

CHAPTER 8

INFANT AND CHILD FEEDING PRACTICES

8.1 Initiation of Breastfeeding

As many as 87 percent of South African babies are breastfed for at least some time. Only 45 percent are breastfed within one hour of birth (Table 8.1). In eight of the nine provinces, more than 80 percent of infants are ever breastfed. The only province that deviates from this high frequency is North West Province where 62 percent are ever breastfed.

There is a wide range among provinces in the proportion of infants who are breastfed within one hour of birth. Newborns in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal are the least likely to be breastfed soon after birth (36 and 37 percent, respectively), while those in Western Cape are the most likely (66 percent). There are also differences among provinces in the proportion of infants who are breastfed within one day of birth (between 75 and 87 percent). Western Cape and Northern Cape have the highest percentages. This correlates positively with the percentages according to population groups, as these two provinces have the highest percentage of coloureds and whites.

The data according to population group show that white mothers are somewhat less likely to ever breastfeed their babies than the other groups. However, white and coloured mothers show the highest percentage breastfeeding within one hour of birth, namely 60 percent for both groups. For Asian mothers, the proportion is 48 percent and for African mothers 43 percent. The percentage of infants breastfed within one day of birth shows the same pattern as for within one hour of birth, but at higher levels, namely 92 percent for whites, 86 percent for coloureds, 79 percent for Asians and 77 percent for African mothers.

Differentials in breastfeeding initiation according to other variables are not strong; however, there is a tendency for better educated mothers not to ever breastfeed their children.

Table 8.1 Initial breastfeeding

Percentage of children born in the five years preceding the survey who were ever breastfed, and the percentage who started breastfeeding within one hour of birth and within one day of birth, by selected background characteristics, South Africa 1998

| Background characteristic | Percentage ever breastfed | Of those ever breastfed, percentage who started: | | Number of children |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| | | Within one hour of birth | Within one day of birth ¹ | |
| Child's sex | | | | |
| Male | 86.1 | 45.1 | 77.7 | 2,518 |
| Female | 87.2 | 45.5 | 79.7 | 2,474 |
| Residence | | | | |
| Urban | 84.3 | 45.0 | 79.0 | 2,470 |
| Non-urban | 89.0 | 45.5 | 78.4 | 2,522 |
| Province | | | | |
| Western Cape | 85.4 | 65.5 | 86.5 | 401 |
| Eastern Cape | 90.0 | 52.9 | 78.4 | 741 |
| Northern Cape | 86.3 | 64.1 | 84.8 | 102 |
| Free State | 89.5 | 53.3 | 80.5 | 257 |
| KwaZulu-Natal | 87.5 | 36.9 | 75.9 | 1,094 |
| North West | 61.5 | 38.2 | 78.9 | 340 |
| Gauteng | 83.1 | 36.1 | 75.6 | 954 |
| Mpumalanga | 91.8 | 47.7 | 83.3 | 379 |
| Northern | 95.5 | 45.8 | 78.7 | 724 |
| Mother's education | | | | |
| No education | 91.1 | 41.3 | 76.3 | 453 |
| Sub A - Std 3 | 92.1 | 49.8 | 80.4 | 657 |
| Std 4 - Std 5 | 85.7 | 45.1 | 77.7 | 747 |
| Std 6 - Std 9 | 86.1 | 45.9 | 78.5 | 2,041 |
| Std 10 | 84.4 | 42.6 | 77.6 | 759 |
| Higher | 80.5 | 44.0 | 84.3 | 336 |
| Population group | | | | |
| African | 87.2 | 42.9 | 77.2 | 4,149 |
| Afr. urban | 84.6 | 40.7 | 76.2 | 1,783 |
| Afr. non-urban | 89.2 | 44.4 | 77.9 | 2,366 |
| Coloured | 86.5 | 60.1 | 86.2 | 445 |
| White | 76.0 | 60.0 | 91.6 | 250 |
| Asian | 89.8 | 48.5 | 79.0 | 114 |
| Assistance at delivery | | | | |
| Health professional | 85.9 | 46.0 | 81.0 | 4,212 |
| Traditional midwife | 92.0 | 48.2 | 70.0 | 69 |
| Other or none | 90.2 | 45.9 | 74.9 | 628 |
| Place of delivery | | | | |
| Health facility | 85.7 | 45.7 | 80.7 | 4,164 |
| At home | 90.4 | 47.6 | 75.8 | 713 |
| Other | 97.9 | 17.0 | 32.0 | 114 |
| Total | 86.7 | 45.3 | 78.7 | 4,992 |

Note: Total includes 83 children for whom information on assistance at delivery was not stated and 114 children whose place of delivery was not stated.

