

Strategies and Challenges of Exclusive Breastfeeding for Career Women in Fulfilling Infant Nutrition

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Abstract : This study aims to analyze the strategies and challenges of mothers in practicing exclusive breastfeeding and the strategies used to overcome these challenges. Using a qualitative approach, data was collected through in-depth interviews with 4 mothers who were giving exclusive breastfeeding in the Pesurungan Lor Village (main informants) and heads of companies where the mothers worked (triangulation informants). The research findings identified three main challenges, namely health factors, family support, and social challenges. Health challenges such as sore nipples or maternal health problems can affect the comfort of breastfeeding and a lack of support and understanding from family members can become an obstacle in continuing this practice. Social challenges, which include diverse societal views of the practice of exclusive breastfeeding, also affect the sustainability of this practice. The strategies identified included educational programs to increase mothers' understanding, strong family support and workplace breastfeeding facilities. The results of this study provide in-depth insight into the complexity of the challenges and efforts that mothers make in exclusive breastfeeding, and underscore the importance of supportive strategies. The implications of this research can help the development of support programs that are more effective and focus on removing the obstacles that hinder the practice of exclusive breastfeeding for optimal fulfillment of infant nutrition.

INTRODUCTION

Breastfeeding is a natural process for the well-being of the baby, mother and family. But often breastfeeding is not successful or stops breastfeeding prematurely. One of the reasons put forward was because of career women (Polwandari et al., 2021) Therefore mothers need help so that the breastfeeding process is successful. Based on the data obtained, the coverage of breastfeeding in 2021 in Tegal City is 66.7%, an increase compared to the coverage in 2020 of 59.8%. The lowest coverage of exclusive breastfeeding in Tegal City is West Tegal District, namely 33.8% (Kesehatan & Sehal, n.d.). This is closely related to the level of public awareness and the willingness of mothers to exclusively breastfeed their babies for 6 (six)

months, especially for mothers who work as career women (Sabriana et al., 2022)

Exclusive breastfeeding (ASI) is widely recognized as one of the most effective practices in ensuring optimal nutrition and health for infants. Breast milk is not only a complete source of nutrition, but also contains bioactive substances that help in the development of the baby's immune system, and play an important role in preventing infectious diseases and chronic diseases in the future. Therefore, the practice of exclusive breastfeeding in a timely and long enough manner is a very important first step in providing a solid foundation for the growth and development of infants (Khofiyah, 2019)

However, for women who are active in the world of work, practicing exclusive

breastfeeding often involves a number of complex challenges (Ramli, 2020). Career women are faced with the dynamics between roles as workers and roles as mothers. They need to manage time and careful planning in order to meet the demands of work while still maintaining exclusive breastfeeding practices to fulfill their baby's nutrition (Latifah et al., 2018). When we consider these aspects, it becomes clear that career women must develop specific strategies to overcome these challenges and ensure successful exclusive breastfeeding. Using the right strategy and adequate support can help facilitate the smooth and sustainable practice of exclusive breastfeeding amidst the busy world of work (Hidayah et al., n.d.). This study aims to dig deeper into the strategies used by career women in carrying out exclusive breastfeeding practices to fulfill infant nutrition, as well as to analyze the challenges they face in this business. By understanding the important role of this strategy and identifying existing barriers, we can gain better insight into how exclusive breastfeeding practices can be effectively integrated into the lifestyles of career women.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach to dig deeper into the strategies and challenges experienced by mothers in the practice of exclusive breastfeeding to fulfill infant nutrition. This research method will use in-depth interviews as the main tool for data collection. Research participants are mothers who are giving exclusive breastfeeding. Interviews will be conducted individually with each participant to gain in-depth insight into experiences, strategies, and challenges faced by mothers in practicing exclusive breastfeeding. Data from the interviews will be recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using the content analysis method. Data reliability will be maintained through data triangulation. Validity will be considered by comparing the findings with existing theories and ensuring that the interpretation of the data reflects the actual

experiences of the participants. It is hoped that this research will provide rich and in-depth insights into the strategies and challenges of exclusive breastfeeding, as well as provide valuable input for the development of support programs for mothers who wish to practice exclusive breastfeeding. The main informants in this study were breastfeeding mothers in the Pesurungan Lor Village, totaling 4 people, while the triangulation informants were the heads of companies where the mothers worked. The instruments used in this study were the researchers themselves assisted with Google informed consent forms, interview guide sheets, using WhatsApp voice notes and notes.

