



# **Gallup Pakistan Analysis of Punjab Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2024**

## **Breastfeeding and Early Nutrition in Punjab**



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Only One in Three Infants Exclusively Breastfed in Punjab: Deep Inequalities Shape Early Nutrition**

Islamabad, January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Gallup Pakistan, as part of its Big Data Analysis initiative, presents an in-depth review of breastfeeding and early childhood nutrition in Punjab based on the latest Punjab Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2023–24. The findings reveal that only 33.9% of infants aged 0–5 months are exclusively breastfed, far below global and national targets. Feeding practices vary sharply across residence, wealth, and levels of maternal education. The report also examines stunting, wasting, and underweight indicators among under-five children, highlighting the lasting consequences of poor early nutrition, especially among poorer and rural households.

#### **What is the Big Data Analysis Series by Gallup?**

Gallup Pakistan’s Big Data Series was founded by Bilal I Gilani, Executive Director of Gallup Pakistan. Explaining its purpose, Bilal notes: *“Pakistan isn’t suffering from a shortage of data — it suffers from a shortage of usable, accessible data. Large datasets exist, but they’re rarely translated into meaningful insights for policymakers and the public. Gallup Pakistan bridges this gap.”* The series has previously analyzed a wide range of national datasets, including PSLM, the Labour Force Survey, Economic Survey of Pakistan, National Census Reports, and Election Commission datasets. Recent editions have examined major demographic and health trends using sources like the Global Burden of Disease (GBD), PBS, and DHIS2. The goal remains consistent: to transform raw data into public knowledge that can inform national dialogue and development priorities.

#### **What data points this current edition covers:**

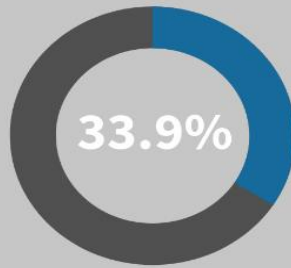
This edition draws on MICS Punjab 2023–24, focusing on breastfeeding practices among infants aged 0–5 months, complementary feeding patterns, and early childhood nutrition outcomes. It analyzes disparities by residence, wealth, and maternal education and reviews stunting, wasting, and underweight indicators for children under five (Tables TC.7.2 and TC.8.1). Together, these indicators provide a comprehensive overview of early nutrition challenges in Punjab and their implications for long-term health and development.

# Gallup Pakistan Analysis of Punjab Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2024

## Only **One** in **Three** Infants Exclusively Breastfed in Punjab: Deep Inequalities Shape Early Nutrition

### Low adherence to optimal feeding practices:

Only **33.9%** of infants aged **0–5** months are exclusively breastfed, well below global targets.



### Urban households introduce alternatives earlier:

Urban exclusive breastfeeding (**35%**) slightly exceeds rural (**33.1%**), but formula and bottle-feeding are more common in urban areas.



### Education and wealth influence feeding:

Mothers with higher education and wealth show better breastfeeding adherence, though rates remain suboptimal across all groups.



### Large reliance on mixed feeding:

Over **52%** of infants receive breast milk along with other liquids or foods, deviating from recommended feeding standards.



### Severe stunting widespread:

Nearly **1 in 7** children (**13.7%**) is severely stunted, indicating chronic deprivation affecting long-term growth.

### Persistent child undernutrition:

**31.1%** of under-five children are stunted, **22.8%** underweight, and **7.4%** wasted—revealing severe early nutrition gaps.