¹ Includes children who started breast-feeding within one hour of birth

8.2 Duration of Breastfeeding

As shown in Table 8.2, supplementation of breast milk starts very early in South Africa. Only 7 percent of infants under 6 months are exclusively breastfed and 6 percent are fully breastfed (i.e., supplemented with water only). Seventy percent of all infants less than 6 months of age receive supplementary food with breastfeeding, while 17 percent are not breastfed at all.

Exclusive breastfeeding only features in the <2 month age group, 16 percent of whom are being exclusively breastfed and 13 percent of whom are receiving breast milk and water only. Three in five of these very young children are being given other liquids or foods in addition to breast milk, while 11 percent are not being breastfed at all.

Table 8.2 Breastfeeding status

Percent distribution of children under three years of age by current breastfeeding status, according to child's current age in months, South Africa 1998

| Age in months | Not breast-feeding | Exclusively breastfed | Breastfeeding and: | | Total | Number of living children |
|---------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------|---------------------------|
| | | | Plain water only | Complementary foods | | |
| < 2 | 11.1 | 15.8 | 12.6 | 60.5 | 100.0 | 121 |
| 2-3 | 20.0 | 7.0 | 6.7 | 66.3 | 100.0 | 191 |
| 4-5 | 18.3 | 1.4 | 2.0 | 78.4 | 100.0 | 193 |
| 6-7 | 30.3 | 0.3 | 2.3 | 67.0 | 100.0 | 169 |
| 8-9 | 32.6 | 1.3 | 0.0 | 66.0 | 100.0 | 177 |
| 10-11 | 30.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 69.7 | 100.0 | 155 |
| 12-13 | 27.1 | 2.9 | 0.5 | 69.6 | 100.0 | 156 |
| 14-15 | 39.4 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 60.6 | 100.0 | 161 |
| 16-17 | 50.1 | 0.6 | 0.0 | 49.3 | 100.0 | 167 |
| 18-19 | 62.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 38.0 | 100.0 | 175 |
| 20-21 | 65.7 | 1.7 | 0.0 | 32.6 | 100.0 | 142 |
| 22-23 | 72.8 | 0.5 | 0.0 | 26.8 | 100.0 | 172 |
| 24-25 | 81.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 19.0 | 100.0 | 181 |
| 26-27 | 86.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 13.7 | 100.0 | 166 |
| 28-29 | 87.2 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 12.8 | 100.0 | 156 |
| 30-31 | 95.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 5.0 | 100.0 | 137 |
| 32-33 | 96.0 | 0.0 | 0.8 | 3.2 | 100.0 | 142 |
| 34-35 | 92.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 8.0 | 100.0 | 151 |
| 0-3 months | 16.6 | 10.4 | 8.9 | 64.0 | 100.0 | 312 |
| 4-6 months | 20.1 | 1.2 | 2.2 | 76.5 | 100.0 | 268 |
| 7-9 months | 33.3 | 0.9 | 0.7 | 65.1 | 100.0 | 271 |
| 0-5 months | 17.2 | 7.0 | 6.3 | 69.5 | 100.0 | 505 |
| 6-11 months | 31.1 | 0.6 | 0.7 | 67.5 | 100.0 | 501 |

Note: Breastfeeding status refers to 24 hours preceding the survey. Children classified as *breastfeeding and plain water only* receive no other complementary foods or liquids.

Figure 8.1 shows the prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding among infants aged 0-3 months, 4-6 months, 7-9 months, 10-12 months and the overall rate for infants under the age of 12 months.

