

# Study of Weaning Practices among Mothers of Children less than One year of Age in Slum area of Multan

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## Abstract

**Background:** Weaning is the key to the proper growth and development of a child. Mothers must do proper weaning practices in order to prevent malnutrition and infection in children.

**Objective:** To determine the weaning practice among mothers with infants aged 6 months to one year of age, and causes of delayed weaning.

**Methodology:** A cross-sectional descriptive study was carried out among the residents of the slum area of Jahangirabad, Multan, from 31st March to 25th May 2018. A close-ended questionnaire was used for collecting data from 85 mothers using non-probability convenient sampling technique. Frequency and percentages were calculated for qualitative variables like education, occupation, socio-economic status, the start of weaning time. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 20.

**Results:** Mothers who started weaning of their children at age of 6 months and above were 91%. Mothers who felt their milk was enough for the baby were only 37%. Mothers using marketed food for weaning were, 48 %. Illiterate mothers were, 45%. Those who were doing weaning less than 6 times per day were 98%. Families belonging to low socioeconomic status were, 61%. On applying the chi-square test there was no significant association found between the start of weaning time and mother's education ( $p=0.3$ ) or occupation ( $p=0.3$ ).

**Conclusion:** A large proportion of children's population has started weaning above 6 months of age. There was no significant association found between the start of weaning time with the mother's education and occupation.

**Key words:** Weaning, Infants, Mother, Slum area, Practices.

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## Introduction

According to WHO recommendation, weaning is the process by which a baby slowly gets used to eating adult foods and relies less on breast milk.<sup>1,2</sup> Breast milk alone is not sufficient for the nutritional requirement of the child. It is deficient in vitamin A, Iron, and Zinc.<sup>3</sup> Weaning is not a sudden withdrawal of breastfeeding. It is a gradual process of starting supplementary foods around the age of six months. The supplementary foods should be rich in protein and other essential materials. In our society, supplementary food materials are based on usually cow's milk, fruit juices, soft cooked rice, vegetables, Dhali, and suji.<sup>4,5</sup> Weaning food should be rich in energy and micronutrients, free from contamination, without much salt or spices, easy to prepare from family foods, and cost-effective.<sup>4</sup> The weaning period is the most crucial in child development. If weaning is not done properly, the child may suffer from

malnutrition and infection. The weaning failure may bring other drastic conditions, like immunodeficiency, marasmus, and kwashiorkor, which are very fatal conditions. Weaning is the period of extensive mental alteration of both baby and parents.<sup>4,5</sup> Babies become more attentive to the world around them and also become liberated in their day to day activities. Mothers at first spend their time completely with their babies, which during weaning alters. Mothers have to be dependent on their families to look-after after their young babies. Healthy growth and development don't include just correct feeding, it also includes emotional encouragement and the correct type of attention for the baby. Successful weaning includes all these points into consideration. Adequate knowledge of weaning foods and practices is an essential aspect of preventive pediatrics so as to improve child physical growth and development.<sup>5</sup> Breast milk as only food was recommended up to the age of six months.<sup>6</sup> The

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objective of this study was to determine the weaning practice among mothers with infants aged six months to one year, and the causes of delayed weaning.

### Methodology

This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in urban slums of Multan city (Basti Jahangir Abad) from 31<sup>st</sup> March to 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018. This study was carried out after taking ethical approval from the hospital ethical committee. Mothers of children aged six months to one year were taken into study. Those mothers who were not willing to participate in the study were excluded further, the mothers who were having a sick child with some emergency condition were also excluded from the study. Out of the selected sample area, 85 mothers eligible for the study were drawn by non-probability convenient sampling technique. The data was collected through a preformed close-ended questionnaire. Frequency and percentages were calculated for qualitative variables like father education, mother education, mother occupation, socioeconomic status, the start of weaning time, reasons for delayed weaning, and giving marketed weaning foods. Chi-square test was applied to see the association between variables like the start of weaning time with mother's education and the start of weaning time with mother's occupation. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 20.

### Results

This study was conducted to assess the weaning practices followed by the mothers in the urban slum area. Mothers who started weaning of their children at age of 6 months and above were, 91%. Mothers who felt their milk was enough for the baby were, 37%. Mothers using marketed food for weaning were 48 %. Regarding causes of delayed weaning, our study found that 36.5% of mothers think that milk is sufficient for baby, 17.6% think that baby cannot digest food, 19.4% delay weaning due to low socioeconomic status, 7.7% on family elders' pressure and 18.8% due to lack of knowledge. In this study, 91.8% of mothers gave their child weaning food less than 6 times per day, 3.5% 6 times per day, and 4.7% more than 6 times per day. Illiterate mothers were, 45%. Those who were doing weaning less than 6 times per day were, 98%. Families belonging to low socioeconomic status were, 61%. Among them, 65% were housewives. The father's education was illiterate 38.9%, primary 12.9%, middle education 29.4%, high school education 16.5%, and graduate 2.4%. In this study, 17.6% of mothers discontinued breastfeeding during weaning, while, 51% of mothers used only a homemade diet for weaning. On applying the chi-square test there was no significant association found between the start of weaning time and mother's education ( $p=0.3$ ) or occupation ( $p=0.3$ ). (Table I and II)

