

Behavior Change Communication

Part II: Promoting through the Media

February 2001

Part II of Breastfeeding and Behavior Change Communication (BCC) focuses on the media as a communication strategy for increasing coverage and awareness. Part I explores the role of interpersonal communication and group discussions as a behavior change communication strategy.

Current Issues

The media's role in "marketing" breastmilk is to present accurate information, promote optimal feeding practices, offer role models, and link clients with services.

A review of breastfeeding media promotion in 25 countries¹ found that few of the media campaigns analyzed the psychological, social, and cultural barriers to behavior change. In recent years, efforts have been made to develop breastfeeding media campaigns that follow social marketing principles of careful research and planning. The generic adage, "Breast is best," has been replaced with:

- ♦ frequent messages on
- ♦ specific behaviors directed to
- ♦ targeted audiences.

Although mass media increases coverage and awareness, interpersonal contact at the community, family, and individual level is also needed to influence behavior change. With new mothers entering the population every hour, breastfeeding promotion cannot be confined to sporadic media campaigns. Comprehensive breastfeeding programs are needed to address the multiple forces that may affect a woman's infant feeding choices. These forces include cultural norms, work arrangements, family influences, health facility services, and marketing of breastmilk substitutes.

LINKAGES' Response

Mass media is one component of LINKAGES' communications strategy along with mothers support groups, interpersonal counseling, and community events. LINKAGES is using media to reinforce messages, raise awareness, extend reach, and create a larger supportive environment for behavior change. Messages are based on an analysis of the results of baseline data on current behaviors, barriers to change, and motivating factors. Focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and pre-tests with target audiences help to refine the messages.

Each country employs a media mix, communicating messages through various channels in a variety of ways. Examples below illustrate specific media activities.

Radio Stories, Dramas, and Songs (Bolivia)

Over a five month period (June – October 2000), 18 radio stations in Bolivia broadcast six radio spots and five songs on immediate initiation of breastfeeding, exclusive breastfeeding, the Lactational Amenorrhea Method (LAM), and complementary feeding. The spots promoted feasible individual and community actions. The stations broadcast the six to ten minute vignettes three times per day, every other day. Throughout the week, they played the songs, with styles ranging from traditional folk to modern rap.

During weekends in September 2000, the same messages aired, this time in 15 to 20 minute dramas. The radio campaign is now being followed with a series of short testimonials and a national weekly call-in program. An educational video on the key messages has also been produced for use by nongovernmental organizations. As part of an endline survey, women will be asked their source of information on breastfeeding messages.

¹ Green CP. Media promotion of breastfeeding: A decade's experience. Washington, DC: AED, 1989.



Television Spots (Jordan)

Television is a popular medium for communication in Jordan. Approximately 90 percent of Jordanian women report that they frequently watch television. The MOH, LINKAGES, and UNICEF designed two television spots to correct public confusion between breastfeeding and LAM, raise understanding of the criteria for using LAM successfully, and stimulate the demand for LAM services. The Government of Jordan underwrites the costs of these broadcasts.

Newspaper (Madagascar)

To enable journalists to play a greater role in breastfeeding promotion, LINKAGES invites them to participate in activities such as nutrition policy and advocacy workshops and behavior change communication workshops. In 1998 LINKAGES facilitated a seminar on breastfeeding for journalists in Madagascar. LINKAGES has partnered with the MEASURES Communication Project and Intermédias, an independent association of 30 print and broadcast journalists in Madagascar who specialize in writing about reproductive health, child survival, and nutrition. Members of Intermédias prepared articles for World Breastfeeding Week, developed a monthly media plan for reporting on nutrition themes, and participated in a workshop to develop a national mass media campaign that includes print, radio, and television.

In a four-month period, more than 13 articles appeared in both the local Malagasy and French language newspapers on topics related to breastfeeding, LAM, and nutrition. The establishment of lactation rooms at the workplace by two garment manufacturers was one outcome of the information campaign.

Event Promotion (Ghana and Zambia)

LINKAGES capitalizes on special events to promote breastfeeding. Each year World Breastfeeding Week is observed during the first week of August. This year LINKAGES sponsored a variety of programs on Radio Savanna in northern Ghana. Daily talk shows, dramas, panel discussions, quizzes, and phone-in programs were broadcast

in ten languages. Along with the intensive media programming, World Breastfeeding Week was celebrated with conferences, community fairs, school programs, and contests. The Ghana Infant Nutrition Action Network organized a one-day seminar for 60 representatives of women's groups on breastfeeding and the needs of working women as well as recent legislation to protect breastfeeding.

In Zambia, the inauguration of the Ndola Demonstration Project in July 2000 received extensive coverage by the media. This innovative project integrates improved counseling on infant feeding practices and HIV voluntary counseling and testing into health and community services. The event received extensive coverage by national television, the local press, two community radio stations, and Radio Phoenix, which has an audience of about three million.

Media Watch (International)

Media coverage around such a complex and controversial issue as HIV transmission through breastfeeding has at times been inaccurate, misleading, and sensational. In 1998 LINKAGES developed a Communication/Media Strategy on HIV and Breastfeeding, which it shared with other key international partners. LINKAGES' approach is to be both proactive and vigilant. LINKAGES provides journalists and others with factual information on the subject and monitors the media for accuracy in reporting. On several occasions LINKAGES sent editorials to newspapers to correct misinformation.

As part of its media watch, LINKAGES worked collaboratively with the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN)/West Africa and CRAN (Food and Nutrition Research Center) to assess compliance with the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes in Togo and Burkina Faso. Although advertisement of breastmilk substitutes in national newspapers and magazines was rare in Togo and Burkina Faso, international journals and magazines distributed in the two countries frequently promoted breastmilk substitutes.

Mass media can be used to motivate, instruct, manipulate, or mislead. LINKAGES' goal is to harness the potential of mass media to help people make informed infant feeding choices.

Contact the Information Resource Center of the LINKAGES Project for more information on mother-to-mother support.

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