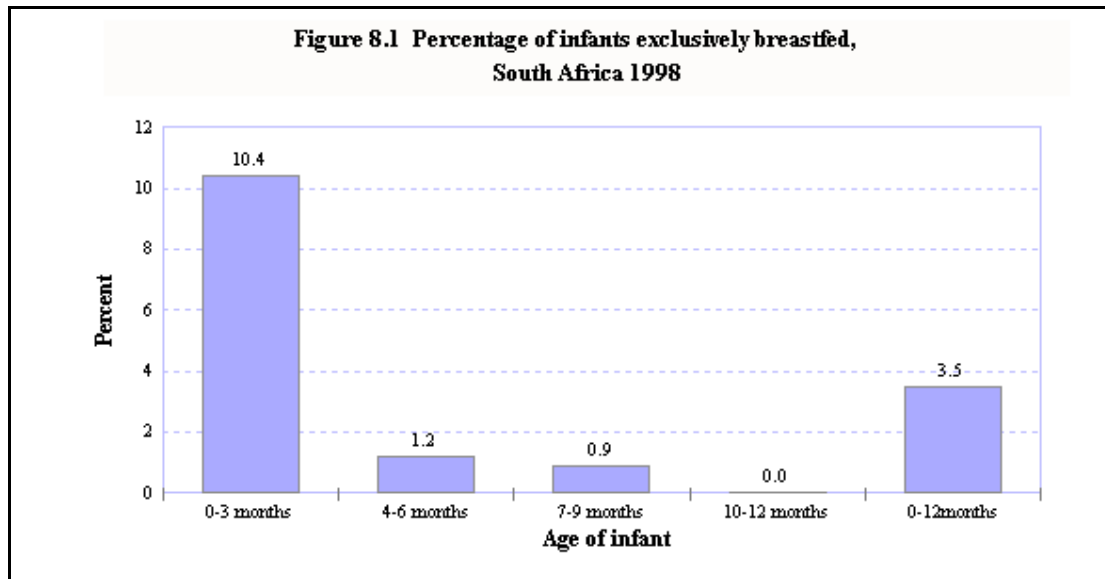


Table 8.3 shows that, at the national level, the median duration of breastfeeding is 16 months. The median duration of exclusive breastfeeding and full breastfeeding (i.e., supplemented with plain water only) are both less than one month.

Although median durations of exclusive and full breastfeeding do not show any substantial variation across background characteristics, there are some variations in the median duration of any breastfeeding. For example, female children are breastfed somewhat longer than male children and non-urban children are breastfed for several months longer than urban children. The median duration of breastfeeding varies between 10 and 20 months according to province. All provinces show a median duration of about 14-17 months, except the Western Cape with 10 months and Northern province with 20 months.

The median duration of breastfeeding does not vary consistently with education level of the mother, fluctuating around 15-17 months for all levels of education. The one exception occurs among children whose mothers have higher than Std.10 education. The median duration of breastfeeding among these children is considerably shorter (7 months).

The median durations of breastfeeding show a wide range according to population group. The longest durations occur for children whose mothers are African (17 months) or coloured (11 months). Children with Asian and white mothers have much shorter median durations of breastfeeding at 5 months and less than 1 month, respectively.

8.3 Frequency of Breastfeeding

Also shown in Table 8.3 is information about the frequency of breastfeeding. The data show that 72 percent of infants under six months of age were breastfed six or more times in the 24 hours preceding the survey. Frequent breastfeeding is more common for non-urban than for urban infants. Breastfeeding frequency varies according to province, with the percentage of children under six months being breastfed six or more times in the previous 24 hours ranging from just over half of young infants in Western Cape province to 90 percent of those in Northern Province. However, much of the variation by province may be due to the small numbers of children under age six months in the sample.

There is a negative correlation between breastfeeding frequency and educational level of the mother. Mothers with either no education or a low level of education breastfeed more frequently than mothers with higher education. Differentials in breastfeeding frequency by population group are inconclusive due to the small numbers of children under six months in the sample for all but the African group.

