

## **DELAYED CONTACT AND BREAST FEEDING**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Fifty two mother-infant pairs were studied. Of these, twenty six belonged to the normal vaginal delivery group where babies were roomed in with their mothers immediately after birth. Twenty six belonged to the cesarean group where the mother and baby were separated for  $2.8 \pm 1.0$  days. The social support was comparable in the two groups. No significant difference was found in the number of mothers breast feeding their infants at four weeks postpartum.*

**Key words:** *Normal vaginal delivery group (NVD), Cesarean section group (CS), Breast feeding.*

Early contact between the mother and her newborn baby has been reported to be associated with a higher incidence(1-6) and longer duration of breast feeding(4,6-9). However, there are other reports which claim that early contact has no effect on breast feeding(10-13).

In many hospitals, including our own, the babies delivered by the normal vaginal routes are roomed in with their mothers soon after birth. However, babies delivered by cesarean section are separated for some time from their mothers. The present study was undertaken to see if this separation of the mother from her baby affected breast feeding.

### **Material and Methods**

Of the 52 mother-infant pairs taken up for study, 26 belonged to the normal vaginal delivery (NVD) group where the baby was roomed in with the mother soon after birth and 26 belonged to the Cesarean section (CS) where the baby had a mean separation of  $2.8 \pm 1.0$  days from its mother. Only primiparous mothers having a residential elder woman staying with them were selected. All had an uncomplicated pregnancy and labor. For Cesarean section, only those receiving epidural or spinal anaesthesia were taken to avoid the affects of general anesthesia on the mother and the baby. Babies in both groups were full term, appropriate for gestational age with an Apgar score of a  $\geq 8$  at 1 and 5 minutes.

Two assessments were made for the feeding patterns among these two groups. First at 24-48 h after the baby had been shifted in with the mother and the second at a follow up visit at one month of age. All

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mothers at time of first assessment were told that "Breast is Best" and instructed to breast feed their babies. The assessment of feeding was done by questionnaire and observation. The success at breast feeding was objectively assessed by the babies weight gain at the follow up visit at one month while being solely on breast feeds. A weight gain of more than 500 g in a solely breast fed baby was considered successful breast feeding.

## Results

The mothers in the two groups were comparable for age, parity (all primi-

parous) educational status, socio-economic status, family size, father's age, sex of baby, presence of a residential elder woman (*Table I*) and social support (*Table II*). At the time of the first assessment, 10 mothers in the NVD group (n=26) were giving items other than breast milk compared to seven in the CS group (*Table III*). The difference was not significant. In the NVD group 10 mothers gave breast feed as the first feed to their babies, ten gave honey, two gave tea, two water, 1 jaggery with water and one powder milk. In contrast, the item given as the first feed in the CS group mothers were generally another milk.

TABLE I—Comparable Group Characteristics

| Group characteristics                      | Mean $\pm$ SD  |                | p value |
|--|----------------|----------------|---------|
|  | NVD<br>(n=26)  | CS<br>(n=26)   |         |
| 1. Maternal age                            | 21.5 $\pm$ 2.6 | 21.7 $\pm$ 2.6 | >0.05   |
| 2. Maternal education                      |                |                |         |
| Illiterate                                 | 4              | 6              |         |
| Up to class 5                              | 4              | 2              |         |
| 6th-12th class                             | 17             | 12             | >0.05   |
| College                                    | 1              | 6              |         |
| 3. Father's age                            | 25.3 $\pm$ 2.7 | 25.8 $\pm$ 3.3 | >0.05   |
| 4. Father's education                      |                |                |         |
| Illiterate                                 | 5              | 2              |         |
| Up to class 5                              | 0              | 2              |         |
| 6th-12th class                             | 17             | 14             | >0.05   |
| College                                    | 4              | 8              |         |
| 5. Family size                             | 5.5 $\pm$ 3.9  | 5.5 $\pm$ 2.7  | >0.05   |
| 6. Socio-economic status<br>(Prasad, 1970) |                |                |         |
| Social class III                           | 3              | 3              |         |
| Social class IV                            | 15             | 14             |         |
| Social class V                             | 8              | 9              | >0.05   |
| 7. Baby's birth weight                     | 2.8 $\pm$ 0.3  | 2.8 $\pm$ 0.2  | >0.05   |
| 8. Baby's gestational age                  | 39.5 $\pm$ 0.6 | 39.6 $\pm$ 0.6 | >0.05   |
| 9. Sex of baby                             |                |                |         |
| Male                                       | 14             | 16             |         |
| Female                                     | 12             | 10             | >0.05   |

