

EFFORTS TO INCREASE EXCLUSIVE BREASTFEEDING AMONG POSTPARTUM MOTHERS

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Article Information

Received:

June 06, 2026

Revised:

June 19, 2026

Accepted:

July 01, 2026

Abstract

Exclusive breastfeeding is crucial for improving maternal and infant health and reducing neonatal morbidity and mortality, yet implementation obstacles remain. Preliminary observations at Pasar Rebo Regional General Hospital (RSUD), East Jakarta, showed suboptimal exclusive breastfeeding coverage, with only 65% of mothers breastfeeding exclusively during care, while others used formula or faced difficulties. This qualitative case study aimed to evaluate efforts to increase exclusive breastfeeding at RSUD Pasar Rebo. Using purposive sampling, 15 informants were selected: 5 experienced healthcare workers (midwives, nurses, lactation counselors) and 10 postpartum mothers (days 1–42). Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions, and direct observations, then analyzed using content and thematic analysis. Results identified key efforts: breastfeeding education, Early Initiation of Breastfeeding (EIBF/IMD), rooming-in, and technique counseling. Supporting factors included available healthcare staff, hospital policies, and family support. Conversely, main barriers were maternal lack of knowledge, postpartum fatigue, and misconceptions about milk supply. Although efforts exist, continuous education and support remain essential.

Keywords: exclusive breastfeeding, postpartum mothers, improvement efforts

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1. Introduction

The postpartum period poses a significant risk to maternal safety, as the majority of postpartum complications occur during this time. National data indicate that 60–62% of maternal deaths are primarily caused by hemorrhage ($\pm 30\%$), infection ($\pm 20\%$), and postpartum hypertension ($\pm 15\%$) [1]. This situation underscores the importance of intensive support for the health of women who have recently given birth. Furthermore, exclusive breastfeeding is a key strategy proven to reduce infant morbidity and mortality by

approximately 13% [2]. In this context, healthcare professionals—particularly midwives and other members of the healthcare team, including community health workers—play a strategic role in providing health education and support to new mothers to ensure the success of exclusive breastfeeding [3].

Observations in the field indicate that the successful implementation of exclusive breastfeeding faces numerous challenges. Preliminary data from Pasar Rebo Regional General Hospital (RSUD) in East Jakarta show that the rate of exclusive breastfeeding among

postpartum mothers during their hospital stay ranges from 65% to 70%—a figure that remains below the national target of 80%. Several reasons contribute to this: mothers often feel their breast milk production is insufficient, and 25% lack adequate education regarding the lactation process, leading to a lack of understanding. This situation highlights a gap between mothers' educational needs and the actual practice of exclusive breastfeeding within healthcare services. [4].

Hospitals, as healthcare facilities, play a vital role in supporting successful exclusive breastfeeding through the implementation of Early Initiation of Breastfeeding (EIB) programs and rooming-in practices [5]. Research indicates that implementing Early Initiation of Breastfeeding (EIB) can increase exclusive breastfeeding success rates two- to threefold. Furthermore, support from healthcare professionals including lactation counseling, education on breastfeeding techniques, and close monitoring of both mother and infant can boost breastfeeding success rates to between 75% and 85%. This clearly underscores that promotive and preventive interventions within healthcare facilities are crucial to the success of exclusive breastfeeding [6][7]. At the national level, the coverage of exclusive breastfeeding in Indonesia in 2023 was recorded at approximately 73%, remaining below the national target of 80%. This low achievement is influenced by several factors: a lack of maternal knowledge ($\pm 35\%$), insufficient family support ($\pm 20\%$), and the practice of early formula feeding ($\pm 15\%$). Suboptimal lactation counseling in healthcare facilities also poses a barrier to the success of exclusive breastfeeding [8].

Suboptimal support for postpartum mothers regarding breastfeeding can increase the risk of health issues in infants, such as gastrointestinal infections and growth

disorders. Data indicate that infants who are not exclusively breastfed face a 1.5 to 2 times higher risk of infection compared to those who are exclusively breastfed [9]. Furthermore, approximately 40% of postpartum mothers experience lactation issues during the first week after delivery such as sore nipples and breast engorgement which can hinder successful breastfeeding. Therefore, more intensive interventions are needed to support postpartum mothers in providing breast milk optimally [10].

Social and psychological factors also influence the success of exclusive breastfeeding. Maternal age, education level, knowledge about breastfeeding, and support from husbands and families contribute significantly to breastfeeding success. Studies show that mothers with good family support are twice as likely to succeed in exclusively breastfeeding compared to those who lack such support. Additionally, approximately 30% of postpartum mothers experience anxiety or stress, which can affect breast milk production [6][11][12].

At RSUD Pasar Rebo in East Jakarta, efforts to promote exclusive breastfeeding have been implemented through various programs, such as lactation education, Early Initiation of Breastfeeding (IMD), and rooming-in. Hospital data from 2024 indicate that while approximately 80% of deliveries involved IMD, the rate of exclusive breastfeeding dropped to around 60% after the mothers returned home. This suggests that the interventions provided during hospital care were not fully sustained at home, highlighting the need for more continuous educational strategies [13].

Preliminary data from RSUD the Pasar Rebo in East Jakarta indicate that, out of approximately 50 postpartum mothers treated monthly, only about 32 (64%) successfully practiced exclusive breastfeeding during their hospital stay. This figure suggests that the rate of exclusive breastfeeding success still requires improvement. Therefore, this

study aims to examine efforts to increase exclusive breastfeeding among postpartum mothers through an approach involving education, guidance, and support from healthcare professionals, with the expectation of achieving optimal exclusive breastfeeding coverage.