RESULT

Based on the research results, the information obtained from the main informants is as follows:

Challenge

Health Factors

- R1 : I face several health challenges such as sore nipples and excessive fatigue. To overcome this, I sought help from health workers and received advice on proper breastfeeding techniques and how to relieve pain. I also try to maintain a healthy diet and get enough rest to keep my body healthy.
- R2 : Yes, I have a problem with milk production. Initially, I was worried because I felt that my milk production was insufficient. I spoke to the doctors and they gave me advice on diet and stimulation techniques to increase milk production. It really helped and eventually my milk production increased.
- R3 : I have had a bad cold and had to take medicine. At first I was worried about the effect of the drug on breast milk, so I consulted my doctor to make sure the drug was safe to take while breastfeeding. The doctor gave the right recommendations and told me how to continue exclusive breastfeeding while maintaining my health.
- R4 : sometimes I feel tired and sleep deprived because I have to get up at night to feed the

baby. To combat this, I try to take naps when the baby sleeps, and my husband helps with household chores so I can get more rest.

Several respondents reported experiencing health challenges that affected their ability to provide exclusive breastfeeding. Some mothers face problems such as sore nipples, low milk production, or personal health issues that make breastfeeding difficult.

Family support

R1 : My partner strongly supports exclusive breastfeeding. She always helps with household chores, gives me time off, and reminds me to always breastfeed our baby. This makes me feel more motivated and can focus more on exclusive breastfeeding.

R2 : Initially I found it difficult because several family members did not fully support my decision to provide exclusive breastfeeding. However, I continue to communicate with them and share information about their benefits. I also seek support from other mothers who are also facing the same thing and we encourage each other.

R3 : Sometimes I feel awkward or uncomfortable when I have to give breast milk in a public place. I worry about what other people think or feel that I don't get enough support from society. But I learned to be more confident and focus on the benefits I will bring to my baby.

R4 : I sometimes feel lonely because my husband and I work far away at home, so I try to actively join a support group for mothers who also provide exclusive breastfeeding. We share stories, experiences, and support each other. It helps me feel more connected and less lonely.

Several respondents mentioned that the lack of support from their family or partners was a challenge. They find it difficult to practice exclusive breastfeeding when there is no support or understanding from the people around them.

Social challenges

R1 : Initially, I felt awkward and uncomfortable. I worry about other people's views and fear negative comments. But over time, I learned to be more confident and recognize the importance of giving my baby milk wherever he needs it.

R2 : several times when I feel that I don't get support from friends or family. Some of them do not fully understand the importance of exclusive breastfeeding and I feel I have to defend my decision. But I try to stay true to my stance and focus on my baby's health.

R3 : I feel it is important to educate others about the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding. When I hear comments or views that are not supportive, I try to share accurate information and provide an explanation as to why I chose exclusive breastfeeding. Sometimes, people just need to get a better understanding of this stuff.

R4 : I started looking for comfortable and quiet places to give breast milk when we were outside the house. I also often wear clothes that allow easy access for breastfeeding. In addition, I spoke with friends and family about the importance of their support in the practice of exclusive breastfeeding. Some mothers feel awkward or uncomfortable when they have to give breast milk in public. They worry about societal perceptions or feel constrained by existing social norms.

Effective Strategy

Education Program

R1 : The educational program is very valuable for me. I feel I know more about the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding and how to do it right. As a mother, I feel more confident and ready to take on any challenges that may arise.

R2 : Before joining the educational program, I only had general knowledge about exclusive breastfeeding. After participating in these sessions, I gained a deeper

understanding of the benefits of nutrition and immunity provided by exclusive breastfeeding. This program opened my eyes about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for the growth and development of babies.

