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Barriers, Influences and Possible Improvements Regarding Feeding Practices among Women in Northern Shan, Myanmar

CAROLE LIECHTI¹, NANG LYAN ZAR², ALESSANDRA GIULIANI³

¹*Bern University of Applied Sciences School of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences, Food Sciences, Switzerland*

²*Care International in Myanmar, -,*

³*Bern University of Applied Sciences School of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences, Agricultural Sciences,*

Abstract

Northern Shan State is among the regions with highest poverty rate in Myanmar (33 %). Rates for wasting (9.4 %), stunting (46.9 %) and underweight (24.1 %) are still very high. An underlying cause are inadequate infant and young child feeding practices. In the framework of the Northern Shan Food Security Projectproject from CARE International Myanmar this study examines the influences, barriers and possible improvements regarding infant and young child feeding practices.

Besides literature review, 60 in-depth individual interviews, four focus group discussions and eight key informant interviews were conducted. The data collection took place in October 2017 in four villages in Lashio Township, northern Shan State. For the individual interview, women with at least one child not older than 3 years were selected using purpose sampling. Analysis of quantitative data was done using Chi-Square Test and z-Test with Bonferroni correction as second deeper analysis. Qualitative data was analysed by content analysis.

Main results indicate that individual- (low knowledge level regarding feeding practices), economical- (low socio-economic status, working away from home)-, cultural- (false believe without scientific evidence) and environmental (no access to information regarding feeding practices) factors were associated with a lower rate of exclusive breastfeeding and a higher rate of early introduction of complementary food. Main perceived barriers regarding feeding practices were no support from husband, family and friends and start working shortly after delivery, in some cases within the next three days. The consequence was that instead of breastmilk infants received food like rice and milk powder and liquids such as water.

In the surveyed villages there is a great need to provide effective education and raise awareness regarding infant and young child feeding practices for mothers, as well as for their social environment. The education should be provided in different ethnic languages to be accessible to all, and preferably focused on cultural beliefs and especially addressed to remoted areas, where a high number of displaced people with low socio-economic status live.

Keywords: Breastfeeding, infant and young child feeding practices, myanmar, nutrition education, nutrition security

Contact Address: Carole Liechti, Bern University of Applied Sciences School of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences, Food Sciences, Länggassstrasse 83, - 3012 Bern, Switzerland, e-mail: carole.liechti@hotmail.com