

MEDIA BRIEF at the launch of World breastfeeding Week 2021

Why Should Corporations Profit on Misinformation on Feeding of Babies and Governments Look the Other Way?

New Delhi. August 2, 2021. For ages, the baby food industry has been doing ‘aggressive’ and ‘bad marketing’ of the commercial ultra-processed baby milk powders. The global sales of baby milks for infants and young children are growing exponentially; is about US \$70 billion annually. Corporations spend about 10% of sales on marketing their products to promote and sustain sales growth. [This figure of about US\\$7 billion annually is more than the entire budget of the World Health Organization.](#)

According to reports, Indian infants and young children up to 3 years of age, consume about 29,836 tonnes of powdered milk formula (retail value estimated at Rs. 35,660 million retail value on 2020 prices). Follow on formula and growing up formula consumed by the 6-month to 3-year-olds is roughly 2/3 and the standard milk formula for 0-6 months is about 1/3. The consumption has increased from 22,000 tonnes in 2010 and is likely to increase to 31,400 tonnes by 2024. This consumption may depend on the medically indicated need of the babies. But more often than not, it is because of unethical or illegal activities of the food corporations indulging in aggressive marketing opportunities.

Both under and over nutrition co-exist in India, in the under-5 children. [The NFHS-5 survey report from 22 states and UTs shows](#) that only 1 in 2 newborn babies is able to begin breastfeeding within an hour of birth. During 0-6 months, again 2 out of 5 babies are not able to practice recommended exclusive breastfeeding. These situations spur intake of powdered formula or liquid animal milk. Industry pitches powdered milk formula as the answer to enhanced nutrition and convenience for mothers and tends to get aspirational among societies.

The question is should we allow corporations to make money out of misinformation of babies because the Indian law bans any kind of promotion of baby foods and feeding bottles for babies under the age 2. Activities such as advertising, selling on discount, giving benefits to health workers through sponsorship of their meetings or research funding, and incorrect or misleading labelling on the containers; all are prohibited as these contribute to decline in breastfeeding. The Parliament enacted the law *Infant Milk Substitutes Feeding Bottles, and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act 1992, and Amendment Act 2003*, clearly noted in its Statement of Objects that promotion of baby foods is more pervasive and can be dangerous. the Parliament of India also noted that interventions are required for promotion of breastfeeding.

Theme of this [years World Breastfeeding Week](#) is so apt to deal with issue .

Protecting Breastfeeding: Where Lies the Responsibility?

BPNI has been monitoring the compliance with this law since 1995. Every year companies violated and continue to break the law. “I am surprised that the governments are not taking stricter action or even ordering an investigation to determine the extent of violation, which is a cognizable offence. Governments and health systems in particular need to do much more. ” said Dr. Arun Gupta, senior pediatrician and central coordinator of BPNI.

This WBW is calling upon people to join this movement to save women and children from the bad marketing and impress upon the governments to take charge of the situation, to note the violations of this law and punish the violators.

It should be noted that inadequate breastfeeding due to such an aggressive promotion of baby food contributes to disease and deaths. [An international study](#) estimates that India could prevent 100,000 child deaths and more than 37 million episodes of diarrhoea and pneumonia if breastfeeding were adequate. It adds billions of dollars in household costs and more than 100 million dollars in health care costs due to sickness. Other benefits include reducing obesity and increased IQ in children, reduced cancers and Type 2 diabetes in women who breastfeed. [According to WHO](#) inadequate breastfeeding and complementary feeding has a direct impact on a child being underweight, stunted or wasted.

“It is therefore necessary that action be taken and people are free from misleading information spread by these companies either directly or through health systems or social media marketing channels using bloggers” says Ms. Nupur Bidla, Director Advocacy BPNI.

Prof. KP Kushwaha Retired Principal, HOD pediatrics from Medical College Gorakhpur said, “Currently most of the baby food companies promote their milk formulas through the health system in India in spite of the ban on such activity. Baby food companies use many tactics, most common being reaching through health professionals because new parents are extremely vulnerable and sensitive to the recommendations of health professionals. Therefore, meetings of baby food company representatives with health professionals need to end”.

In addition widespread lack of support to women while they deliver in hospitals or later when they have to go to work especially the unorganized sector contributes to lack of adequate breastfeeding. Government of India should make all efforts to bridge these gaps, says Dr. Vandana Prasad, a community pediatrician working as technical adviser to PHRN.
ENDS.

Contacts

Dr. Arun Gupta arun.ibfan@gmail.com 9899676306

Ms. Nupur Bidla nupurbidla@gmail.com 99581 63610