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**FOOD CHOICES AND FEEDING PATTERNS FOR WOMEN AND
INFANTS IN RURAL NORTHERN THAILAND:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY**

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Nursing
at Massey University

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ABSTRACT

The question for this study arose from the situation that malnutrition remains one of the major health problems among Thai children, particularly the under-fives. The purpose of it was to develop better understanding as to what sustains beliefs and practices associated with infant nutrition. An ethnographic approach was chosen as the research method. One rural village in northern Thailand was selected as the site of fieldwork for a period of 10 months. Data were collected through participant observation, interview, and ethnographic records. Key informants were 18 pregnant women and mothers of the under-twos. General informants were elderly kinswomen, fathers of the under-twos, volunteer health workers and community health workers.

From the data it can be argued that what each woman does with regard to her own nutrition during pregnancy and following childbirth and the feeding pattern that she adopts for her infant are the outcomes of interplay between a complex network of cultural, social, personal and situational factors. These act and interact as *pushes* and *pulls* in a woman's decision making, frequently conflicting. Four main sources of pushes and pulls are: traditional beliefs; personal factors including attitudes, feelings, needs and experiences; sociocultural situations and changes; and government health services. If nursing interventions aimed at promoting a well nourished woman and a well nourished child are to be effective, nurses must be aware of these multiple influences.

The conceptual account generated from the findings of this study has potential value for nursing practice, education and research. It identifies the aspects amenable to change by nurses and other health workers in their work to counter malnutrition situation, and so to improve the health of mothers and children.

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