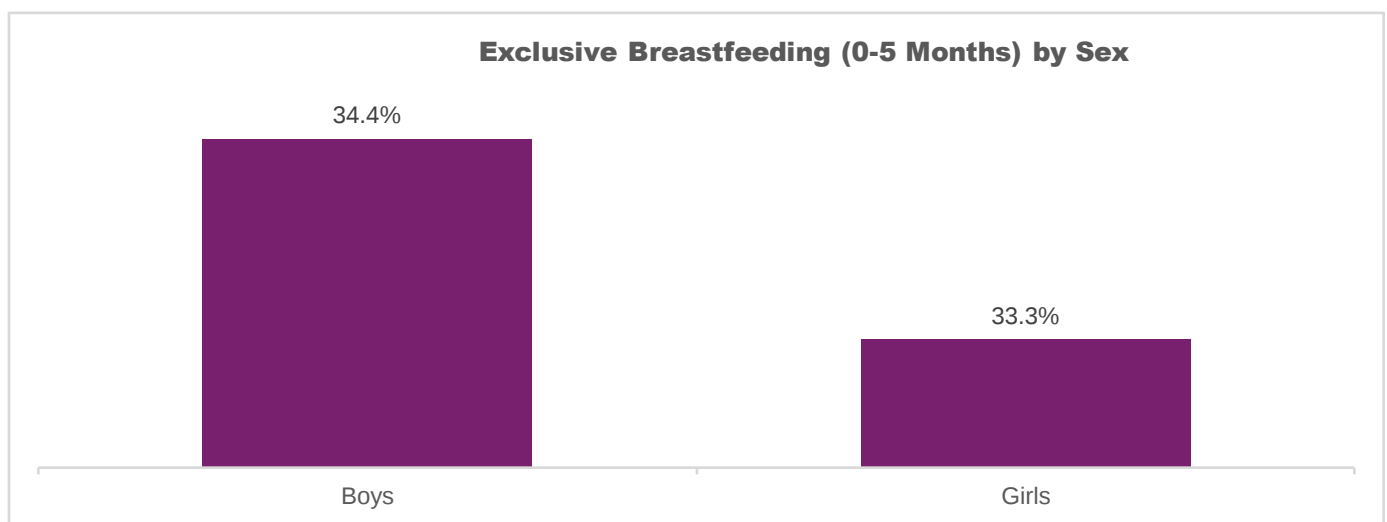


## **Key Findings:**

1. Low adherence to optimal feeding practices: Only 33.9% of infants aged 0–5 months are exclusively breastfed, well below global targets.
2. Large reliance on mixed feeding: Over 52% of infants receive breast milk along with other liquids or foods, deviating from recommended feeding standards.
3. Urban households introduce alternatives earlier: Urban exclusive breastfeeding (35%) slightly exceeds rural (33.1%), but formula and bottle-feeding are more common in urban areas.
4. Education and wealth influence feeding: Mothers with higher education and wealth show better breastfeeding adherence, though rates remain suboptimal across all groups.
5. Persistent child undernutrition: 31.1% of under-five children are stunted, 22.8% underweight, and 7.4% wasted—revealing severe early nutrition gaps.
6. Severe stunting widespread: Nearly 1 in 7 children (13.7%) is severely stunted, indicating chronic deprivation affecting long-term growth.
7. Need for targeted maternal support: Improving exclusive breastfeeding requires stronger counselling, maternal education, workplace protections, and community-based support, especially for low-income households.

## 1. Feeding Practices Among Infants (0–5 Months)

Exclusive breastfeeding remains far below global standards in Punjab. The MICS findings show that only 33.9% of infants aged 0–5 months receive breast milk exclusively, despite WHO recommendations that infants be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life. A large share of infants—52%—receive breast milk along with other liquids or foods, indicating early deviation from optimal feeding practices. Another 3.3% are predominantly breastfed (given water or other non-milk liquids), while 10.7% are not breastfed at all. These feeding patterns expose infants to higher risks of infection, inadequate weight gain, and long-term developmental deficits. The data make clear that early nutrition programming in Punjab requires stronger breastfeeding promotion, counselling, and maternal support, especially during the first days after delivery.

