**Transcripts on Key Informant Interview Notes on Child Breastfeeding in Kenyan**

**Transcript 1**

**Location**: Community Health Center, Rural Nyeri  
**Interviewer**: Health Researcher  
**Respondent**: Community Health Worker

**Interviewer (Int)**: Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. Let's start with discussing breastfeeding practices in this community. Can you tell me about the common practices regarding child breastfeeding?

**Respondent (Resp)**: Most mothers here initiate breastfeeding within the first hour of birth, which is a positive trend we have seen. However, exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months is not as common as we would like.

**Int**: What factors do you think influence whether mothers exclusively breastfeed for the first six months?

**Resp**: There are several factors. Cultural beliefs play a significant role. Some families believe that giving water or herbal teas to the baby is necessary, especially in hot weather. They think that breast milk alone is not sufficient to quench the baby's thirst. Additionally, there are rituals involving the introduction of certain herbs to newborns that are believed to protect them from evil spirits or illnesses.

**Int**: Can you elaborate on these cultural beliefs and how they impact breastfeeding practices?

**Resp**: Certainly. For example, in our community, there is a traditional belief that newborns should be given a mixture of herbs called "Muthoni" within the first week of birth. Elders believe this mixture strengthens the baby and prevents common illnesses. This practice often interrupts exclusive breastfeeding because the herbs are given in addition to breast milk. Also, some families have the custom of giving babies water early on because they believe it helps in cleansing the baby’s system and helps with digestion.

**Int**: How do these beliefs influence the decisions that mothers make about breastfeeding?

**Resp**: These beliefs are deeply rooted and are passed down from generation to generation. Many mothers are under pressure from their parents and in-laws to follow these traditions. Even if a mother is aware of the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, she may find it difficult to go against the wishes of her elders. Respecting elders is a crucial part of our culture, and young mothers often feel they have no choice but to comply with these practices.

**Int**: Are there any specific ceremonies or rituals involving breastfeeding that are common in this community?

**Resp**: Yes, there are a few. One common ritual is the "First Food Ceremony," where after a few weeks, a baby is given a special porridge made from millet or maize. This ceremony is a significant cultural event, and the community views it as a necessary step for the baby's growth and health. This porridge is believed to give the baby strength and vitality. Such practices make it hard to maintain exclusive breastfeeding.

**Int**: What efforts are being made to address these cultural beliefs and promote exclusive breastfeeding?

**Resp**: We try to engage the entire family in our education sessions, including elders. By showing respect for their experience while also explaining the benefits of modern practices, we find that they are more likely to support exclusive breastfeeding. We also use stories and examples from within the community, highlighting mothers who have successfully exclusively breastfed and the positive health outcomes their children have experienced.

**Int**: How receptive are the community members, especially the elders, to these educational efforts?

**Resp**: It varies. Some elders are very receptive once they understand the health benefits. They want the best for their grandchildren and are willing to adapt if they see convincing evidence. However, others are more resistant and see these new practices as a rejection of their cultural identity and wisdom. It takes time and continuous engagement to shift these deep-seated beliefs.

**Int**: Are there any other cultural practices related to child feeding that affect breastfeeding?

**Resp**: Yes, another practice is early weaning. In some parts of the community, it is believed that babies should start eating solid foods by the fourth or fifth month to prepare them for family meals and ensure they are not too dependent on breast milk. This belief is partly due to economic reasons, as some mothers need to return to work and rely on other family members to feed the baby.

**Int**: Given these challenges, what strategies have been most effective in promoting exclusive breastfeeding?

**Resp**: Peer education programs have been particularly effective. Mothers who have successfully exclusively breastfed their children serve as mentors to new mothers. This peer support has been very impactful. Additionally, involving respected community leaders and using media campaigns tailored to local cultural contexts have helped. We also find that public health campaigns that respect and incorporate cultural beliefs while gently introducing new practices tend to be more successful.

**Int**: Thank you for sharing your insights. Is there anything else you would like to add about breastfeeding practices in this community?

