

Breast - Feeding Patterns

Breast-Feeding Patterns is the title of a 1982 publication by the **WHO/EMRO**, prepared by Dr. J.K. Harfouche, M.D., Professor Emeritus of Maternal and Child Health at the American University of Beirut. The book is a review of different studies covering 29 countries in the Eastern Mediterranean

Region, 16 of which are Arabic speaking. These countries are predominantly Muslim; they total 250 million inhabitants and vary greatly in size and in levels of socio-economic development.

The 323 page publication is divided into two

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

parts and includes an 18-page bibliography. The first part deals with the cultural and historical backgrounds against which the present patterns of infant feeding practices have developed. The second part is a country-by-country review of the different studies, with a personal section on the traditional use of particular substances administered by mothers to their infants, either internally or externally, (e.g. Kohl or Kohol, qat, dried poppy or soukur ..). A short review of menstrual taboos and evil-eye beliefs which play an important role in child-rearing practices is also included. The author then draws up a number of conclusions, the most important being:

1. Despite the unique benefits to be gained from human milk, benefits, demonstrated by Western science, the Eastern Mediterranean Region as a whole is beginning to turn more and more to bottle-feeding practices, and to suffer from the high risks connected with those practices. The only regions spared till now are distant rural areas where social or economic conditions do not favor artificial feeding. The hardest hit are the newly urbanized marginal communities.

2. Bottle-feeding seems to undermine deeply rooted traditions and disrupt the dyadic interaction between mother and child, resulting in immediate and long range effects on human behavior and personality development.

3. The use of artificial feeding now being practiced by over-populated countries, seems to undermine natural fertility control devices prolonged by breast-feeding.

According to the author, the most important lesson to be learned is that, in the region, breast-feeding has scarcely been studied at all in the overall context of child-rearing patterns. Unless these patterns are investigated in the immediate future, we will have trouble finding proper solutions to the continuing decline of breast-feeding. Therefore there is a need, says Dr. Harfouche, for continued mass education on this subject and or person-to-person campaigns to promote the return to breast-feeding, the most important target being the urban elite women.

**Book review by
Wafa Stephan**