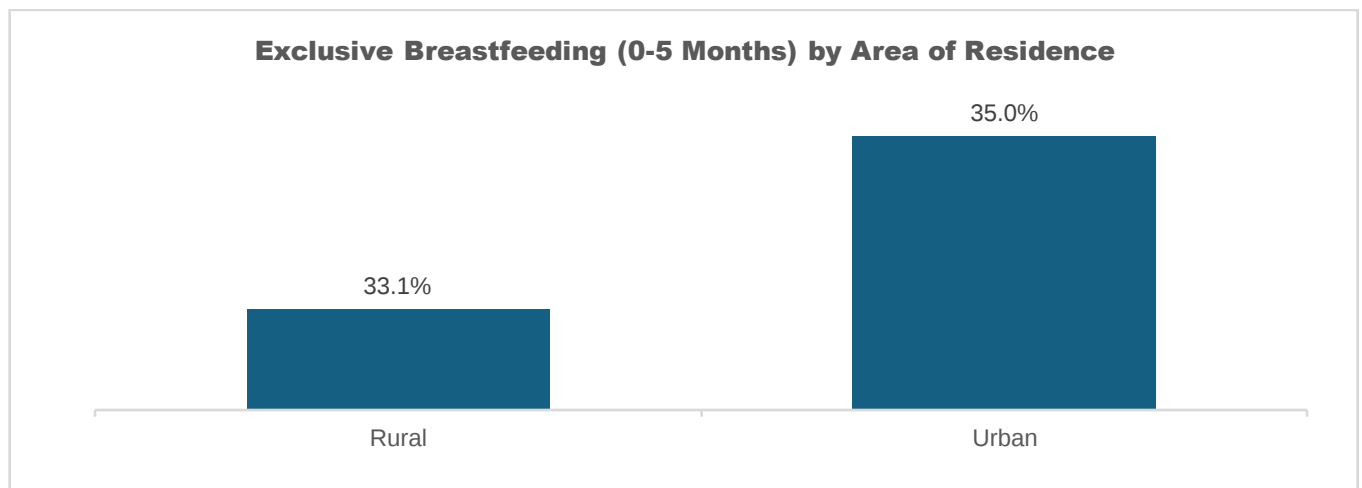


*Source: Punjab MICS 2023–24 (Bureau of Statistics Punjab & UNICEF)*

## 2. Urban–Rural and Gender Differences

Breastfeeding practices vary significantly across geography and gender. Rural infants have an exclusive breastfeeding rate of 33.1%, slightly lower than the 35% observed in urban households. Urban mothers are more likely to rely on early introduction of formula, bottled milk, or other liquids—driven by work pressures, aggressive formula marketing, or other lifestyle factors. In rural areas, traditional feeding norms may support breastfeeding, but lack of counselling and health system support may still limit optimal practices.

Gender differences are small but noticeable: 34.4% of boys and 33.3% of girls are exclusively breastfed. While the gap is narrow, it suggests slight variations in feeding behavior that may reflect cultural norms or parental preferences. Regardless of gender or location, exclusive breastfeeding remains below recommended levels across all demographics.



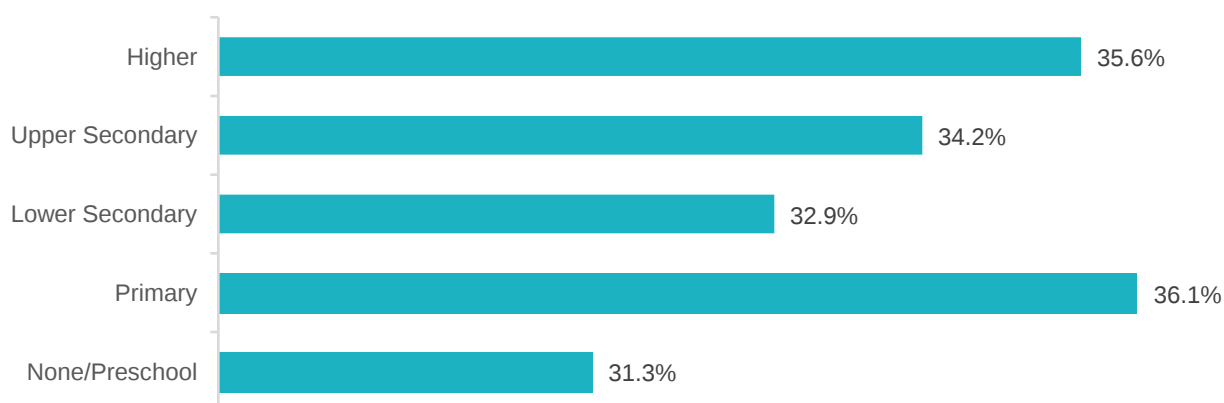
*Source: Punjab MICS 2023–24 (Bureau of Statistics Punjab & UNICEF)*

### 3. Inequalities by Mother's Education & Wealth

Maternal education strongly predicts early feeding practices in Punjab. Exclusive breastfeeding rates range from 31.3% among mothers with no schooling to 35.6% among mothers with higher education. Although the increase is modest, it signals that better-educated mothers are more aware of recommended feeding practices and more likely to follow health guidance. Mothers with secondary and higher education also tend to receive better antenatal and postnatal counselling.

