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**Prayag Raj Joshi**  
Ph.D. Scholar Tribhuvan University, Nepal

## Association of maternal education and breastfeeding practices in Kailali district, Nepal

**Prayag Raj Joshi**

### Abstract

Breastfeeding is the action of feeding a baby with milk from the breast. The main aim of this study is to investigate the association between maternal education and breastfeeding of Nepalese mothers with a consideration of household income and health-seeking behaviors. This was a cross-sectional analytical study carried out in Dhangadhi sub-metropolitan city which was selected randomly. Respondents were 384mothers having below 1year of children who were recruited based on purposive sampling method. Among 5 breastfeeding outcomes, ever BF was considered as the main outcome of breastfeeding. Interview schedule was the research tool that was based on WHO sample questions on breastfeeding indicators. Mothers with a higher education were more likely to initiate early breast feeding when they were also from a high-income household while also being lesslikely to exclusively breast feed their babies. Routine and successful nursing is crucial for the health of infants andis influenced by maternal education. Future public health interventions to promote breast feeding should consider the issues related to the educational level of mothers.

**Keywords:** Association, breast feeding practices, early initiation, ever breast feeding, infants, maternal education

### Introduction

#### Background of the Study

Breastfeeding is considered as the first four strategies promoted by UNICEF for improving infant and child survival (Grant, 1984) [8]. According to Kumari, Vansa, & Lata (2015) [10], breast feeding is associated with decreased childhood morbidity and mortality as it provides adequate and appropriate nutrients for infant's growth and development (Dewey *et al.* 1995) [7], reduction in infant mortality and morbidity (Booth, 2001) [4], protects infants against infections and promotes their survival (Chakrabarty, Ghosh, & Bharati, 2007) [5].

Breast milk is the best form of nutrition for infants. Breastfeeding benefits not only the infants but also the mothers, families and society in terms of nutritional, developmental, economic and environmental factors. According to Beral & *et al.* (2002) [3], the benefits of breast feeding include a low incidence of pre-menopausal breast and/or ovarian cancer among mothers who have breastfed. The WHO has recommended that infants should be exclusively breastfed during the first six months. Thereafter, it recommends the addition of appropriate complementary food. It is recognized that the immunological and nutritional properties of breast milk are beneficial to babies (Dewey *et al.*, 2001) [6]. Moreover, World Health Assembly (2001) resolved that exclusive breastfeeding for the 6 months is the most appropriate infant feeding practice.

WHO (2009) [17] stresses on that almost all mothers are biologically capable to breast feed except in a small number of health conditions, and that the use of breast milk substitutes is justifiable.

Breastfeeding practices, however, are notmerely biological issues but are also related to health behaviors and are influenced by multifactorial determinants, including historical, socioeconomic and cultural factors (Rollins & *et al.* 2016)<sup>[13]</sup>, but these practices are affected by personal attributes, such as age, weight, education and confidence (Rollins & *et al.* 2016)<sup>[13]</sup>. In China, breastfeeding practices face unique challenges, due to China's diverse cultural values, political system and historical perception of breast feeding (Jiang & *et al.* 2012)<sup>[9]</sup>. Among various determinant factors, the education status of the mother has been identified as an important determinant for child welfare, survival and health (Meyrose & *et al.* 2018)<sup>[11]</sup>.

**Correspondence Author:**  
**Prayag Raj Joshi**  
Ph.D. Scholar Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Skafida *et al.* (2009) [14] found that maternal education was a more informative predictor of breastfeeding initiation than occupation. Moreover a study conducted by Acharya and Khanal (2015) [1], showed that the higher maternal education level is related to better breastfeeding practices.

Maternal education and breastfeeding practices have been studied extensively and most of the previous literatures showed a positive association between maternal education and breastfeeding practices, but according to Mihrsahi & *et al.* (2010) [12], the positive association may not be accurate in all contexts like, studies in Ethiopia and Bangladesh observed a negative association between breast feeding and maternal education (Alemayehu, Haidar & Habte, 2009) [2]. Breast feeding has become much more common in the last few years because of numerous interventions by international organizations in the field of infant nutrition (WHO, 1998), but the breastfeeding rates remain below optimal levels recommended by the WHO in many countries (Victora & *et al.*, 2016) [15]. Thus this study aims at to investigate the association between maternal education and breast feeding, taking into account household income and health-seeking behaviors. The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of evidence on the social determinants of breast feeding and have the potential to provide evidence for related interventions and policies.

