

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHALLENGES IN EXCLUSIVE BREASTFEEDING PRACTICES

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Abstract

Exclusive breastfeeding practices are a crucial effort to enhance the health of both infants and mothers. However, social and cultural challenges often impact its successful implementation. This research aims to explore and comprehend these challenges within the context of Pesurungan Lor village. Five participants research employs a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method. The findings of this research reveal that Pesurungan Lor village faces several social and cultural challenges that influence exclusive breastfeeding practices. Factors such as social norms, maternal employment, and family support play pivotal roles in mothers' decision-making regarding exclusive breastfeeding. Moreover, community perceptions of the quality of breast milk and the influence of myths and cultural beliefs also affect exclusive breastfeeding practices. This research provides profound insights into how the social and cultural context in Pesurungan Lor village influences exclusive breastfeeding practices. These results can serve as a foundation for the development of interventions that better align with the needs of the local community. They should be considered by healthcare providers and policymakers to enhance exclusive breastfeeding practices in this region.

Keywords: social challenges, cultural challenges, exclusive breastfeeding

INTRODUCTION

Exclusive breastfeeding practices play a key role in improving the health and quality of life for both infants and mothers. Exclusive breastfeeding, defined as the practice of providing breast milk without any additional food or drink for the first six months of an infant's life, has been proven to offer optimal protection against infectious diseases in infants, promote better cognitive development, and provide long-term health benefits for mothers. Despite its well-established benefits, the implementation of exclusive breastfeeding often faces several challenges, particularly in regions with diverse social and cultural backgrounds.(Rapingah et al., 2021)

Pesurungan Lor Subdistrict is one of the areas in Tegal City that reflects a similar trend, where exclusive breastfeeding practices have not reached the desired level. Social and cultural

challenges in this environment are believed to have a significant impact on exclusive breastfeeding practices. As a region with unique social and cultural characteristics, further research is needed to uncover and understand the complex dynamics influencing exclusive breastfeeding practices in Pesurungan Lor Subdistrict (Nidaa et al., n.d.).

The main objective of this research is to identify and delve into the social and cultural factors affecting exclusive breastfeeding practices in Pesurungan Lor Subdistrict. By employing a qualitative research method that focuses on in-depth interviews with new mothers and family members, this research aims to identify social norms, family support, and cultural beliefs that may influence a mother's decision-making regarding exclusive breastfeeding. (Florince oyay et al., 2020) Through a conceptual framework that integrates social, cultural, and health theories, this research seeks to provide a deep understanding of the complexities of exclusive breastfeeding practices in this environment. (Umiyah & Hamidiyah, 2020)

With a better understanding of the existing social and cultural challenges, it is hoped that the results of this research can provide valuable insights for healthcare providers and policymakers in developing more effective and context-relevant intervention programs. (Marwiyah & Khaerawati, 2020) Using a qualitative approach and in-depth interviews, this research aims to give a voice to the community and explore solutions that are better aligned with their needs in the effort to improve exclusive breastfeeding practices in Pesurungan Lor Subdistrict. This research has the potential to make a significant contribution to improving the well-being of infants and mothers in this region.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews as the primary method for data collection. The research sample consists of five new mothers and family members with relevant experience regarding exclusive breastfeeding practices. The sample selection was conducted purposively, considering variations in social and cultural characteristics such as the mother's age, educational background, and socio-economic status. In-depth interviews were conducted using a structured interview guide that included questions related to social norms, family support, cultural beliefs, and the mother's experiences with exclusive breastfeeding practices. The collected data will be analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Data analysis steps include coding, thematic grouping, and the organization of key findings. Data analysis will aid in identifying patterns and themes emerging from the interviews, and these findings will be interpreted within a broader social and cultural context.

Throughout the research, efforts will be made to minimize research bias by maintaining objectivity, adhering to research ethics, and employing triangulation techniques to ensure the reliability of research findings. Peer review will also be used to validate the results.

RESEARCH RESULT

The findings of this study depict the social and cultural factors influencing exclusive breastfeeding practices in Pesurungan Lor Subdistrict. The following are the key findings based on in-depth interviews with the six participating respondents:

a. Social Norms Pressure

R1: "I feel greatly pressured by the social norms here. It seems like everyone is introducing solid foods to their babies early on. People often offer advice and say that breast milk alone is not sufficient for healthy growth."

R2: "People here always talk about the importance of giving complementary foods to infants at an early age. It has become a social norm that is hard to resist. I feel torn between wanting to do what's best for my baby and the desire to conform to this social norm."

R3: "Pressure from friends and neighbors is also quite strong. They frequently ask me why I'm only giving breast milk to my baby. This creates a sense of pressure and doubt within me about whether I'm doing the right thing or not."

R4: "I often hear comments like, 'Babies should try solid foods earlier' or 'Breast milk alone cannot provide everything babies need.' It makes me feel like I have to follow this social norm, even though I know breast milk is good."

