

**INFANT FEEDING: REALITIES FROM HIV POSITIVE  
MOTHERS IN MANDALAY, MYANMAR**



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PENCHEN SHERER, Ph.D., NATTHANI MEEMON, Ph.D.**ABSTRACT**

Nowadays, in the world, HIV is still a social burden disease and infant feeding practices for the under six months olds are also one of the cultural practices. HIV and infant feeding issues are matters of social, cultural, economic and policy issue in HIV positive mothers and the health of babies born to HIV positive mothers.

This research was conducted in Mandalay, the third capital of Myanmar, for six months to explore various cultural issues of under six months infant feeding practices among HIV positive mothers, to find out which socio-cultural and political determinants were configuring those infant feeding patterns and to learn which understandings of under six months infant feeding HIV positive mothers were similar to or different from those of medical professionals. Field research was performed with in-depth interviews with 13 HIV positive mothers, 10 medical professionals and peer counselors, and focus group interviews with 16 HIV positive mothers while participant observations were conducted during interviews with a qualitative approach.

Twenty five out of total 29 HIV positive mothers were practicing various cultural mixed feedings to their under six months infants according to their cultural beliefs and practices related to infant health, growth and development, the local small babies' illnesses and disease diagnosis, treatment and prevention using foods, drinks and drugs; including traditional and western drugs for self medication purposes. HIV positive mothers were led to practice cultural mixed feeding, resulted from strong cultural beliefs as well as a result of policy structural function impacts and economics in the midst of cultural seniority, good motherhood and cultural learning perceptual concepts.

On the other hand, two out of three mothers practicing exclusive formula feeding, and one mother practicing exclusive breastfeeding, had a strong belief in the modern medical professional's suggestions concerning HIV and infant feeding practices and the good mother concept to prevent HIV transmission to their babies. Although both kinds of mothers who chose to practice exclusive breastfeeding or exclusive formula feeding, usually practiced mixed feeding, medical professionals assumed mothers who chose to practice exclusive formula feeding were less likely to practice mixed feeding, because those mothers were provided with medical professionals' counseling sessions for HIV and infant feeding.

**KEY WORDS: HIV POSITIVE MOTHERS/ UNDER SIX MONTHS INFANT FEEDING/ SOCIO-CULTURAL DETERMINANTS/ LOCAL SMALL BABIES ILLNESSESS AND DISEASES**

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