**Resp**: Just that we are making progress, but it requires a collective effort. Support from healthcare providers, families, and the community as a whole is essential to ensure that more children can benefit from exclusive breastfeeding. It’s important to approach these cultural beliefs with sensitivity and respect, finding ways to integrate beneficial health practices with traditional customs.

**Int**: Thank you again for your time and valuable information.

**Resp**: You're welcome. I'm glad I could help.

Transcript 2

**Location**: Community Health Center, Rural Area, Kenya  
**Interviewer**: Health Researcher  
**Respondent**: Young Adolescent Mother

**Interviewer (Int)**: Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. Let's start with discussing breastfeeding practices in this community. Can you tell me about your experience with breastfeeding?

**Respondent (Resp)**: Sure. I started breastfeeding my baby right after birth, as the nurses advised. But keeping up with exclusive breastfeeding has been challenging.

**Int**: What factors do you think influence whether mothers exclusively breastfeed for the first six months?

**Resp**: For me, it's been hard because of the pressure from my family. My mother-in-law insists that I give my baby water and herbal teas, especially now that it's so hot. They think breast milk alone isn't enough.

**Int**: Can you elaborate on these cultural beliefs and how they impact breastfeeding practices?

**Resp**: Yes, in our Kikuyu community, it's common to give newborns a mixture of herbs called "Muratina" within the first week. It's believed to protect the baby from illnesses and make them stronger. My family thinks it's necessary, so I felt I had to do it even though the nurses said exclusive breastfeeding is best.

**Int**: How do these beliefs influence the decisions you make about breastfeeding?

**Resp**: It's tough because I respect my elders and don't want to go against their advice. Even if I want to follow what the health workers say, it's hard to ignore the traditions. I feel torn between doing what's best for my baby according to modern health advice and respecting my family's beliefs.

**Int**: Are there any specific ceremonies or rituals involving breastfeeding that you follow?

**Resp**: Yes, there's the "First Food Ceremony" where we give the baby porridge made from millet or maize after a few weeks. It's a big deal in the community, and everyone expects you to do it. They believe it helps the baby grow strong and healthy.

**Int**: What efforts are being made to address these cultural beliefs and promote exclusive breastfeeding?

**Resp**: The health workers here try to educate us and our families. They have community meetings where they explain the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding. They also show examples of babies who have been exclusively breastfed and how healthy they are. Sometimes they involve elders in these sessions to help change their views.

**Int**: How receptive are the community members, especially the elders, to these educational efforts?

**Resp**: Some elders are open to learning and changing their beliefs, but others are very resistant. They think the new practices are a way of rejecting our traditions. It takes a lot of time and effort to convince them otherwise.

**Int**: Are there any other cultural practices related to child feeding that affect breastfeeding?

**Resp**: Yes, there's also early weaning. Some people believe that babies should start eating solid foods by the fourth or fifth month. They think it prepares the baby for family meals and ensures they are not too dependent on breast milk. This belief is partly because some mothers need to return to work and can't breastfeed exclusively.

**Int**: Given these challenges, what strategies have been most effective in promoting exclusive breastfeeding?

**Resp**: Peer support has been really helpful. I have a friend who exclusively breastfed her baby, and she encouraged me a lot. The health workers also involve community leaders and use media campaigns to spread the message. Public health campaigns that respect our cultural beliefs while gently introducing new practices seem to work best.

**Int**: Thank you for sharing your insights. Is there anything else you would like to add about breastfeeding practices in this community?

**Resp**: Just that it's a struggle to balance respecting our traditions and doing what's best for our babies. We need more support from healthcare providers and the community to make exclusive breastfeeding easier. It’s important to approach these cultural beliefs with sensitivity and respect, finding ways to integrate beneficial health practices with traditional customs.

**Int**: Thank you again for your time and valuable information.

**Resp**: You're welcome. I'm glad I could help.

**Focus group discussion transcript**

**Location**: Community Health Center, Nyeri County, Kenya  
**Facilitator**: Health Researcher  
**Participants**: A group of young mothers from the community

**Facilitator (Fac)**: Thank you all for joining this discussion today. We are here to talk about breastfeeding practices in our community. Let's start with each of you sharing your experience with breastfeeding.