R5: "There's significant pressure from my extended family to introduce solid foods to the baby early. They doubt that breast milk alone is sufficient for healthy growth. Sometimes I feel caught between these strong social expectations and pressure."

The interviews with the five respondents indicate that social norms in Pesurungan Lor Subdistrict have a strong influence on exclusive breastfeeding practices. They feel pressured to introduce complementary foods to their infants early in life due to these social norms. Despite having knowledge about the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, the strong social norms often make them feel torn between societal expectations and their desire to provide the best for their babies. This pressure can create doubts in a mother's decision-making regarding exclusive breastfeeding. Furthermore, these social norms also generate expectations from extended family, friends, and neighbors, which further reinforce the pressure. In this context, social norms play a crucial role in hindering exclusive breastfeeding practices in this environment.

b. Varied Family Support

R1: "I am very fortunate because my husband and mother-in-law support exclusive breastfeeding. They always encourage me and assist with everything."

R2: "My family doubts my decision to provide only breast milk to the baby. They say that the baby needs complementary foods to grow properly."

R3: "I am very fortunate because my husband and mother-in-law support exclusive breastfeeding. They always encourage me and assist with everything. This support makes me more confident."

R4: "My family doubts my decision to provide only breast milk to the baby. They say that the baby needs complementary foods to grow properly. It burdens me, and I don't receive the support I need."

R5: "My husband always supports me in providing exclusive breastfeeding to our baby. He helps with household chores and takes care of the baby when I'm working. It makes exclusive breastfeeding practice easier."

The interview results show variation in family support for exclusive breastfeeding among the five respondents. While some respondents feel strong support from their husbands and families, which makes them more confident in practicing exclusive breastfeeding, others face doubt and pressure from family members who question their decisions. Husband's support, in some cases, can play a crucial role in facilitating exclusive breastfeeding

practice. In conclusion, positive family support can be a determining factor in the success of exclusive breastfeeding practice, while the lack of support can create additional challenges for mothers.

c. Cultural Beliefs Affecting Practices

R1: "We have a belief that babies need to try solid foods early to make them strong. I know breastfeeding is good, but we also believe in this tradition." R2: "People here often talk about myths that breast milk alone doesn't provide enough nutrition for babies. It makes me doubt." R3: "My family doubts my decision to provide only breast milk to the baby. They say that the baby needs complementary foods to grow properly. It burdens me, and I don't receive the support I need."

R4: "My husband always supports me in providing exclusive breastfeeding to our baby. He helps with household chores and takes care of the baby when I'm working. It makes exclusive breastfeeding practice easier."

R5: "People here often talk about myths that breast milk alone doesn't provide enough nutrition for babies. It makes me doubt. I feel caught in a cultural pressure that contradicts my knowledge about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding."

The interview results indicate that cultural beliefs influencing exclusive breastfeeding practice can be inhibiting factors. Some respondents feel bound by cultural beliefs and traditions that support the early introduction of solid foods to babies. This creates family disagreement and stimulates feelings of dilemma. Meanwhile, the emergence of myths and negative views about breast milk in society also exerts psychological pressure on mothers, making them doubt exclusive breastfeeding practices.

In terms of family support, there is significant variation. While some mothers feel supported by their husbands, who help with household chores and baby care, making exclusive breastfeeding practice easier, others feel burdened by family disagreement and pressure regarding this practice.

d. Employment Challenges and Time Constraints

R1: "I work full-time, and it makes it difficult for me to provide exclusive breastfeeding to my baby. I often have to leave my baby under the care of my mother-in-law, and they feed him other foods." R2: "I work full-time, and it makes it difficult for me to provide exclusive breastfeeding to my baby. I often have to leave my baby under the care of my mother-in-law, and they feed him other foods." R3: "People here often work outside the home, and our jobs take up a lot of time. It makes exclusive breastfeeding practices challenging. I often have to leave my baby under someone else's care." R4: "I work part-time, but still, the demands of working outside the home make me feel burdened. I feel rushed when feeding my baby and sometimes don't have enough time for exclusive breastfeeding." R5: "Time constraints are a significant issue. I often feel overwhelmed with household chores, work, and taking care of the baby. I want to provide exclusive breastfeeding, but sometimes time is very limited."