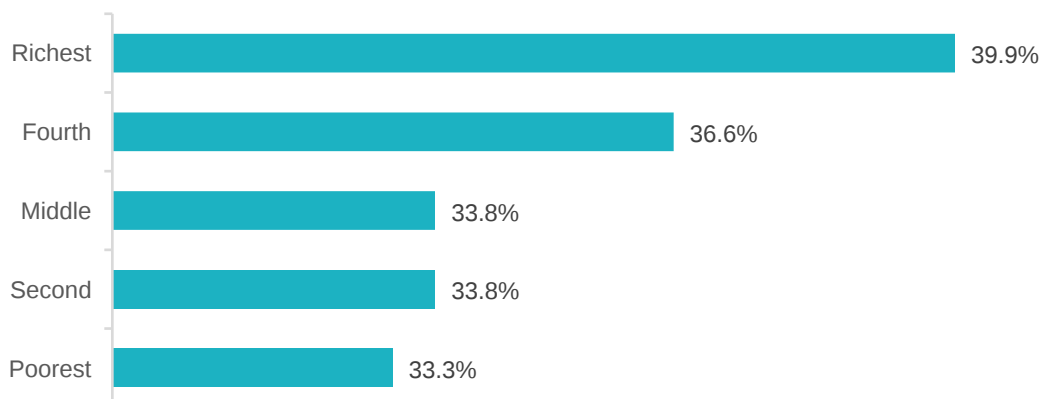
Wealth disparities are more pronounced. Exclusive breastfeeding increases from 33.3% in the poorest households to 39.9% in the richest—showing a 7-percentage-point spread. While even the richest households fall short of global benchmarks, the inequality indicates that poorer families face additional barriers: financial stress, maternal nutritional challenges, early work resumption, reduced exposure to counselling, and limited access to maternity protections. These socioeconomic divides underline the need for targeted interventions aimed at the poorest households.

