



# Ethical Problems with Infant Formula Marketing in Developing Nations

Nancy Zelman\*

Department of Neonatology, University of Stirling, Scotland, UK

## DESCRIPTION

As societies, we fall short in defending kids and families from the advertising of goods that jeopardise their growth and development. The strong promotion of commercial milk formula for newborns and young children is one of the most egregious examples of this.

Marketing for formula milk has a different effect than marketing for commonplace commodities like shampoo, shoes, or refrigerators. The sleazy marketing strategies employed to promote milk formula encourage overconsumption, discourage nursing, undercut mothers' self-confidence, and prey on parents' natural desire to provide for their children's needs.

One of the most underrated threats to children's and newborn's health is the marketing of formula milk. However, sales of formula milk have nearly doubled over the past 20 years, whereas exclusive breastfeeding for infants 6 months and younger has increased very little. Increased breastfeeding could avert an estimated 20,000 mother deaths from breast cancer and 80,000 deaths of children fewer than five per year.

This problem has a long history. Early in the 1970s, concerns about the infant food industry's marketing strategies in Latin America, Asia, and Africa were brought to the attention of the entire globe. These strategies used hazardous water and overly-diluted formula, which had detrimental effects on children's health. The World Health Assembly called on nations to regulate these advertising activities in the wake of lawsuits and government inquiries, as well as a general drop in breastfeeding globally, and in 1981 the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes was adopted. The Code addresses topics like labeling, retail promotions, and marketing in healthcare systems, and public service announcements.

Even now, social media has accelerated many of the same heinous acts that were committed four decades ago. Despite the Code and subsequent decisions, formula milk businesses with massive budgets continue to disobey international recommendations and regularly misrepresent scientific findings in their advertising. The use of formula products after 12

months is necessary, breast milk is insufficient for older infants and children's nutrition, formula keeps babies fuller for longer and thus promotes sleep, and formula products with added ingredients improve brain development and immunity. These are just a few of the false claims made by formula milk companies.

All of these are untrue. Both mothers and children are harmed by them. After completing research in Bangladesh, China, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, the UK, and Viet Nam, a recent study by WHO and UNICEF has systematically documented instances of this from all around the world. organized and run by formula milk producers (sometimes through front organizations), which provide moms with gifts and discounts, details on pregnancy and birth, and access to "carelines" that offer round-the-clock "help and counseling" for diseases like COVID-19.

a typical but frequently deceptive marketing strategy intended to persuade potential buyers that they have a problem that can be fixed by buying a product. There has been an increase in the marketing of "specialty" and "comfort" milks, which make grandiose promises to treat typical infant maladies and behaviour including colic, reflux, and crying despite a lack of proof that they work.

The deliberate sabotage of hospitals, clinics, and medical staff by business interests to promote formula milk products. The behaviour and recommendations of health workers are influenced through sponsorship, training exercises, and gifts, including in certain cases offers of cash or commissions. In our multi-country study, we discovered that, in certain countries, as high as 97% of the women polled had been exposed to advertisements for formula milk.

For moms and parents who are unable to breastfeed for a variety of reasons, such as a lack of support from social and health institutions, formula milk has its place. The promotion of formula milk, not the product itself, is what stifles informed choice, hinders nursing, and harms children's health. It is time to stop formula being marketed in an unethical manner. Governments are urged to pass and implement laws that are

**Correspondence to:** Nancy Zelman, Department of Neonatology, University of Stirling, Scotland, UK, E-mail: 857@Nancy.com

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consistent with the Code. We urge medical professionals and their organizations to defend scientific objectivity and to limit the use of their recommendations to the greater good. Investors

are urged to demand moral business conduct. Additionally, we demand that social media networks stop engaging in actions that endanger children's health.