### **Research Question**

How is the association of mothers' education and breastfeeding practices among infants living in Kailali district?

### **Research Hypothesis**

There is a relation between mothers' education and breastfeeding practice.

### **Problem Statement**

A review of the literature revealed that limited information is available on association of mother's education and breastfeeding practice. This general idea suggests me that only basic information is available on mothers and breast feeding. To make change and contribute in this field it requires more information. Therefore, it is academically

significant to conduct a qualitative research study.

### **Significance of the Study**

Like other research this research is also beneficial to various concerned people. For e.g. Health educators may use the results of the study to develop education programs, and to increase awareness of female towards breastfeeding. Community health educators may use data from this study to modify reproductive health programs to facilitate the needs of the women's population. Health education specialists may have access to data that can be used to develop teaching programs that are client-centered and focused on the relevant needs of the women. The data from the study can be shared with the local and state departments of health, local health facilities, and local community groups. The health departments and community groups may use the data to initiate a conversation on female's view on breastfeeding. So this study is significant for research.

### **Methodology**

A quantitative methodological approach was adopted to conduct the study. This study was a cross sectional analytical study carried out in June and July, 2019. Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan city of Kailali district was chosen using convenience sampling method as it is the resident area too of this researcher. As a research tool, an interview schedule was used to collect data. Number of respondents was 384 mothers having below 1 year children and they were calculated by applying Solvin, 1960 formula using simple random sampling method. An interview schedule was prepared based on association of mother's education and breastfeeding practice since most of them were illiterate. Oral consent was taken from respondents and assent from keen member of family as an ethical consideration. After piloting tool in 10 % of total respondents for validation, tool was applied after correcting some lapses for final data collection. Descriptive and analytical statistical techniques were employed to analyze the data and prepare the findings. SPSS software was used to conduct appropriate analyses.

### **Results**

**Table 1:** Demographic Description of the Respondent

<b>Demographic Description of the Respondents</b>		<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent %</b>
Ethnicity(Nom)	Brahmin/Chhetri	110	28.64%
	Dalit	50	13.02%
	Ethnic	206	53.64%
	Others	18	4.68%
Religion(Nom)	Hindu	283	73.69%
	Buddhist	38	9.89%
	Christian	54	14.06%
	Muslim	0	0.0%
	Others	9	2.34%
Size of Family	Below 6	288	75%
	More than 6	96	25%
Mother's earning status	Earning	139	36.19%
	No earning	245	63.80%
Age of Mothers	Below 20 years	114	29.68%
	21-34 years	145	37.76%
	Above 35 years	25	6.51%
Wealth Rank	Higher	111	28.90%
	Lower	173	45.05%
No. of Children in Family	Up to 2	104	27.08%
	Above 2	280	72.91%

Type of Family	Joint	302	78.64%
	Nuclear	82	21.35%
Education Status of mother	Uneducated(who cannot read and write )	248	64.58%
	Educated (who can read and write)	136	35.41%

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Among 384 respondents, most of the respondents (73.69%) were from Hindu and rest of them was belonged to other religions. In the same way, Ethnic groups were 53.64%, Brahmin/ Chhetri were 28.64%, Similarly, most of the mothers, 64.58% were uneducated and rest of the mothers were educated, while 78.64% were from nuclear and 21.35% were from joint family. And it can be concluded that Hindu religion and Chhetri caste have the

dominant role in the community. In the same way, this table shows the mothers' earning status. Among 384 mothers, 36.19% mothers engaging in earning activities while 63.80% were not engaging any activities. It shows that there are not sources of income in concerned community. This table shows that most of the mothers were the age range of 21-34 years and most of the mothers had more than 2 children and most of the mothers had the larger family size.