**Exclusive Breastfeeding (0-5 Months) by Mother's Education**



*Source: Punjab MICS 2023–24 (Bureau of Statistics Punjab & UNICEF)*

**Exclusive Breastfeeding (0-5 Months) by Wealth Quintile**

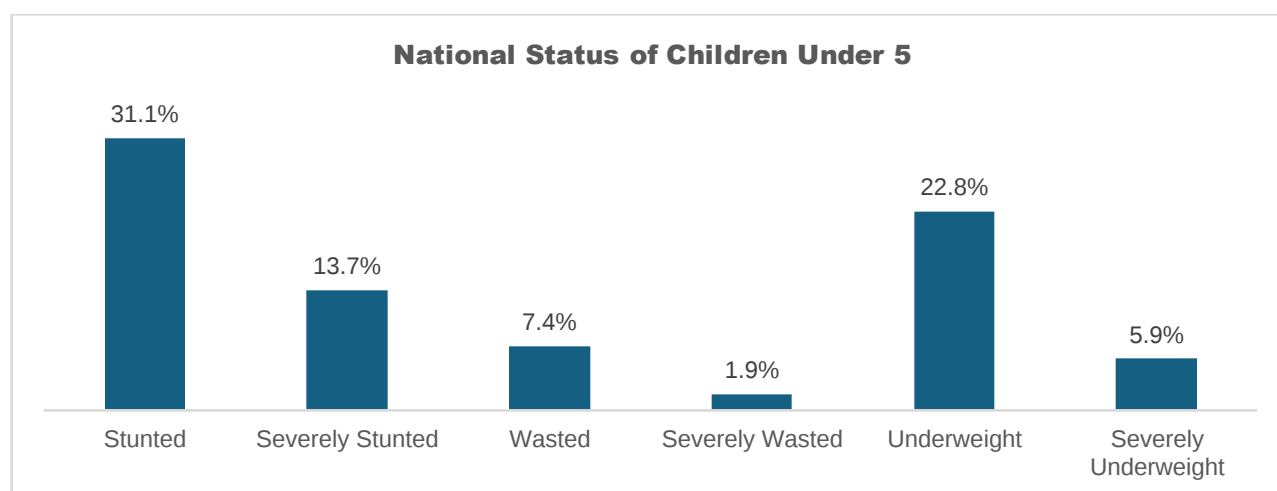


*Source: Punjab MICS 2023–24 (Bureau of Statistics Punjab & UNICEF)*

#### 4. Nutritional Status of Under-Five Children

Punjab's early nutrition challenges are further reflected in child undernutrition indicators. According to Table TC.8.1, 31.1% of children under age five are stunted, and 13.7% are severely stunted, reflecting chronic nutritional deprivation and long-term deficits in growth and development. Wasting affects 7.4% of children, with 1.9% suffering severe wasting—patterns commonly associated with episodes of acute illness or inadequate dietary intake. Additionally, 22.8% of children are underweight, and 5.9% are severely underweight.

These high levels of stunting and underweight signal that poor early feeding practices, combined with poverty, disease burden, and inadequate diets, remain deeply entrenched across Punjab. Without strengthened nutrition programs, the province risks long-term consequences for children's cognitive development, school readiness, and overall human capital formation.



*Source: Punjab MICS 2023–24 (Bureau of Statistics Punjab & UNICEF)*

#### 5. Implications

Punjab's breastfeeding rates fall far short of the WHO benchmark of at least 50% exclusive breastfeeding for infants under six months. Persistent inequalities by wealth, education, and residence, combined with widespread undernutrition, call for expanded investment in maternal nutrition programs, breastfeeding counselling, baby-friendly hospital initiatives, and poverty-focused social protection. Strengthening community health worker outreach, improving follow-up after delivery, and enforcing maternity protections for working mothers are essential steps toward ensuring that every child in Punjab receives the nutritional foundation needed for healthy growth.

## **About the MICS Punjab 2023–24 Survey**

The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2023–24 is Punjab’s largest and most comprehensive source of population and social sector statistics, conducted by the Bureau of Statistics, Government of Punjab, in collaboration with UNICEF. The survey provides high-quality, internationally comparable data on the well-being of women and children across the province. MICS follows a globally standardized methodology used in more than 120 countries, ensuring that results are reliable, representative, and comparable over time.

The 2023–24 round covers a wide range of indicators—including child mortality, nutrition, health, education, water and sanitation, child protection, reproductive health, and socio-demographic characteristics. The survey sampled tens of thousands of households across urban and rural Punjab using a stratified, multi-stage cluster sampling design that guarantees statistical precision at both provincial and district levels. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews, with rigorous quality checks, real-time monitoring, and global MICS validation standards applied throughout the fieldwork.

MICS data are widely used by policymakers, researchers, development partners, and civil society to assess service delivery gaps, track progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and monitor the situation of women and children. The Punjab 2023–24 edition is especially significant as it provides post-COVID evidence on vulnerabilities, inequalities, and emerging demographic patterns in the province. By offering granular insights across wealth quintiles, education levels, geographic regions, and demographic groups, MICS enables a deeper understanding of who is being left behind and where targeted investments are most urgently needed.

This PR series by Gallup Pakistan draws directly on this authoritative dataset to translate complex indicators into accessible insights for decision-makers and the wider public. The goal is to ensure that the rich evidence generated by the MICS survey meaningfully informs policy, programming, and public dialogue across Pakistan.

### **Editor’s Note**

This analysis highlights a critical but often underestimated foundation of child health in Punjab: how infants are fed in the earliest months of life. The MICS 2023–24 data show that while awareness of breastfeeding exists, optimal practices remain out of reach for most families, shaped strongly by poverty, education, and access to maternal support. Low rates of exclusive breastfeeding and persistently high levels of child undernutrition point to gaps that cannot be solved by information alone, but require sustained investment in maternal care, workplace protections, and community-level counselling.

By placing breastfeeding and early nutrition within a broader inequality lens, this edition aims to reinforce a simple truth: early nutrition is not only a health issue, but a measure of social equity. Ensuring that every child gets a healthy start will depend on how effectively systems support mothers — especially those facing the greatest constraints.

— **Aisha Aamir**

*Assistant Manager Research, Gallup Pakistan*



### **Wish to Contribute to Gallup Big Data Analysis?**

Gallup Pakistan is looking for collaboration with researchers to expand the Big Data Analysis project. If you have any ideas, please write to Bilal I Gilani, Project Director, Big Data Analysis at Gallup Pakistan.

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