

# Preface

This book is born out of my personal life. I breastfed my two children for a long period. My first daughter, Zoe, was breastfed for 2 years, and Emma, my younger one, was breastfed for 4 years. Often, people made comment about my behaviour, saying that it was unusual for a mother to breastfeed her children this long. But then, they also said that since I was born in Thailand, things might be different for Thai people. So, my ethnicity was seen to be my excuse. But others congratulated me for doing so. I even won a prize at a breastfeeding conference in Melbourne for practising prolonged breastfeeding. My curiosity grew as I observed what other women do in regard to infant feeding; and since I commenced my research on reproduction and motherhood, infant feeding issues have always been my great interest.

Breastfeeding is a contentious issue. It is seen as beneficial for both a newborn infant and a mother. It is also profoundly supported by both lay individuals and professionals. However, infant feeding practices occur within the social and cultural context of the society in which women live. And as we have witnessed, not all women and their families necessarily see such benefits. There are many reasons that has prevented or stopped women from breastfeeding their newborn infants. There are other important issues that may impact on infant feeding practices of women and these include social class, ethnicity, socio-economic status and geographical location. These discussions will be included in this book.

In the past few decades, we have also seen a dramatic increase in the rates of women living with HIV/AIDS and many of these women are also mothers with young infants. Due to the infection, women living with HIV/AIDS are advised not to breastfeed their infants. Most of these mothers are from poor backgrounds and their poverty has a great impact on their feeding practices. How do these mothers deal with these issues? What can the government and local authorities do to assist these women? Some of these questions will be discussed in several chapters in this volume.

In this book, I also bring together salient issues regarding cultural beliefs and practices in different societies. I shall show that despite advanced medical knowledge in infant feeding, traditions continue to exert influence on how the women and their families manage to feed their infants in their societies. Women have attempted to preserve valued traditional beliefs and practices although they accept innovations

in the management of infant feeding in response to social and cultural changes. Likewise, traditions surrounding infant feeding practices continue to live despite the fact that many societies have been modernised. Some explanations will be discussed through some of the chapters in this volume.

The book provides a comprehensive coverage of infant feeding issues from a cross-cultural perspective. The book comprises chapters written by researchers who carry out their projects in different parts of the world. Each chapter contains empirical information, which is based on real life situations. This can be used as an evidence for health care providers to implement socially and culturally appropriate services, which will assist women who are mothers and their young babies in many societies.

The book will be of interest to health care providers who have their interests in working with women and infant feeding practices from a cross-cultural perspective. They will be useful for students and lecturers in courses like midwifery, anthropology, sociology, social work, nursing, public health and medicine. The book will also attract many lay readers and those in organisations which are interested in infant feeding practices from a cross-cultural perspective.

In bringing this book to life, I owe my gratitude to many people. First, I should like to thank all contributors in this volume, who worked hard in constructing their chapters and getting it to me in the required time. Second, I should like to thank Springer for believing in the value of this book. Last, I am grateful to Rosemary Oakes, my dear friend who helped reading through several chapters for me. I dedicate this book to all the children in my family.

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