**Table 2:** Breastfeeding practices of the mothers in the study

Description	Education Status of Mothers			
	Educated	Percent	Uneducated	Percent
Baby ever breast feed	310	80.72%	74	19.27%
Breastfeeding initiated within an hour of delivery	290	75.52%	94	24.47%
Practiced exclusive breastfeeding at all	285	74.21%	99	25.78%
Practiced exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months	275	71.61%	109	28.38%

Table 2 shows the description of mothers' education and breastfeeding practices. Total 4 questions regarding breastfeeding practice were asked to educated and uneducated mothers equally. According to their responses, we can say that educated mothers had the good breastfeeding practices as compare to others.

#### Association between Mother's Education and Breastfeeding Practice

With the help of bivariate analysis (Chi Square Test), it can be said that there is a statistically significant association between mother's education and breastfeeding practice. My research hypothesis was accepted as I hypothesized that "there is a relationship between mother's education and breastfeeding practice". It means that literate mothers had early initiated breastfeeding within an hour of delivery as compare to other mothers. Similarly, this study showed that they had practiced exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months too.

#### Discussion

Breast Feeding is the first fundamental right of the child. The initiation of breast feeding and the timely introduction of adequate safe and appropriate complementary foods in conjunction with continued breast feeding are of prime importance for the growth, development, health and nutrition of infants and children everywhere. However, there are many cultural practices associated with infant feeding of which certain undesirable practices need to be discouraged. Among four breastfeeding variables, including early initiation of breast feeding (EIB), exclusive breast feeding (EBF) under 6 months, predominant breast feeding (PBF) under 6 months and children ever breast fed (ever BF), only ever BF was taken for this study and ever BF was defined according to WHO indicators. The prevalence of ever BF was defined as the proportion of children who were ever BF among all children aged 0–12 months. Furthermore, to explore mothers' Current Breastfeeding (CBF) situation, the present study also implemented an indicator of CBF prevalence, defined as any breast feeding in the last 24 hours of children less than 12 months of age. Maternal

education was the primary variable in the study which was classified into two categories: literate (who can write their names) and illiterate (cannot write their names) and it represents the formal education gained through schooling and it may not reflect the actual health literacy of the mothers. This study aimed to investigate the association between mothers' education and breastfeeding practices in Dhangadhi Sub-metropolitan city Nepal by investigating whether the mothers' education has an impact on breastfeeding practices. Many descriptive results show that uneducated mothers do not have the knowledge about breastfeeding in Nepal, thus indicating an unmet need to be addressed by breastfeeding education.

Bivariate analysis shows that variables such as mothers' education, religion, number of children in family, wealth status are important variables in explaining breastfeeding practice. Among them, only two major variables namely; mothers' education and breastfeeding practices were analyzed in this study. As do many other studies, this study also shows that literate mothers have the proper knowledge about breastfeeding. It could be that educated mothers are more capable of accessing available health facilities with profound effects on child care.

#### Conclusion

A positive association between maternal education and the Ever BF were observed in this study, with the consideration of health-seeking behavior and household income. Routine and successful breast feeding, as per the American Academy of Paediatrics recommendation, is crucial for the health of the infant and is primarily influenced by social factors. This study underscores the influence of maternal education on breastfeeding practices. Findings from this study contribute to the growing body of research on the social determinants of breast feeding.

This study suggests that extensive public health interventions on breastfeeding promotion in Nepal should target mothers with lower level of education, especially among those with medium incomes. Appropriate supportive policies and program for this group of mothers, including enforcing full-term maternal leave and building a mother-

friendly workplace to job holders, providing breastfeeding education and counseling as well as breaking cultural and social norms, should be implemented to create an encouraging environment for breastfeeding practice among Nepalese mothers.

### Ethical Consideration

Verbal informed consent was taken from every selected subject as an ethical approval. Subjects were assured for the anonymity of the information and allowed to refuse to participate in the study at any time if they wish.

### Data Availability

The datasets analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

### Disclosure

The funder has no role in the manuscript writing, editing, approval, and decision to publish.

### Conflicts of Interest

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest associated with the publication of this manuscript.

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