

# Empower Parents: Enable Breastfeeding

Subhash C Parija

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Breastfeeding continues to play a leading role in the protection of the child, besides enabling nutrition and bonding, it eventually contributes to the overall growth, productivity, and development of the nation.<sup>1</sup>

It is a matter of growing concern that only 40% of infants under 6 months are breastfed across the nations. The leading factors include socioeconomic status, literacy, working mothers, insufficient breast milk production, etc.<sup>2</sup> If the statutory recommendations are strictly adhered to, we would be in a position to stem the tide of infant mortality, a staggering 8 lakhs plus infants every year.<sup>3</sup>

The World Health Assembly resolution categorically has set a target of minimum 50% exclusive breastfeeding of infants under 6 months by the year 2025.<sup>4</sup> One of the discerning factors is the lack of support for parents at work, a matter that has to be essentially and aggressively addressed.<sup>5</sup>

Inform, anchor, engage, and galvanize are the four cardinal objectives that acquire great significance in the present context. The nexus between gender-equitable parental social protection and breastfeeding has to be constantly reiterated.<sup>6</sup>

Health professionals including nursing professionals have to necessarily emphasize on parent-friendly tenets, values, and gender-equitable social norms.<sup>7</sup> Nursing professionals and educators need to team up with individuals and like-minded organizations for highlighting the benefits of breastfeeding to the mothers, in order to cause a greater impact.<sup>8</sup> Galvanizing equally significant action on gender-equitable parental social protection would certainly result in augmenting greater awareness to advocate breastfeeding.<sup>9</sup>

It is the prerogative of the nursing professionals to impart education to the mothers by duly apprising them of the available infant feeding options, besides throwing light on optimized alternatives and the objectivized introduction of additional liquids.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, a nurse is endowed with the responsibility of being both an educator and a counsellor at various stages of motherhood. For instance, the prenatal nurse can inform the mother of the merits of breastfeeding.<sup>11</sup> The midwife can facilitate the mother in her first contact with the baby,<sup>12</sup> whereas the postpartum nurse can provide frequent maternal–infant contact during the mother's stay in the hospital or in a safe environment.<sup>13</sup>

Empowering parents is the first nodal step toward promoting breastfeeding.<sup>6,14</sup> It is high time that we had initiated and sustained family-friendly policies such as paid parental leave. This would go a long way to enable breastfeeding, besides facilitating bonding when it matters the most. It is well-documented that during early childhood, the optimal nutrition is provided solely by breastfeeding.

Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth Deemed University, Pillaiyarkuppam, Puducherry, India

**Corresponding Author:** Subhash C Parija, Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth Deemed University, Pillaiyarkuppam, Puducherry, India, Phone: +91 413-2616766 e-mail: vc@sbvu.ac.in

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If this is promulgated in association with nurturing care, we could create an ideal environment that would essentially endure over an entire lifetime.

When a breastfeeding mother rejoins duty, it is absolutely necessary that she is provided with an adequate, hygienic, and a private enclosure. Furthermore, modalities have to be in place for expressing and storing breast milk. Yet another frequently ignored policy is providing paternity leave that immensely enables the father to bond with his child. Paternal care is often underestimated even in developed countries.<sup>15</sup> All these facets, if addressed on a war footing, would help enable mothers to breastfeed their babies.

Let us make a clarion call to resolve unanimously in order to empower parents and enable breastfeeding.

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