

A-38: Does continued breast feeding lead to poor growth?

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This study was conducted to investigate the association between breast feeding and nutritional status of children aged 6-24 months.

159 babies in the age group of 6-24 months attending the well baby clinic, at SOS village Piliyandala were studied. The weights and heights of the babies were measured to assess their nutritional status. Nutritional status was classified using the WHO classification.

The study revealed that 83.65% of the study population were being currently breast fed and that 19.6% were underweight, 20.9% were wasted while 13.2% were stunted.

There was no significant relationship between being underweight and breast feeding in children <9 months of age. There was a significant relationship between nutritional status and being breast fed in babies >9 months irrespective of other confounding factors such as income ($p=0.024$). In the study population underweight was more prevalent than stunting and wasting. Underweight and stunting increase with age, whereas wasting decrease with age.

There are other factors influencing the nutritional status of the baby such as mother's education, father's occupation, income group and birth order. When mother's education is beyond G.C.E. (O/L) the nutritional status of the child is better. In high income families, children above 9 months of age who were breast fed were at a significantly higher risk of being underweight as compared to non breast fed counterparts. As this may be due to inadequate intake of complementary foods, it is recommended that more attention be paid to educate mothers on the usefulness of complementary feeding patterns and in depth studies of the usefulness of continued breast feeding in children >9 months of age in Sri Lanka be undertaken.