R3 : Educational programs provide concrete solutions to the problems I'm experiencing. For example, I've learned how to deal with sore nipples and how to increase milk production. This helps me feel better prepared and more easily deal with challenges as they arise.

R4 : I believe this educational program will have a long-term positive impact. The knowledge and skills I have acquired will help me in providing exclusive breastfeeding for the next few months. I will also share this information with other mothers around me to create a more supportive environment for exclusive breastfeeding.

Mothers who participated in educational programs about the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding reported an increase in their knowledge and understanding. They feel better prepared to face challenges and are more confident in exclusive breastfeeding.

Support from family members

R1 : Support from family members, especially my husband, has increased after participating in this educational program. He understands more about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding and becomes more active in supporting me. We are now sharing knowledge and planning healthy meals to support exclusive breastfeeding.

R2 : Support from my partner is very important to me. She is always by my side, encouraging and helping with household chores. This makes me feel calmer and more focused on giving exclusive breastfeeding to our baby.

R3 : Support makes me feel that I am not alone in this journey. I feel more motivated to provide the best for our baby. In addition, this support helps reduce stress levels and

makes me feel calmer and happier in exclusive breastfeeding.

R4 : Family support will have a positive impact in the long run. I believe that this support will assist me in continuing my exclusive breastfeeding practice for many months to come. The support will keep me motivated and feel supported in exclusive breastfeeding for our baby.

Mothers who get support from family members, especially from their partners, feel more motivated and confident in carrying out the practice of exclusive breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding facilities in the workplace

R1 : I think that is a very positive step. Breastfeeding facilities in the workplace will make the practice of exclusive breastfeeding easier and more comfortable for working mothers. It also shows the company's concern for the welfare of its employees and helps us carry out our responsibilities as mothers.

R2 : Breastfeeding facilities will make me more confident and motivated to continue giving exclusive breastfeeding. I know that I have a place of comfort and privacy to breastfeed or express milk at work. This will help me maintain the quality of the milk I feed my baby.

R3 : I will plan my exclusive breastfeeding schedule in advance and match it with breaks or work breaks. Breastfeeding facilities will help me breastfeed or express milk without having to worry about an uncomfortable environment. This will make the practice of exclusive breastfeeding more regular.

R4 : Companies have a key role in creating effective breastfeeding facilities. They need to ensure the facility is comfortable, clean, and has sufficient privacy. In addition, companies can also provide information and education to employees about the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding and how to use these facilities.

Respondents who work feel helped by the existence of breastfeeding facilities at work. This

gives them the opportunity to continue to provide exclusive breastfeeding even though they are working.

In qualitative analysis, interviews with mothers and health workers revealed various experiences and views on exclusive breastfeeding. Many mothers report that they face various challenges in pursuing this practice, including specific challenges such as health problems, family support, etc. However, mothers who had participated in the education program reported increased knowledge and support, which affected their confidence in exclusive breastfeeding.

The integration of the findings from the interviews with the results of the quantitative analysis reveals that educational programs have a significant impact on increasing the practice of exclusive breastfeeding. Family support and workplace support are also important factors in facilitating this practice. However, health and social challenges are still obstacles that need to be overcome to achieve the goal of fulfilling infant nutrition through exclusive breastfeeding.

Based on the research results, information was also obtained from the Triangulation Informants regarding support for workers who were carrying out Exclusive Breastfeeding Practices as follows:

T1 : "In our company, we consider it important to support working mothers in exclusive breastfeeding. We have implemented special facilities for breastfeeding expression, as well as flexible work schedules to ensure they can maintain a balance between work and family. We believe that employees who feel supported in their dual roles will be more productive and committed."

T2 : "We recognize that working mothers have unique challenges in maintaining a balance between career and family. Therefore, we have launched training and counseling programs facilitated by nutritionists to help our mothers understand the important benefits of exclusive breastfeeding. This is part of our endeavor to create a work

environment that supports the full development of our employees' potential."

T3 : "We see exclusive breastfeeding as a shared responsibility between the company and employees. In addition to providing breastfeeding expression facilities, we also have a guidance program to help working mothers plan an efficient schedule. We believe that by providing concrete support, we can create better conditions for the growth and development of their children."

