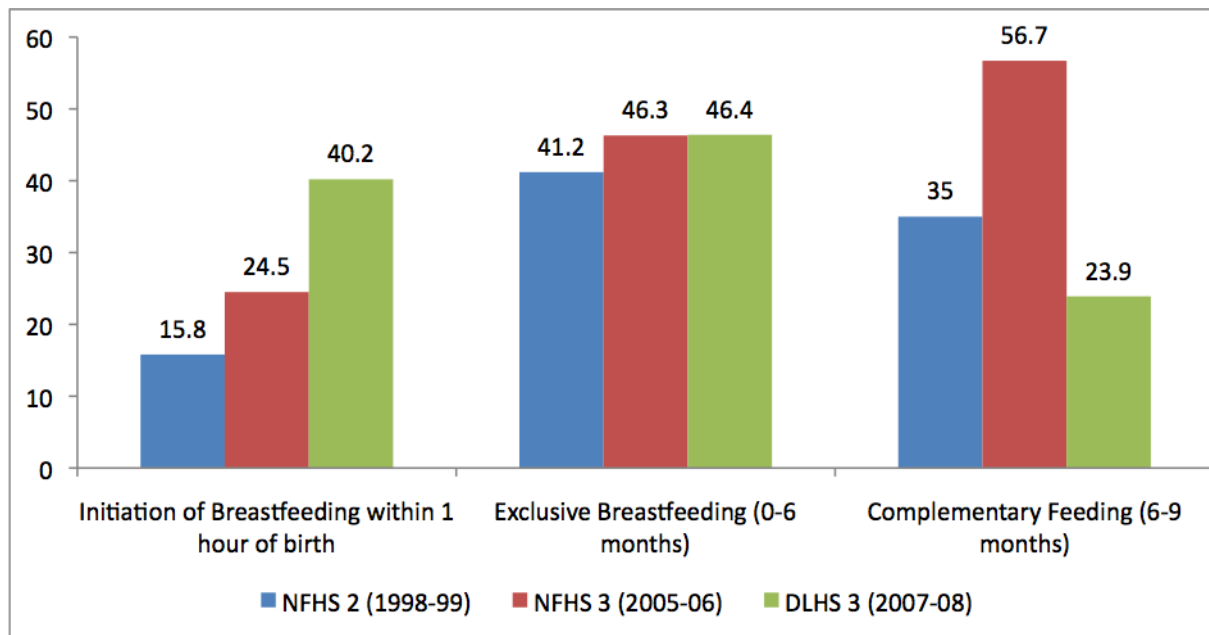


**Figure 1: Trends in 3 indicators of Breastfeeding**



Annually about 26 million babies are delivered in India. According to National Family Health Survey -3 (NFHS-3) data , 20 million are not able to receive exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and about 13 million do not get good timely and appropriate complementary feeding after six months along with continued breastfeeding.

Exclusive breastfeeding up to the age of six months is only 46.3% as per NFHS-3. Further analysis of age wise data of NFHS -3, also reveals that exclusive breastfeeding rapidly declines from first month to sixth month, and only about 20% children continue it by six months giving a real figure of exclusive breastfeeding. Also the DLHS data shows stagnation and no improvement in the exclusive breastfeeding rate.

According to the NFHS-3, the initiation of breastfeeding within one hour of birth is only 24.5%. The District Level Household and Facility Survey (DLHS-3) shows little improvement, which is encouraging; in initiation of breastfeeding is now about 40% from data of 534 districts.

Introduction of complementary feeding along with continued breastfeeding in 6-9 months age is only 55.8 % as per NFHS -3, up from 35% in NFHS 2. But as per the DLHS 3 data it is only 23.9% , means there is decline again.

Unfortunately, feeding practices have not shown a significant rise over the past two decades to be any where near universal coverage; since India began measuring them. Reasons are many, which include aggressive promotion of baby foods by commercial interests, lack of support to women at family and work places, and inadequate skilled health care support. All that shows how much work needs to done if meaningful rise of feeding practices is to be achieved.

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