Table 8.3 Median duration and frequency of breast-feeding by background variables

Median duration of any breastfeeding, exclusive breastfeeding, and full breastfeeding among children under three years of age, and the percentage of children under six months of age who were breastfed six or more times in the 24 hours preceding the interview, according to background characteristics, South Africa 1998

| Background characteristic | Children under 3 years of age | | | Children under six months | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| | Median breastfeeding duration | | | Number of children | Breastfed 6 or more times in preceding 24 hours | Number of children |
| | Any breast-feeding | Exclusive breast-feeding | Full breast-feeding ² | | | |
| Child's sex | | | | | | |
| Male | 14.3 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 1,538 | 70.9 | 269 |
| Female | 16.7 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 1,533 | 72.3 | 236 |
| Residence | | | | | | |
| Urban | 13.7 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 1,484 | 65.8 | 249 |
| Non-urban | 17.3 | 0.5 | 0.6 | 1,588 | 77.1 | 256 |
| Province | | | | | | |
| Western Cape | 10.4 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 258 | 55.1 | 46 |
| Eastern Cape | 16.6 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 462 | 71.1 | 76 |
| Northern Cape | 15.0 | 0.6 | 1.8 | 61 | * | 8 |
| Free State | 15.0 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 155 | 77.6 | 30 |
| KwaZulu-Natal | 14.9 | 0.7 | 0.7 | 688 | 59.9 | 102 |
| North West | 14.1 | 0.4 | 0.6 | 211 | 78.1 | 36 |
| Gauteng | 14.3 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 561 | 73.8 | 100 |
| Mpumalanga | 16.5 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 229 | 72.2 | 38 |
| Northern | 19.5 | 0.5 | 0.6 | 447 | 89.9 | 69 |
| Mother's education | | | | | | |
| No education | 16.1 | 1.1 | 1.1 | 265 | 80.0 | 53 |
| Sub A - Std 3 | 14.7 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 396 | 80.9 | 55 |
| Std 4 - Std 5 | 17.1 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 463 | 74.4 | 64 |
| Std 6 - Std 9 | 17.4 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 1,277 | 69.0 | 196 |
| Std 10 | 14.9 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 481 | 73.8 | 96 |
| Higher | 6.5 | 0.4 | 0.6 | 190 | 50.1 | 40 |
| Population group | | | | | | |
| African | 16.7 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 2,570 | 75.0 | 426 |
| Afr. urban | 15.5 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 1,083 | 71.6 | 189 |
| Afr. non-urban | 17.3 | 0.5 | 0.6 | 1,488 | 77.6 | 237 |
| Coloured | 10.8 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 286 | 57.5 | 40 |
| White | 0.6 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 134 | (37.4) | 27 |
| Asian | 5.2 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 62 | * | 8 |
| Assistance at delivery | | | | | | |
| Health professional | 16.0 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 2,625 | 71.1 | 441 |
| Traditional midwife | (11.4) | (0.5) | (0.5) | 44 | * | 9 |
| Other or none | 15.7 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 367 | 77.3 | 52 |
| Total | 16.0 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 3,072 | 71.5 | 505 |
| Median | 15.6 | 1.2 | 1.7 | 87.6 | - | - |
| Prevalence/Incidence mean | 15.3 | 0.5 | 1.0 | - | - | - |

Note: Total includes 9 children for whom data on assistance at delivery are missing. Figures in parentheses are based on 25 to 49 children.

¹ Medians and means are based on current status and durations are in months.

8.4 Weaning Foods

Among children under two months of age who are still being breastfed, almost one-third are also receiving infant formula, while just over half are being given other liquids (Table 8.4). Use of infant formula is even more common among non-breastfed babies. Meat, fish, and eggs are generally not widely given to babies until they are 4-6 months old, although they are introduced earlier to infants who are not being breastfed than to those who are. On the other hand, almost half of infants 2-3 months old are given other types of solid or mushy foods.

The use of bottles with nipples (teats) is very common in South Africa. Four-fifths of non-breastfed infants 0-3 months of age are given bottles with nipples. Fifty-eight percent of breastfed infants age 0-3 months also use a bottle with a nipple.

For infants under 5 months of age (n=701), only 5 percent are exclusively breastfed and 34 percent are supplemented with other liquids. Approximately 28 percent of all infants less than 5 months of age receive infant formula with breastfeeding. Of the infants aged less than 5 months, 28 percent also receive other foods, while 5 percent receive meat, fish and eggs. For infants under 5 months of age (n=177) who are not breastfed, 39 percent receive infant formula, while 29 percent are supplemented with other liquids. Approximately 23 percent of all infants less than 5 months of age receive other foods, while 9 percent receive meat, fish and eggs.

