

## WEANING PRACTICES IN KARACHI

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## Abstract

One hundred and forty seven mothers were interviewed to determine their mode of weaning their children. Upper and lower socio-economic classes were evaluated separately. Major differences in their nutritional habits were found. These were primarily related to more education in the upper socio-economic classes coupled with better income and smaller family size.

## Introduction

The word 'Weaning' is derived from an old English word which means "to accustom" (the baby to new foods). The process is said to be complete when the baby is taking three solid meals a day with top feeds for occasional supplementation.

Pakistan is an interesting country of extremes. These are found in our nutritional practice also. Under nutrition is the bane of the poor and over nutrition or obesity—a sign of affluence.

This study was done to evaluate (1) the extent of difference in the practice of weaning

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in two different socio-economic classes, (2) the causes of these differences, (3) What were the deficiencies in this practice and how they could be corrected.

## Material and Methods

One hundred and forty seven mothers were asked in a standard questionnaire about how and when they started weaning their babies. There were two main groups; Class-I which included families in the middle and upper classes with income above Rs. 1000/- per month; Class-II, which included families of lower and lower middle classes with income below Rs. 1000/- per month. Families were also divided according to their place of origin. This was done to determine any cultural differences in their nutritional habits.

## Results and Discussion

Tables I-IV, explain the pertinent points that came out of this survey. As seen in the tables, there are some major differences in these two socio-economic classes. The size of each family in the upper socio-economic class is much smaller; in fact, half that in Class II. Moreover, the number of children in the latter class seems to increase with the increase in income as seen in Table III. There is also a significant difference in the educational level of mothers in these classes (Table IV).

Table I: Income Groups  
(Total: 147 Families)

Class I		Class II	
Income	No of Cases	Income	No of Cases
A. Rs. 1000-3000 per month	24	A. Rs. 0-400 per month	49
B. Rs. 3000-6000 per month	17	B. Rs. 400-800 per month	22
C. Rs. 6000 per month	19	C. Rs. 800-1000 per month	5
		D. Income not known	11
Total	60	Total	87

Table II: Place of Origin  
(Total: 147 Families)

	Class I	Class II
1. Baluchi and Makrani	3	9
2. Bengali	4	7
3. C.P. and U.P.	18	19
4. Gujrati speaking (Kutch and Bombay)	10	12
5. Panjabi	10	11
6. NWFP	0	13
7. Sindhi	11	10
8. Miscellaneous (S. India)	4	6
Total	60	87



Table III: Average Number of Children Per Family

Class-I	2.56	Class-II	4.7
A.	2.7	A.	4.6
B.	2.5	B.	5.4
C.	2.5	C.	4.0
Percentage of Educated Mothers			
Class-I	100%	Class-II	24.1%(21/87)
A.	100%	A.	14.2%( 7/49)
B.	100%	B.	50% (11/22)
C.	100%	C.	40% ( 2/5 )
70% college graduates		None above secondary education level.	

Table IV: Average Age of Initiation and Completion of Weaning

Class I	Class II
Started: 3.6 months	16 months
Completed: 18 months	24 months
Percentage of Families giving Adequate Weaning Diet (Quality: At least two protein-rich foods)	
Class I 100%	Class II 31%(27/87)
Percentage of Preparing Food Especially for the Children	
Class I 100%	Class II 17.2%(15/87)

Thus, three variables are seen in these two classes:

1. income
2. education
3. size of the family

These seem to affect the weaning habits of mothers significantly in these two classes. Supplementation is started at a much earlier age by Class I mothers and the type of weaning diet used by Class II mothers is cheaper, with the notable exception of biscuits (Table V).

Income does not seem of primary importance as: (a) the habits of all mothers in Class I were identical, not withstanding their incomes, (b) the habits of mothers in Class II did not change with an increase in income. It would appear to have an indirect influence on the weaning habits of mothers by its effect on the other two variables, education and size of the family.

The effect of education can be seen in Table VI. This factor alone seems significant in determining the weaning habits of mothers. This point has already been brought out in a previous study (Undre 1976).

The third variable, the size of family, did not seem to make too much difference in weaning practices.

Table V: List of Weaning Foods Used

Class I	Class II (In order of frequency)
1. Milk (Dried, Powdered)	1. Biscuits 56.3%
2. Cereal (Usually Package)	2. Roti 55.1%
3. Juices (Orange, Apple)	3. Tea 50.1%
4. Egg	4. Kitchri 47.1%
5. Vegetables (Potatoes, Carrots, Peas)	5. Milk 32.1%
6. Rice or Kitchri	6. Egg (Occas) 31.0%
7. Soup	7. Rice 29.8%
8. Fruit (Bananas, Steamed Apples)	8. Dalia Ferrex etc. 27.5%
9. Meat, Chicken	9. Salan 14.9%
10. Occasionally: Biscuits, Butter, Vermicelli, Sooji, Dal, Fish	10. Meat (Occas) 13.7%
Mostly home made	11. Potato 11.4%
	12. Dahi 10.3%
	13. Fruit 9.1%
	14. Fish 9.1%
	15. Vegetable 2.2%
	16. Halwa 1.1%
	17. Soup 1.1%
	18. Lassi 1.1%

Table VI: Effect of Education on Class-II Mothers

Number of educated mothers 21/87	Educated Mothers	Total No. of Class II Mothers
(a) Adequate diet given by	17/21(81%)	27/87(31%)
(b) Average weaning age	12.3 months	16 months
(c) Average size of family	4.9	4.7
(d) Income	Rs. 500/- per month (average)	Rs. 0-1000 per month

Effect of Size of Family on Class-II Mothers

Adequate diet given by 27/87 mothers	1-3 children/family	> 3 children/family
11/87	16/87	

### Conclusions

The main points that were highlighted in this survey were:

1. Education: Even primary education makes a significant improvement in the nutritional habits of mothers.
2. Income: Income is not directly proportional to better nutrition in children.
3. Family size: Decrease in family size is seen in higher income groups and this corresponds with better weaning practices related to education, income and therefore domestic help, and the amount of time that can be spent on each child.
4. Cultural background: There was no correlation between the type of diet and the cultural background of the mothers. The length of stay in Karachi did not adversely affect the weaning diet of the children.



5. There is a tendency towards early weaning and overfeeding in upper class mothers though not significant.
6. Biscuits, to a large extent, form the staple diet of a weaning child of lower class family. This was also shown in a survey done in Mahmoodabad Colony (Rahimtoola 1978). Therefore, while educating the mothers, in the interim period, we should have special fortified whole wheat 'weaning' biscuits for babies in this nutritionally deprived class.

#### References

Rahimtoola, R.J. (1978) Annual Report Part-I of Mahmoodabad Nutritional Project (Unpublished data).

Undre, H.R. (1976) Study of the nutritional status of a Peri-Urban Community. JPMA., 26:206.