TABLE II—Social Support

| Visiting characteristics<br>during first 24 h after delivery | Mean $\pm$ SD |               | p value |
|--|---------------|---------------|---------|
|  | NVD<br>(n=26) | CS<br>(n=26)  |         |
| 1. Number of visitors  | 4.9 $\pm$ 2.2 | 4.4 $\pm$ 1.9 | >0.05   |
| 2. Number of visits by husband                               | 2.6 $\pm$ 1.0 | 3.0 $\pm$ 0.8 | >0.05   |
| 3. Residential elder women                                   |               |               |         |
| No. who visited  | 17            | 13            | >0.05   |
| No. who stayed with mother                                   | 9             | 13            | >0.05   |

TABLE III—Feeding Patterns—1st Assessment

| Type of feeds           | NVD Group |      | CS Group |      | p value |
|-------------------------|-----------|------|----------|------|---------|
|                         | No.       | %    | No.      | %    |         |
| 1. Only breast feed     | 16        | 61.5 | 19       | 73.1 | >0.05   |
| 2. Breast + other feeds | 10        | 38.5 | 7        | 26.9 | >0.05   |

In the NVD group, 4 mothers initiated breast feeding within 6 hours of delivery, 15 within 12 hours and 20 within 24 hours of delivery. Only two mothers administered the first breast feed later than 24 hours after delivery. Among the CS mothers all had initiated breast feeding within 8 hours of receiving their babies. At the follow up assessment at one month, 24 mothers in the NVD group and 23 in the CS group were successfully breast-feeding their babies. Only 2 mothers in the NVD group and 3 in the CS group were giving top feeds in addition to breast feeds (Table IV). The difference was once again not statistically significant. The reason given by all 3 mothers in the CS group was inadequate breast

milk where as only one of the two mothers in the NVD group gave this as the reason. The reason given by the other was sore nipples.

#### Discussion

At the first assessment more mothers in the NVD group (n=10) gave items other than breast milk compared to those in the CS group (n=7). Although the difference in the 2 groups were not significant the possible reasons for this include: (a) it is well known that among this class of mothers, it is customary to administer honey, tea and various "ghutties" made from jaggery, etc. for the first few feeds to their babies because of the belief that these help to

TABLE IV—Feeding Patterns: Follow Up Assessment

| Type of feeds         | NVD Group |      | CS Group |      | p value |
|-----------------------|-----------|------|----------|------|---------|
|                       | %         | No.  | No.      | %    |         |
| 1. Only breast feed   | 24        | 92.3 | 23       | 88.5 | >0.05   |
| 2. Breast + Top feeds | 2         | 7.7  | 3        | 11.5 | >0.05   |

clear the baby's bowel of the dirt (meconium), (b) an important contributory factor is the mother's feeling that her breast milk output is inadequate in the first 48 hours after delivery, causing more mothers in the NVD group to add top feeds. For the CS mother the milk flow was already beginning to be established by the time their babies were transferred to them, (c) some of these mothers believed that colostrum was not real milk and should therefore, not be given to the baby. For the CS mothers the colostrum phase was nearly over by the time they received their babies ( $2.8 \pm 1.0$  day). Further, the customs and rituals generally apply to the first feed. As the baby in the CS group had already received this in the nursery earlier, these were not relevant when the baby was eventually transferred to the mother.

Other workers(2,3,9) reported that early suckling rather than the early contact was responsible for a greater incidence of breast feeding. In the present study most mothers in the NVD group initiated breast feeding between 6-24 h after delivery and in the CS group at  $2.8 \pm 1.0$  day and yet most went on to successful breast feeding by 4 weeks post partum. Hence suckling immediately after delivery was not essential for successful breast feeding. The separation of the baby from his mother during the first few days ( $2.8 \pm 1.0$  day) also did not significantly affect the success at breast feeding assessed at 1 month postpartum.

The reason for this may lie in the fact that mothers in both groups had good social support from the residential elder woman and husband (this was assessed by number of visits and was comparable in the 2 groups) (Table II). Also all mothers were told that 'breast is best' and instructed to breast feed their babies at the initial assessment.

The reality of the observed results of the present study become even more marked considering the fact that the two groups were comparable for most variables (Tables I and II). Therefore, we conclude that the separation of the mother and her baby during the first few days and the traditional practice of giving ghutties, honey, etc. as initial feeds do not materially affect the success at breast feeding in our mothers.

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## NOTES AND NEWS

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