

## Lancet Calls Out Baby Food Companies Exploitative Marketing Against Breastfeeding

*Indian Experts Support the arguments with rampant evidence of violations of the law protecting breastfeeding in the country*

**8 February 2023:** The Lancet published the first article in their series on breastfeeding this week, alleging that formula milk manufacturers manipulate scientific data and prey on parents' emotions in order to increase sales at the expense of the rights, health, and welfare of families, women, and children. The Series emphasised the dominating formula milk industries' economic and political influence as well as the inadequacies of public policies that hinder millions of women from nursing as is recommended.

According to NFHS 5 in India despite 88.6 percent institutional births only 41.8 percent women are able to breastfeed in the first hour of birth which is alarming. There is much evidence that marketing of infant formula milk for newborns is one of the reasons for undermining breastfeeding as it exploits parents and families vulnerability and lack of information on risks of formula feeding.

The Government of India enacted the Infant Milk Substitutes Feeding Bottles, and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act 1992, and Amendment Act 2003 (IMS Act) in order to control marketing of the of the baby foods as follow up to the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly resolutions. Despite the legal framework to stop promotion of the products under its scope, baby food and feeding bottle companies aggressively promote their products in India to make profits on the harmful products.

The scope of the IMS Act extends to the infant milk substitutes, feeding bottles and infant foods. The Act prohibits any kind of promotion by any means; may it be advertising, incentives on sales, sponsoring health workers' meetings are a few to mention. It also

prescribes labelling requirements and standards for these products. The Government of India has notified the Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI) in the Gazette of India (No G.S.R. 540 (E), dated the 27th July, 1995) as child welfare NGO to initiate action under section 21(1) of the IMS Act for officially monitoring and implementing the Act.

In the year 2022 a monitoring report published by Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI) titled "Under Attack" documented several violations of the IMS Act. It was just a tip of the iceberg and there are many which can be spotted even now on internet and social media platforms. The link to the Under-attack reports could be found here (2019-2021) <https://www.bpni.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Under-Attack-Report-May-2021.pdf> ; (2021-2022) <https://www.bpni.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Under-Attack-2021-22.pdf>. BPNI had shared these reports with the Ministry of Women and Child Development and Ministry of Health and Family welfare last year and currently monitoring the violations occurring in 2023. While the monitoring is ongoing it can be seen the Youtube and Instagram promotions of baby food and bottles is rampant especially for emerging local brands.

"The irony is that the companies continue to violate the IMS Act and there has been no action taken even for an investigation. The governments need to do more to protect mothers and children from commercial influence of aggressive marketing. A comprehensive monitoring system has to be in place for meaningful implementation of the law ." Say Dr. Arun Gupta, Central Coordinator, BPNI

The infringement of IMS Act is a cognizable offence and therefore in the interest of the mothers and children's health, BPNI urges MoWCD and MoHFW to launch investigation into the alleged violations reported by BPNI and launch prosecution where necessary.

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- Link to the Lancet Breastfeeding Series 2023 materials (PR and Communication Material )

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ci589lgRHqOT-DnXHdJausf8JPTd\\_kIK](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ci589lgRHqOT-DnXHdJausf8JPTd_kIK)

- Lancet Series on Breastfeeding 2023 official page

<https://www.thelancet.com/series/Breastfeeding-2023>

Some of the examples of alleged violation spotted in 2023 on Instagram:

1. Hipp Organic violates section 3 for promotion and 6 (a) labelling flaws.



2. NumNum Baby Foods violates section 3 for promotion and section 6 for labelling flaws



36 likes

num\_num\_babyfood Num Num Baby Food is certified organic and makes baby food using locally grown... more  
mrsrosemarycyril What's the price



3. Baby Forest Ayurveda Feeding Bottles promoted by celebrity Meera Kapoor violates section 3 for promotion of the IMS Act

