Behavior Change Communication

Part I: Interacting with Women

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

Current Issues

Improved breastfeeding practices are more likely to occur if women perceive them as beneficial, feasible, and socially acceptable. One behavior change model identifies five stages in the process of changing individual behaviors and community norms.

1. **Awareness** of the alternative behavior and its benefits
2. **Intention** to try out the behavior
3. **Trial** of one or two feasible, effective actions
4. **Adoption and maintenance** of the alternative behavior
5. **Advocacy** of the new behavior to others

Those promoting breastfeeding can facilitate this process by presenting clear and compelling information on the benefits of breastfeeding and by identifying practical actions to improve breastfeeding practices. The process includes negotiating with women to try out the practices and supporting them in their efforts to adopt and maintain the alternative behavior.

**LINKAGES Response**

Program experience shows that breastfeeding messages should be frequent, focused on specific behaviors, directed to targeted audiences, and communicated through multiple channels. Interpersonal communication and women’s groups are two channels LINKAGES is using to interact with women.

**Interpersonal Communication**

Home visits and counseling at health facilities provide health workers with an opportunity to “negotiate” with a mother to try out a new behavior. LINKAGES is training service providers and community volunteers in negotiation skills and the use of IEC materials as counseling and communication tools.

In India, community volunteers encourage women to empty the breast to get the rich hind milk before switching to the other breast. In northern Ghana, they show mothers how to position the baby to prevent “nipple feeding,” which limits breastmilk intake. The volunteers help mothers find ways of overcoming difficulties with the new behavior and return several days later to check how the “trial” has gone and to offer encouragement.

**Women’s Groups**

Women’s groups offer another channel of communication. The women provide each other support for feeding decisions and practical solutions to common problems. LINKAGES works with several types of women’s groups. Some are modeled after La Leche League International’s (LLL) mother-to-mother support groups. In these groups, experienced breastfeeding mothers model optimal infant feeding practices, share information and experiences, and offer support in an atmosphere of trust and respect.

**LINKAGES is also working with existing community women’s groups—such as credit associations, mothers clubs, and religious groups—that discuss other health and non-health issues. In these groups, breastfeeding support may be a secondary objective and not necessarily of immediate interest to all members.**

**Resources for Women’s Groups**

The challenges of using any type of women’s groups to promote optimal breastfeeding behaviors is to ensure that the information is accurate and adequate and that the methodology is participatory and practical. LINKAGES has developed resources on mother-to-mother support and three types of training modules for women’s...
groups. The modules build skills in infant feeding and group facilitation.

1. Breastfeeding and Complementary Feeding Basics and Mother-to-Mother Support Groups is a five-day training module first used in Ghana with facilitators of women’s groups affiliated with the MOH, Catholic Relief Services, UNICEF, and the Ghana Red Cross. In addition to content on breastfeeding and complementary feeding, the module focuses on group facilitation skills and negotiation of behavior change. Participants discover how to organize infant feeding mother-to-mother support (MtMS) groups in their communities. The training features participatory discussions, role plays, practice sessions in the community, and on-the-job supervision.

In November 2000, LINKAGES introduced the module to 35 La Leche League Leaders from 15 Latin American countries at a regional LLL workshop in Puerto Rico. The leaders from the region are now prepared to train community health workers in their respective countries. La Leche League/Bolivia is using the module to train community health volunteers from six NGOs affiliated with PROCOSI, a network of organizations involved in child survival and reproductive health. Following the training, these organizations will establish MtMS groups with the expressed purpose of assisting mothers in initiating and sustaining breastfeeding.

2. Groupements Féminins Formation (Women’s Group Training) is a three-part module developed by LINKAGES/Madagascar. Over a ten-month period, representatives of approximately 100 women’s groups in Madagascar will participate in three different trainings for a total of five days. The first training focuses on breastfeeding and the Lactational Amenorrhea Method. The other two cover complementary feeding, feeding of sick children, and maternal nutrition.

3. Improving Breastfeeding: Everyone Can Help is a module developed by Freedom from Hunger—in close collaboration with LINKAGES—for its Credit with Education sessions. Freedom from Hunger (FFH) pre-tested the module in Madagascar and introduced it to other members of its international network of credit associations during a workshop in Togo in June 2000. Previous research by FFH in Ghana found that Credit with Education health sessions improved the health behaviors of those in the group as well as others in the community.

In addition to the training modules, LINKAGES has developed resources on mother-to-mother support to familiarize people working in the fields of health and development with the concept of community-based breastfeeding support. LINKAGES and La Leche League International produced an illustrated handbook on mother-to-mother support, a reference document on resources, an instructional comic book series, and a four-page publication titled Frequently Asked Questions on Mother-to-Mother Support for Breastfeeding.

Operations Research

To learn more about the effectiveness of women’s groups, LINKAGES is monitoring program outcomes and analyzing the results of two operations research studies. LINKAGES is collaborating with La Leche League/Guatemala to examine the effect of increasing the number of breastfeeding counselors on the rates of exclusive breastfeeding and bottle usage. La Leche League trained sixty new breastfeeding counselors as part of the study, doubling the number of counselors in the two program communities. Findings from the Guatemala study will be available in May 2001.

LINKAGES also provided technical support for a small qualitative study on breastfeeding groups established by CARE in Niger. Even though the groups did not follow conventional mother-to-mother support group format, many women in the villages adopted exclusive breastfeeding and joined a group after seeing the results of exclusive breastfeeding in the children of women who pioneered this behavior in the community.

By linking women’s groups with health services and other community groups, training and motivating group facilitators, and monitoring program experience, LINKAGES aims to increase the effectiveness of women’s groups and sustain their efforts in promoting and supporting breastfeeding.