8.5 Termination of Breastfeeding

In the SADHS data, about ten different reasons were given by mothers as to why they stopped breastfeeding. Almost one-third of the mothers gave “weaning age” (32 percent) as the most important reason for stopping breastfeeding, while 18 percent said that the infant refused to breastfeed. Insufficient breast milk (10 percent) and the fact that the mothers had to go back to work (9 percent) were the other two most important reasons.

Table 8.4 Types of food received by children in preceding 24 hours

Percentage of children under three years of age who received specific types of food in the 24 hours before the interview, and the percentage using a bottle with a nipple, by breast-feeding status and child's age in months, South Africa 1998

| Age (in months) | Breast milk only | Infant formula | Other liquids | Meat/ poultry/ fish/ eggs | Other | Use of bottle with a nipple | Number of children |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------------------------|-------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| BREASTFEEDING CHILDREN | | | | | | | |
| < 2 | 17.8 | 30.1 | 53.6 | 0.0 | 19.9 | 54.2 | 107 |
| 2-3 | 8.8 | 54.0 | 54.6 | 8.0 | 45.2 | 60.5 | 153 |
| 4-5 | 1.7 | 48.1 | 62.8 | 15.7 | 69.8 | 48.1 | 158 |
| 6-7 | 0.4 | 49.9 | 69.3 | 33.2 | 81.5 | 42.9 | 117 |
| 8-9 | 2.0 | 49.6 | 70.8 | 48.7 | 87.0 | 46.8 | 119 |
| 10-11 | 0.0 | 43.5 | 67.7 | 51.4 | 95.7 | 34.1 | 108 |
| 12-13 | 3.9 | 31.5 | 76.9 | 52.5 | 92.9 | 29.2 | 114 |
| 14-15 | 0.0 | 22.1 | 79.4 | 52.2 | 92.6 | 22.3 | 97 |
| 16-17 | 1.1 | 25.9 | 77.1 | 61.7 | 94.5 | 23.0 | 83 |
| 18-23 | 2.0 | 17.4 | 82.4 | 68.6 | 94.1 | 16.6 | 162 |
| 24-29 | 0.0 | 8.2 | 87.5 | 69.8 | 93.7 | 13.8 | 77 |
| 30-35 | 0.0 | 17.5 | 87.0 | 92.3 | 93.3 | 17.9 | 25 |
| 0-3 months | 12.5 | 44.1 | 54.2 | 4.7 | 34.8 | 57.9 | 260 |
| 4-6 months | 1.5 | 47.2 | 63.5 | 17.9 | 72.6 | 46.9 | 214 |
| 7-9 months | 1.3 | 51.3 | 71.5 | 46.2 | 85.4 | 45.2 | 181 |
| Total | 3.5 | 35.8 | 70.5 | 40.8 | 77.7 | 36.8 | 1,321 |
| NON-BREASTFEEDING CHILDREN | | | | | | | |
| 0-3 | 0.0 | 77.7 | 49.6 | 14.2 | 36.8 | 79.9 | 52 |
| 4-6 | 0.0 | 85.3 | 76.9 | 31.4 | 64.0 | 91.7 | 54 |
| 7-9 | 0.0 | 77.5 | 80.4 | 50.2 | 88.6 | 88.0 | 90 |
| 10-11 | 0.0 | 67.1 | 70.2 | 69.7 | 83.4 | 85.9 | 47 |
| 12-13 | 0.0 | 62.6 | 85.2 | 55.0 | 83.6 | 63.3 | 42 |
| 14-15 | 0.0 | 28.8 | 90.7 | 68.7 | 92.5 | 56.4 | 63 |
| 16-17 | 0.0 | 36.4 | 82.9 | 63.7 | 92.5 | 67.3 | 84 |
| 18-23 | 0.0 | 30.4 | 81.8 | 65.2 | 88.8 | 43.3 | 327 |
| 24-29 | 0.0 | 13.7 | 81.4 | 67.2 | 86.4 | 23.7 | 427 |
| 30-35 | 0.0 | 10.8 | 80.3 | 65.9 | 85.0 | 13.1 | 404 |
| Total | 0.0 | 29.2 | 80.2 | 62.2 | 84.7 | 39.3 | 1,590 |