in hospitals and health centres were used in the study. Validated questionnaires were used to collect data. Dietary home observations of some selected infants were carried out. It was observed from the study that 97.4% of the mothers breast fed their children while 2.7% never breastfed their children. 25% mothers started solid foods before 4 months, 49.7% between the ages of 4–6 months, 19.3% at the age of 7–9, 2% 10–12 months and 1% after 12 months. Most mothers breastfed their children at will or when the baby signaled. Only 34.3% practised exclusive breast feeding. Fermented corn (pap) was the most popular complimentary food used. It was also discovered that although mothers had a wide knowledge of optimal infant feeding, actual practices were constrained by cost of food, maternal HIV status and availability. The average nutrient intake of infants were 626.1 ± 196.6 Kcal, 19.9 ± 7.6 g, 8.2 ± 5.9 mg, 25.9 ± 13.4 mg, 442.5 ± 164.5 mg for energy, protein, iron, ascorbic acid and calcium respectively. The energy values were lower than the recommended daily allowances while protein and iron intakes were generally adequate. Grassroot nutritional campaign that will educate the women on strategies to improve the traditional complimentary practices is therefore recommended.

Keywords: Breast feeding ,Nutrient intake, Children, complimentary feeding practices, Ebonyi-state