T4 : "We have committed to creating an inclusive and supportive work environment. When it comes to exclusive breastfeeding, we not only provide a dedicated place for breastfeeding expression, but also promote a culture that understands the importance of family time. This is part of our company's core values which emphasizes the balance of work and personal life."

Several company heads expressed support for exclusive breastfeeding, reflecting their understanding of the importance of a balance between work and personal life.

DISCUSSIONS

This study reveals a comprehensive picture of the challenges faced by mothers in practicing exclusive breastfeeding. Health factors, family support, and social challenges emerged as the main constraints that could affect the success and consistency of this practice. Challenges in health factors, such as sore nipples or health problems of the mother, may hinder the comfort and quality of exclusive breastfeeding. This is in line with Rakhmawati Agustina's 2020 research, that the physical factor of the mother is also one of the challenges in carrying out exclusive breastfeeding practices (Agustina et al., 2020), (Rahmanindar et al., 2022) In addition, family support, although it has an important role, is not always evenly distributed and consistent, which can affect the motivation of mothers to continue this practice. In line with Wiwi Wardani's 2020 research, the results showed that there was a relationship between

mother's employment status and family support with breastfeeding (Wiwi et al., n.d.). Furthermore, social challenges in the form of community views that may not support the practice of exclusive breastfeeding also play a role in overcoming these obstacles.

In responding to these challenges, this study identified important strategies that can help mothers practice exclusive breastfeeding. Education programs have proven to have a positive impact in increasing mothers' understanding of the importance of exclusive breastfeeding and in overcoming health challenges. In line with Siti Suciati's 2020 research that there is a need for an educational program to make the exclusive breastfeeding program successful (Suciati & Wulandari, n.d.) Family support, particularly from partners, has been shown to play a role in helping mothers overcome these barriers, by providing the necessary emotional and practical support. In addition, the existence of breastfeeding facilities in the workplace has also emerged as an important strategy, allowing mothers to continue practicing exclusive breastfeeding when they return to work (Latifah et al., 2019) Research from Nila Marwiyah 2020 shows that it is necessary to evaluate working mothers in order to optimize the utilization of the lactation room and continue to provide exclusive breastfeeding to their babies (Marwiyah & Khaerawati, 2020) This research has outlined the complex challenges faced by mothers in carrying out exclusive breastfeeding practices to fulfill infant nutrition. Through strategies such as educational programs, strong family support, and workplace breastfeeding facilities, we can stimulate the success of exclusive breastfeeding and reduce the impact of existing challenges. The implications of this research can be used as a basis for developing interventions that are more effective and in-depth in supporting mothers in practicing optimal and sustainable exclusive breastfeeding.

CONCLUSION

In this study, which aims to explore the Strategies and Challenges in Exclusive Breastfeeding for the Fulfillment of Infant Nutrition, we were able to identify the main challenges faced by mothers in the practice of exclusive breastfeeding. Health factors, family support, and social challenges emerge as important aspects that influence the success of this practice. Challenges in health factors such as nipple pain or maternal health problems can affect the comfort and consistency of exclusive breastfeeding. Family support, although important, is sometimes not always consistent and equitable, affecting mothers' motivation. Social challenges, such as societal views of exclusive breastfeeding, can also be significant barriers. However, in facing this challenge, this study also identified important strategies used by mothers. Education programs have proven effective in increasing mothers' understanding of the importance of exclusive breastfeeding and can help overcome health challenges. Family support, especially from spouses, has a positive impact on overcoming these obstacles. In addition, having breastfeeding facilities in the workplace is also a strategy that allows mothers to continue practicing exclusive breastfeeding when they return to work. In conclusion, this study underscores the complexity of challenges and strategies in exclusive breastfeeding to fulfill infant nutrition. Addressing this challenge requires a holistic approach, which includes health support, social support, and supportive workplace policies. By implementing strategies such as educational programs, family support, and breastfeeding facilities in the workplace, we can help mothers maintain exclusive breastfeeding practices more effectively, and in turn, ensure optimal nutrition for their babies.

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