

Breastfeeding in Rural Northern India : Levels and Differentials

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The duration of the distribution of breastfeeding (BF) has been examined for its level and differentials by demographic and socio-economic characteristics of rural women of Northern India. The BF data have been collected through both retrospective (last but one child) as well as current status (last child) reporting of the duration of BF. The breastfeeding in the study area was found universal.

The 'survival analysis' which allowed 'censoring' revealed a higher mean duration of breastfeeding for the last child than for the last but one child; the difference being statistically significant. However, for the same mothers who gave BF information in both the data sets, the difference in their mean duration of BF was not statistically significant. The average duration of BF was almost identical for mothers who had the last but one child and the last child (19 to 21 months). This study favoured the 'current status' data as these were more complete in terms of the coverage, and perhaps less distorted due to reporting errors caused by recall lapse.

Breastfeeding differentials by specific characteristics of mother were identical for both the last or the last but one child cohorts. Mothers belonging to the older birth cohorts breastfed for longer duration's than the younger generation's cohorts. Education as well as upper social and economic status of mothers were found inversely related with the duration of breastfeeding.