

Infant Feeding Practices of Paroja: A Tribal Community of Orissa

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ABSTRACT Child under-nutrition and infant mortality are among the serious sufferings of many backward communities of India. Proper infant feeding practices stand as a major public health intervention to reduce child under-nutrition and related consequences. The infant feeding practices of 'Paroja', one of the major tribal communities of Koraput District, Orissa was studied in detail in the present investigation. The information was collected through interview of mothers with the help of pre-designed and pre-tested schedules and through personal observation. The study revealed an encouraging fact that all the respondents fed their babies with breast milk. At the same time, it was disheartening to note that breast milk was introduced only after 24 hours of birth and in more than 60% of cases, colostrum was discarded. Instead, varieties of pre lacteal foods were given prior to putting the child for breast feeding. Exclusive breast feeding was practiced for a long period of 1 year and supplementary foods were introduced only after the child attained about 1 year age. Mostly cereal preparations were given twice daily as supplementary foods. Such methods of infant feeding practices including late initiation of breast milk, inordinate delay in supplementary feeding etc. may be among the reasons of prevalence of malnutrition among the growing children of such communities. Proper counselling of the mothers on the infant feeding practices would help in a great way in reducing child under-nutrition.