**Participant 1 (P1)**: Hi, I'm Mary. I have a six-month-old baby. I started breastfeeding right after he was born, but it’s been challenging to stick to exclusive breastfeeding.

**Participant 2 (P2)**: I'm Ann, and my baby is four months old. I’ve been breastfeeding her, but I give her water and some herbal teas because my mother-in-law insists on it.

**Participant 3 (P3)**: My name is Jane. My baby is seven months old. I tried to exclusively breastfeed, but my family believes in giving porridge early, so I started giving it to her after a few weeks.

**Fac**: Thank you for sharing. It seems cultural beliefs play a significant role in your breastfeeding practices. Can you tell me more about these beliefs and how they influence your decisions?

**P1**: In our Kikuyu community, it’s common to give newborns a mixture of herbs called "Muratina" within the first week. Elders believe it protects the baby from illnesses and makes them stronger. My family insisted on it, so I felt pressured to follow the tradition.

**P2**: Yes, that's true. My mother-in-law also believes that giving the baby water helps in cleansing their system, especially when it’s hot. Even though I know breast milk is enough, it’s hard to go against her advice.

**P3**: For us, there’s the "First Food Ceremony" where we introduce porridge made from millet or maize after a few weeks. It’s a big event, and everyone expects you to follow through. They think it helps the baby grow strong and healthy.

**Fac**: It sounds like these cultural practices are deeply rooted. How do you balance these traditions with the advice from healthcare workers about exclusive breastfeeding?

**P1**: It’s difficult. I respect my elders and don't want to go against their wishes. But I also want to do what’s best for my baby. Sometimes I feel torn between the two.

**P2**: I try to explain to my family what the nurses tell me, but they often don’t believe that modern practices are better. They think we are rejecting our traditions.

**P3**: I’ve found that having a friend who exclusively breastfed her baby helped. She encouraged me a lot and even spoke to my family about the benefits. Peer support makes a big difference.

**Fac**: That’s interesting. What other support systems or strategies have been helpful to you in promoting exclusive breastfeeding?

**P1**: The community health workers visit us and provide guidance. They also involve elders in the education sessions, which helps change their views.

**P2**: The health workers organize community meetings where they explain the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding. They show examples of healthy babies who were exclusively breastfed, which convinces some people.

**P3**: Media campaigns and involving local leaders have also been effective. Seeing respected community leaders supporting exclusive breastfeeding helps change people's minds.

**Fac**: How receptive are the elders to these educational efforts?

**P1**: Some elders are open to learning and changing their beliefs, but others are more resistant. They see new practices as rejecting our cultural identity.

**P2**: It takes time and continuous effort to convince them. Some are more willing to adapt if they see convincing evidence and understand the health benefits.

**P3**: It’s a gradual process. We need more support and continuous engagement to shift these deep-seated beliefs.

**Fac**: Are there any other challenges you face in promoting exclusive breastfeeding?

**P1**: Economic pressures are also a challenge. Some mothers need to return to work early, which disrupts exclusive breastfeeding.

**P2**: Yes, and the marketing of formula milk by companies sometimes persuades mothers to switch to formula feeding.

**P3**: Another issue is early weaning. Some believe that babies should start eating solid foods by the fourth or fifth month to prepare them for family meals.

**Fac**: Given these challenges, what more could be done to improve breastfeeding practices in this community?

**P1**: Increased support and education are crucial. More resources for community health workers and better access to maternity leave and breastfeeding-friendly workplaces would help.

**P2**: Stronger regulations on the marketing of formula milk and continued public health campaigns to raise awareness about the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding are needed.

**P3**: It’s important to approach these cultural beliefs with sensitivity and respect, finding ways to integrate beneficial health practices with traditional customs.

**Fac**: Thank you all for your insights. Is there anything else you would like to add about breastfeeding practices in this community?

**P1**: Just that we are making progress, but it requires a collective effort from healthcare providers, families, and the community as a whole.

**P2**: Yes, we need to respect our traditions while also promoting healthy practices for our babies.

**P3**: I agree. With more support and understanding, we can ensure more children benefit from exclusive breastfeeding.

**Fac**: Thank you again for your time and valuable information. This discussion has been very insightful.