**Table-I: Distribution of start of Weaning Time and Mother's Education**

Responses	Lahore (n=50)	Bahawalpur (n=50)	Total	P-value
Mother in Law knows that a large family will badly affect Daughter in Law's health	34(68%)	33(66%)	67(67%)	0.4
Mother in Law holds the household budget	29(58%)	33(66%)	62(62%)	0.6
Sons favor mother	15(30%)	18(36%)	66(66%)	0.4
Mother in Law wanted more children	34(68%)	23(46%)	57(57%)	0.02
More children will result in poor child care	33(66%)	44(88%)	77(77%)	0.01

## Discussion

This study was carried out to assess the practices of mothers regarding the weaning of their babies in an underdeveloped urban slum area of Multan, Pakistan. Proper weaning is of prime importance for the adequate development of children as they face the risk of malnutrition and inadequate immunity against their increasing interaction with the environment. Improper and delayed weaning amplifies these risks and is a major contributor to the infliction of disease and stunted growth.<sup>6,7</sup> WHO in collaboration with UNICEF developed the global breastfeeding collective to meet political, legal, financial, and public sustenance for breastfeeding. It has also developed strategies in order to guard, expand, and help adequate infant and young child feeding. There are multiple problems, mothers have to face regarding the weaning of their child, and out of these the most important one is the disinterest of the child in food. In such stances, parents should develop certain strategies to improve the interest of their child such as taking food in front of the child. This develops motivation in the child to eat similar food.<sup>8</sup>

In this study, only 9.4 % of the mothers started weaning their children around the correct time of 6 months. This compared to the global data published by UNICEF in 2018, is at a marked difference from the rest of the country.<sup>7</sup> According to UNICEF in 2012-13 nationally 66.3% of mothers started weaning around 6-8 months, while 81.6% and 59.7% of mothers from urban and rural settings started weaning around 6-8 months. According to UNICEF mothers divided into five socioeconomic categories from low to high started proper weaning in the following percentages;<sup>7</sup> 37.8, 49, 70.9, 85.5, and 83.2, which resulted in 83.2% of mothers belonging to the top 20% socioeconomic status and 52.% in bottom 20% socioeconomic status observing correct weaning age. UNICEF further reported that 81.2% of mothers with higher education practiced weaning at the proper time while 54.3% of illiterate mothers practiced correct weaning time. This is in accordance with this study which observes that 61.2% of mothers belong to lower and 37.6% belong to lower-middle socioeconomic status and only 14.1% had higher education while more than 80% had less education or none. This compared with other countries' data by UNICEF

shows that Argentina has one of the highest rates of proper weaning age at 96.6% while Somalia has one of the lowest at 15-17%, whereas our neighbors China, India, Iran, and Afghanistan have 60%, 45.8%, 75.9% and 61.0% rates, respectively.<sup>7</sup>

Nutritional Survey of Pakistan also indicates that the practices observed in this study are quite alarming by reporting that More than half (51.3%) of the mothers interviewed across Pakistan reported they had started giving semisolid foods to their children at 6–8 months.<sup>8</sup> The proportion was higher (68.4%) in urban areas than in rural areas (44.7%). KP (35.3%) and AJK (35.7%) had lower trends than other provinces. In comparison with a study conducted at the pediatrics OPD Ghurki Trust Hospital Lahore, 42% of mothers started weaning at the correct age, 32% late and the rest early,<sup>9</sup> 26% discontinued breastfeeding during weaning, while in this study 17.6% discontinued, and 44% reported that they used only homemade diet for weaning compared to 51% in this study.

Ashraf S et al reported that 29 out of 62 illiterate, 31 out of 53 primary schooled, 50 out of 70 high schooled, and 25 out of 33 Graduate mothers initiated weaning at the correct time thus highlighting the importance of educational awareness in this regard.<sup>10</sup> A study carried out in rural Tumkur, India by Ananda et al, concluded that 18% of mothers delayed the weaning of their children, out of which 63% believed that milk was sufficient for the baby and 36% thought that the baby couldn't digest food.<sup>11</sup> In comparison to this, regarding reasons for delayed weaning, our study found that 36.5% of mothers think that milk is sufficient for baby, 17.6% think that baby cannot digest food, 19.4% delay weaning due to low socioeconomic status, 7.7% on family elders' pressure and 18.8% due to lack of knowledge. In this study, 91.8% of mothers gave their child weaning food less than 6 times per day, 3.5% 6 times per day, and 4.7% more than 6 times per day, whereas Ananda et al reported that 45.9% of mothers gave weaning food twice daily and 31% only once a day. In contrast to the 48.2% of mothers in this study giving marketed food to their children, only 13% of the mothers from Tumkur used marketed food. A cross-sectional study was conducted in the Urban Health Center of Govt. Medical College and hospital of Ambajogai, Maharashtra reported that 75.6% of mothers initiated weaning at the correct time of 6 months.<sup>12</sup> Although the great majority of them were illiterate and the rest

only primary schooler, it can be assumed that close proximity to a tertiary health care facility was the reason for their proper awareness regarding weaning practices.

### Conclusion

Thus it is evident that the majority of the mothers of this area are carrying out poor practices regarding the weaning of their children, which poses a great danger to the children's proper development and growth. It is suggested that weaning should be started around the age of six months because the mother's milk is not sufficient for growth beyond six months. Weaning food material should be supplemented with proteins and other essential nutrients. If weaning is followed by diarrhea and growth failure, a nearby pediatrician should be consulted. Efforts should be made to design and promote the use of adequate homemade weaning foods.

**Authors Contribution: SQ:** Conception of work and Design of Work. **MKA:** Drafting and Revising. **UA:** Acquisition & analysis **SB:** Analysis of data and drafting.

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