

WOMEN'S HEALTH

My interest in women's health extended directly from my two dissertations in Fiji. The programs in women's health that followed in subsequent years, were the patterns and context of breast feeding and adolescent response to menarche.

The Patterns and Context of Breast Feeding

Observations and mothers, reports of how, when, where, and why they nursed their infants in Fiji were astonishing. In 1980s in North America, we were teaching mothers that if they did not nurse every four hours, their milk would "dry up".

In the Fiji Indian culture, the infant 'belonged' to the mother-in-law, who cared for the infant in the daylight hours, and bottle-fed the baby. At night the infant was cared for by his or her mother, slept in her bed, and was breast-fed at night. The Fiji-Indian infant 'belonged' to the village. Mothers frequently told me they did not know where their infant was. This meant anyone could feed the infant with a bottle—often containing coconut milk.

Publications

Morse, J.M. *Feeding patterns and health assessment of Fijian and Fiji-Indian neonates*. PhD Dissertation, 1981.

Morse, J. M. (1982). Infant feeding in the Third World: A critique of the literature. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 5(1), 77-88.

Morse, J. M. (1985). The cultural context of infant feeding in Fiji. L. Marshall (Ed.), *Infant feeding in Oceania* (pp. 255-268). New York: Gordon & Breach. Reprinted from *Ecology of Food and Nutrition*, 14, 287-296.

Morse, J. M. (1984). Breast- and bottle-feeding: The effect on infant weight gain in the Fiji-Indian neonate. *Ecology of Food and Nutrition*, 15, 109-114.

Morse, J. M. (1984). The cultural context of infant feeding in Fiji. *Ecology of Food and Nutrition*, 14, 287-296.

Returning to Canada, there several significant questions arose from this first project:

- 1) Health Canada was concerned about early weaning of infant and anxious to increase the duration of breast feeding. Why did mothers wean early—often less than 3 months?
- 2) Could Canadian mothers maintain lactation without routine four hourly nursing?

The first study examined patterns and reasons for weaning. We were primarily interested in "minimal breast feeding" as observed in Fiji. We found that the level of support for

breastfeeding was actively encouraged until the infant was 6 months of age. About 10-12 months breast feeding was actively discouraged—even by the mother’s partner. We called the “social coercion for weaning” and recommended that to increase the duration of breast feeding, Health Canada must target health teaching to all citizens: mother’s mother, mother’s, partner, and provide supports for nursing in the community.

Publications

- Morse, J. M., & Harrison, M. (1987). Social coercion for weaning. *Journal of Nurse-Midwifery*, 32(4), 205-210.
- Morse J. M., & Harrison, M. (1988). Patterns of mixed feeding. *Midwifery*, 4(1), 19-23.
- Morse, J. M., Harrison, M. & Williams, K. (1988). What determines the duration of breastfeeding? In K. Michaelson (Ed.), *Childbirth in America: Anthropological perspectives* (pp. 261-270). South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.

The second series of studies was to explore breast-feeding for working mothers. We recruited 60 mothers in their last trimester who planned to nurse their infant while they returned to work. We interviewed them once prenatally, and then every month until they weaned their infant, or for 1 year.

We found these mothers did manage lactation so that they were *minimally breast feeding*. Circumstances for the nursing mother in the workplace were difficult—and conditions have since changed. However, we obtained interesting and unique data about how mothers learned to express and the experience of expressing and managing leaking breasts.

Publications

- Morse, J. M., Bottorff, J., & Boman, J. (1989). Patterns of breastfeeding and work: The Canadian experience. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 80(3), 182-190.
- Morse, J. M., & Bottorff, J. L. (1989). Intending to breastfeed and work. *Journal of Obstetrical, Gynecological and Neonatal Nursing*, 18(6), 493-500.
- Morse J. M., & Bottorff, J. L. (1988). The emotional experience of breast expression. *Journal of Nurse-Midwifery*, 33 (4), 165-170.
- Morse, J. M., & Bottorff, J. L. (1989). Managing breastfeeding: The problem of leaking. *Journal of Nurse Midwifery*, 34(1), 15-20.
- Morse, J. M. (1990). ‘Euch! Those are for your husband!’: Examination of cultural values and assumptions associated with breast feeding. *Health Care for Women International*, 11(2), 223-232.
- Bottorff, J. L., & Morse, J. M. (1990). Mothers’ perceptions of breast milk. *Journal of Gynecological, Obstetrical and Neonatal Nursing*, 19, 518-527.
