Infant Feeding Practices as Personal and Cultural Constructions

Abstract
How do infant feeding practices reflect the cultural values, practices, and aims of mothers? To attempt to explore the various dynamics of this question, this thesis will cover three main topics: societal and maternal concepts of childrearing and childhood, Western ideologies of motherhood, and external and internal forces that affect infant feeding. Based on analysis of current research and original interviews, I propose that infant feeding practices are not only determined based on the biological taste preferences of both mother and child and basic nutritional needs, but are also culturally constructed by personal, social, and historical influences. By recognizing that many of these practices are centered on culture, rather than necessity, mothers may be better prepared to make informed decisions and choices regarding what they want to achieve and sustain through their own feeding practices.
University of Tampere School of Health Sciences INFANT FEEDING PRACTICES AND THEIR RELATION TO MATERNAL HEALTH CARE UTILIZATION: A National Cross-Sectional Study among Ghanaian Women Master’s Thesis, 67 pages Supervisor: Subas Neupane PhD Health Sciences (Public Health) March 2015. Background: Adequate infant feeding enhances growth, overall health and survival of infants in the early years of life and throughout the life cycle. Infant’s age and gender were matched as well. Issues addressed included feeding method, adherence to feeding and bedtime schedules, age of infant when mother return to work outside the home. Results: FSU mothers share a similar feeding and sleeping pattern for their six and twelve month old infants, while native born mothers keep diverse and flexible feeding routines. Conclusions: We suggest that maternal practices reflect cultural norms. In the case of Soviet culture, a developmental-educational approach emphasizes the parental role in modifying and adjusting child’s behavior, while Israeli culture Even the health specialists illustrated that while they had knowledge of best infant feeding practices, their personal experiences were not always consistent with this. Some cultural norms which were encouraged included using the size of the child’s naval to determine quantities that the child requires (if a child has a large naval, this means that they need to be fed often and large quantities, which requires supplementing breastmilk with formula), the expression and discarding of milk after a funeral to prevent the passing on of evil. Status was another factor that impacted on feeding practices, with infants being fed items such as yoghurt (commonly referred to as Danone) or chips from an early age as this illustrated the mother’s financial ability to provide for her children.