

Empower Parents and Enable Breastfeeding: Role of Employers

Feeding of infants and young children has been acknowledged as a crucial determinant to ameliorate child survival and ensure optimal growth and development.^[1,2] It has been estimated that breastfeeding alone can account for saving the lives of more than 0.8 million under-five children on an annual basis.^[1] It is an alarming fact that only 40% of the infants in the 0–6 month age group is exclusively breastfed, despite being aware of the proven merits attributed to breastfeeding both in childhood and in adult life.^[1] Moreover, the initial 2 years of life are of considerable importance, as better nutrition during this time significantly minimizes the risk of morbidity and mortality and encourages better development.^[1]

There are no doubts that becoming the parent of a newborn child is not only a big responsibility but also a life-changing milestone for the entire family.^[3] Keeping this into account, supporting parenting is the responsibility of all the stakeholders, including the policy-makers and health-care providers.^[2,4] In the current era, many of the parents are working, and it is a fact that mothers are in need of some relaxation time from their workplace, which will not only aid them in recovering from childbirth but will also play a defining role in acclimatizing with parenthood and initiation-cum-continuation of breastfeeding.^[3] The international welfare agencies advocated for a provision of a minimum of 18 weeks to a preferable period of 6 months as paid leave for mothers and also for the fathers from the side of employers.^[3]

At the time of resuming her assignments in the workplace, the continuation of breastfeeding obviously depends on having intermittent breaks and availability of a safe and hygienic earmarked area to express and store breast milk.^[5] The existence of friendly policies such as the provision of paid leave for the parents play an important role in enabling breastfeeding and formation of bond with their babies in the initial stages of life.^[3,5] Even for a father, provision of paid leaves creates the background for sharing of various responsibilities related to child-rearing. In addition, it can be considered as a crucial step to encourage gender equality.^[3,5]

The existence of such policies in the workplace has been attributed to better employee retention, job satisfaction, and lesser incidence of sickness absenteeism.^[3] In the long run, these policies play a major role in the active involvement of women in the workforce leading to the strengthening of the economy and growth of the nation.^[2-4] However, none of

this is possible without the financial investment in holistic breastfeeding programs, better counseling, and supportive measures for women in health-care establishments.^[3]

In conclusion, it is the need of the hour to empower parents and to enable breastfeeding and this will essentially require support and concerted efforts of the policy-makers, employers, health professionals, and communities.

Authors' Contribution

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