**Overcoming Perceptions of Colic and Increasing Support to Improve Exclusive Breastfeeding Practices in Tanzania: Household Trials with Mothers and Fathers**

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### BACKGROUND

- WHO recommends infants 0-6 mos be exclusively breastfed (EBF), that is, given only breastmilk without any other foods/drinks, except drops and syrups.
- EBF prevalence in Tanzania has improved in recent decades, but rates steeply decline with child age from 84% infants 0-1mo to 27% infants 4-5mo (MoHCDGEC et al., 2016).
- A major challenge is to develop effective social and behavior change interventions that account for the complexities of EBF behaviors from 0-6mo.

### OBJECTIVES

- Study objectives were to assess:
  - Barriers and facilitators to EBF in rural Tanzania
  - Mothers’ willingness and ability to try recommended breastfeeding practices
  - Fathers’ willingness and ability to support women to improve EBF practices

### STUDY CONTEXT

- Lake Zone regions of Tanzania targeted by Addressing Stunting in Tanzania Early (ASTUTE) program, which aims to reduce prevalence of stunting.
- Rural villages with high prevalence of stunting and anemia, and low prevalence of appropriate IYCF.
- Women with infants 0-5mo (n=36) and their partners (n=30) were recruited with support from community health workers.

### METHODS

- Trials of Improved Practices (TIPs) – a qualitative, consultative method with in-depth interviews:
  - 3 visits with mothers
  - a focus group discussion and 2 visits with fathers
  - Conducted 7-day infant dietary recalls with mothers at first and last visits.
  - In 2-wk trials, assessed acceptability and feasibility of recommended practices to support EBF.
- Inductive analytical approach by four researchers using constant comparative method.

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### CONCLUSIONS

- Families in region can overcome EBF challenges by engaging men and other family members in more hands-on support.
- Parents and health workers need to be educated on lack of scientific evidence on efficacy of gripe water/potential risk of alcohol in its formulation.
- Recommendations for supporting parents and promoting EBF in this region:
  - o address concerns about colic-like symptoms (mchango) and equip parents with skills to soothe its symptoms;
  - o invoke parental desires for optimal growth and health for infants;
  - o call support from men and families to enable more time for mothers to breastfeed.

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### RESULTS

#### TIPs Visit 1 (Assessment)

- Less than one-quarter of infants (n=8) were exclusively breastfed.
- Non-exclusively breastfed infants were mostly given:
  - non-prescribed medicines (n=26): gripe water (n=16), oral traditional medicine (n=9), other commercial medicines (n=5);
  - plain water (n=12);
  - porridge and/or cow milk (n=2).
- Half of moms planned to introduce other foods at 6mo.
- Less than one-third mothers had heard about EBF.

#### TIPs Visit 2 (Counseling)

- Practices offered to parents aimed to:
  1. stop giving infant medicines not prescribed by health worker;
  2. increase mother’s time to BF
  3. increase BF frequency and duration;
  4. not give other “foods/drinks”;
  5. address breast problems in mothers.

#### TIPs Visit 3 (Follow-up)

- Over three-quarters infants (n=31) were exclusively breastfed.
- Non-exclusively breastfed infants were mostly given:
  - non-prescribed medicines (n=6): gripe water (n=1), oral traditional medicine (n=1), other commercial medicines (n=4);
  - plain water (n=1);
  - other food/drink (n=0).
- Three-quarters mothers planned to introduce other foods at 6mo.

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### Emergent themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents’ experiences</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soothing techniques to treat colic-like symptoms (mchango) were acceptable to most parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I have found it very useful because whenever I calm the baby, she stops crying and the stomach pain ceases to the point she sleeps.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>42-year-old mother of 1-month-old daughter</td>
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<td>“It was a little bit tough for [my wife] but she got used of it... when we stopped giving gripe water, the baby was crying every night.”</td>
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<td>25-year-old father of 2-week-old daughter</td>
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<td>Dealing with baby’s crying remained a challenge for some parents, especially mothers</td>
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<td>“It was hard because he was bothering me to the extent that I was tempted to give him the medicines... He was crying a lot.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>23-year-old mother of 3-month-old son</td>
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<td>“The difficult part can be that when the child cries due to abdominal pains (mchango) you might calm him down but he refuses... Another difficulty comes along when you do not give the drug to the child his father gets mad and you end up giving the drug to the child.”</td>
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<td>21-year-old mother of 1-month-old son</td>
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<td>Men and families were willing to support mothers’ workload to enable BF</td>
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<td>“[My parents] said they cannot come back to find all work not done because of EBF but they felt you need to do other things. Sometimes my young sisters help me take care of him but other times I can work while doing work.”</td>
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<td>35-year-old father of 3-month-old daughter</td>
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<td>Perceived improvements in child’s sleep, growth and health were motivating</td>
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<td>“She wasn’t getting any sleep previously but now she sleeps just after being breastfed. This is a good outcome... you can even do other chores comfortably.”</td>
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<td>22-year-old mother of 3-day-old daughter</td>
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<td>“The results were excellent. Even my wife realized that if the baby is properly fed, the baby sleeps a lot and this improves baby’s health... This gives me enough time to work on other things.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>21-year-old mother of 3-month-old son</td>
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<td>Couples reported more “cooperation,” less conflict and greater joint decision-making after BF counseling</td>
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<td>“I would like to thank you for coming to my house and visiting me. I worked on the recommendations which led to peaceful environment in my household. That is all, I just wanted to give thanks for this opportunity.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>39-year-old mother of 1-month-old son</td>
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<td>“… there is now peace in the family... my wife was thin but when we started with this process and I started helping her with her duties, she gained weight. She is now more beautiful that is why I am happy with these lessons. My wife is also happy.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-year-old father of 2-month-old daughter</td>
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