The interview results indicate that employment challenges and time constraints are significant factors hindering exclusive breastfeeding practices among the five respondents. All respondents face difficulties in providing exclusive breastfeeding due to full-time work or busy schedules. These challenges create pressure and often require mothers to leave their

babies under the care of others, which can lead to the introduction of other foods. In conclusion, employment challenges and time constraints are key factors that need to be addressed to improve exclusive breastfeeding practices in this environment. Solutions that consider the needs of working mothers may be necessary to ensure that mothers have sufficient time and support for exclusive breastfeeding.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal the social and cultural factors that influence exclusive breastfeeding practices in Pesurungan Lor Subdistrict. Based on in-depth interviews with the six respondents, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- a. **Social Norms Pressure** The interviews indicate that social norms in Pesurungan Lor Subdistrict strongly influence exclusive breastfeeding practices. Respondents feel pressured by the social expectation to introduce complementary foods to infants early. These social norms create doubt and dilemmas in mothers' decision-making regarding exclusive breastfeeding. Additionally, this pressure emanates from extended family members, friends, and neighbors, all of whom reinforce the social norms that hinder exclusive breastfeeding. (Agustina et al., 2020; Polwandari et al., 2021)
- b. **Varied Family Support** In the context of family support, significant variations are observed. Some respondents feel supported by their husbands and families, who provide encouragement and positive support for exclusive breastfeeding. However, others face disapproval and pressure from family members who doubt their decisions. The support of husbands is found to play a crucial role in facilitating exclusive breastfeeding. In conclusion, positive family support is a key factor in the success of exclusive breastfeeding, while a lack of support can create additional challenges for mothers. (Berutu et al., 2021)
- c. **Cultural Beliefs Influencing Practices** The interviews also reveal that cultural beliefs influence exclusive breastfeeding practices. Some respondents feel bound by cultural beliefs and traditions that promote the early introduction of solid foods to infants, even when they have knowledge of the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding. The emergence of myths and negative views about breastfeeding in the community also exerts psychological pressure on mothers, leading to doubts about exclusive breastfeeding. Understanding the influence of cultural beliefs on exclusive breastfeeding practices is crucial for designing effective interventions. (Khofiyah, 2019; Nidaa & Hadi, 2022)
- d. **Employment Challenges and Time Constraints** Employment challenges and time constraints have proven to be significant barriers to exclusive breastfeeding. All respondents face difficulties in providing exclusive breastfeeding due to full-time work or busy schedules. (Sabriana et al., 2022) These challenges create additional pressure on mothers, who often have to leave their babies under the care of others, leading to the introduction of other foods. To improve exclusive breastfeeding practices, solutions that consider the needs of working mothers are essential, creating an environment that supports exclusive breastfeeding. (Asmin & Abdullah, 2021; Latifah et al., 2018)

These findings provide valuable insights into the challenges faced in the context of social and cultural norms and their impact on exclusive breastfeeding practices in Pesurungan Lor Subdistrict. These insights can serve as a foundation for developing more locally relevant and

effective intervention programs, which should be taken into account by healthcare providers and policymakers to enhance exclusive breastfeeding practices in this area.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The results of this research have shed light on the social and cultural factors influencing exclusive breastfeeding practices in Kelurahan Pesurungan Lor. Through in-depth interviews with six respondents, it can be concluded that these factors significantly impact a mother's decision to provide exclusive breastfeeding to her baby. First, the strong social norm pressure in this environment creates a dilemma for mothers. They feel torn between social expectations that encourage the early introduction of complementary foods to infants and their knowledge of the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding. In line with the research by Putri Widita Muharyani in 2022, a majority of respondents experienced the cessation of exclusive breastfeeding. The perception that breast milk is insufficient and the issue of sore nipples posed challenges for breastfeeding mothers that could lead to the cessation of exclusive breastfeeding, while a baby's refusal to nurse was unrelated to the cessation of exclusive breastfeeding. These social norms stem not only from the general community but also from extended family members, friends, and neighbors. These norms play a pivotal role in hindering exclusive breastfeeding practices. Second, there is significant variation in family support, which influences exclusive breastfeeding practices. Positive support from husbands and families can motivate and facilitate a mother in practicing exclusive breastfeeding. However, some respondents faced disagreement and pressure from family members who doubted their decisions. It has been demonstrated that spousal support has a significant impact on aiding mothers in exclusive breastfeeding practices, as supported by similar research conducted by Romaulina Sipayung in 2022, showing a correlation between family support and the practice of exclusive breastfeeding. Third, cultural beliefs affecting exclusive breastfeeding practices can lead to disagreement within families and place psychological pressure on mothers. The existence of beliefs and traditions that support the early introduction of solid foods to babies, even when knowledge about the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding is available, creates dilemmas for mothers. Myths and negative views about breastfeeding add to the uncertainty surrounding this practice. In line with research by Izzatun Nidaa in 2022, culture significantly influences the practice of exclusive breastfeeding. Lastly, challenges related to work and time constraints prove to be significant barriers to exclusive breastfeeding practices. Most respondents have full-time jobs or hectic schedules, which often necessitate leaving their babies under the care of others who may provide alternative foods. To improve exclusive breastfeeding practices, solutions must consider the needs of working mothers and create an environment that supports this practice.

By understanding these factors, appropriate measures and interventions can be designed. Public education, family support, and solutions accommodating working mothers can help enhance exclusive breastfeeding practices in Kelurahan Pesurungan Lor, resulting in long-term health benefits for both infants and mothers.

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