2. Research Methods

This qualitative study, utilizing a case study approach, describes efforts to increase exclusive breastfeeding among postpartum mothers at RSUD Pasar Rebo in East Jakarta. Informants were selected via purposive sampling, resulting in a total of 15 participants: five healthcare professionals (two midwives, two postpartum nurses, and one lactation counselor) with at least two years of experience, and ten postpartum mothers (ranging from day 1 to day 42 postpartum), comprising both those who had successfully practiced exclusive breastfeeding and those who had not. The study focused on the hospital's exclusive breastfeeding program policy, the educational competence of healthcare professionals, barriers faced by postpartum mothers, and family support practices.

Data were collected between July and September 2025 through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and direct observation of breastfeeding practices. All data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using content analysis to identify patterns and barriers. Data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation, with results presented narratively and descriptively, supplemented by tables detailing informant characteristics.

3. Results and Discussion

This study involved informants comprising healthcare professionals specifically midwives, nurses, and lactation counsellors and postpartum mothers at Pasar Rebo Regional General Hospital (RSUD) in East Jakarta. The healthcare professionals possessed

experience in providing postpartum care and breastfeeding support, while the mothers came from diverse backgrounds. One postpartum mother stated, "At first, I was afraid my breast milk wouldn't come out, but after receiving explanations and assistance, it turned out I could do it." [Postpartum Mother Informant, NY] This statement indicates that mothers often experience doubts regarding their breastfeeding ability during the early postpartum period. However, education and guidance from healthcare professionals boosted their confidence, enabling them to initiate breastfeeding more successfully. This underscores the fact that a mother's early experience is significantly influenced by interventions provided by healthcare professionals at the facility.

Data quality in this study was maintained through the application of qualitative rigor criteria, such as source and method triangulation and the use of direct quotes. A lactation counselor stated, "We do not merely provide theory; we observe firsthand how mothers breastfeed and then offer corrections if anything is amiss." [Lactation Counselor Informant, KL1] This statement demonstrates that the approach employed was practical and based on direct observation, ensuring the data reflected real-world conditions. Consequently, the study findings possess a high level of credibility, as they are grounded in direct interactions between healthcare professionals and postpartum mothers.

Analysis results indicate that healthcare professionals play a crucial role in the success of exclusive breastfeeding, particularly during the initial phase. A midwife stated, "We always strive to enable mothers to breastfeed from the very beginning even within the first hour after delivery." [Midwife Informant, Bd1] This demonstrates that healthcare professionals understand the importance of early initiation for breastfeeding success. Interventions during this early

period are a key factor, as they help establish sustainable breastfeeding patterns and enhance overall success rates for exclusive breastfeeding.

External factors, such as family support, also influence the success of exclusive breastfeeding. A nurse explained, "If the husband is supportive, the mother is usually more motivated. However, if someone suggests formula milk, the mother begins to have doubts." [Nurse Informant, Pw1] A postpartum mother also shared, "At home, my mother suggested formula milk, but I remembered the information from the hospital, so I persisted with breastfeeding." [Postpartum Mother Informant, AN] These statements illustrate the dilemma mothers face between medical information and the influence of their family environment. Family support proves to be either a reinforcing factor or a hindrance to the success of exclusive breastfeeding.

Strategies employed by healthcare workers include educating mothers on breastfeeding techniques and the early detection of lactation issues. A lactation counselor stated, "We teach correct positioning and latching, because incorrect technique can lead to sore nipples and leave the baby unsatisfied." [Lactation Counselor Informant, KL2] A postpartum mother added, "After correcting the position, my baby found it easier to nurse, and I no longer experienced pain." [Postpartum Mother Informant, SP] This demonstrates that technical education has a direct impact on maternal comfort and breastfeeding effectiveness. With proper technique, the risk of complications can be minimized, and breastfeeding success rates improved.

Promotive efforts are carried out through ongoing education and individual counseling. A nurse stated, "We explain the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding not only for the baby but also for the mother's health." [Nurse Informant, Pw2] A postpartum mother remarked, "I learned that breast milk is important, so I feel more motivated to

breastfeed." [Postpartum Mother Informant, LM] These statements indicate that increased knowledge contributes to heightened maternal motivation. The education provided is not merely informative; it also fosters maternal awareness regarding the importance of exclusive breastfeeding.

Hands-on guidance during breastfeeding is a key strategy for increasing the success of exclusive breastfeeding. A midwife stated, "We don't just explain; we actively assist mothers during their first breastfeeding session." [Midwife Informant, Bd2] A postpartum mother remarked, "When I breastfed for the first time, I was guided until I got it right, which made me feel more confident." [Postpartum Mother Informant, DR] This demonstrates that hands-on practice is more effective than merely providing theoretical information. Such guidance helps mothers overcome initial difficulties and boosts their confidence to breastfeed independently.

Beyond technical aspects, emotional support also plays a crucial role. A nurse stated, "We try to calm the mother down, because if she is stressed, breast milk flow is usually hindered." [Nurse Informant, Pw3] A postpartum mother remarked, "I was worried at first, but after being reassured, I felt more confident." [Postpartum Mother Informant, KH] This demonstrates that a mother's psychological state influences breastfeeding success. Emotional support helps create conditions more conducive to breast milk production.

The training and experience of healthcare workers contribute to the quality of care. A lactation counselor stated, "We regularly attend training sessions so that we can provide better education." [Lactation Counselor Informant, KL1] This demonstrates that enhancing the competence of healthcare workers is crucial for delivering appropriate interventions. Trained healthcare workers are better equipped to identify issues and provide effective solutions to postpartum mothers.

Recording the condition of the mother and baby is part of the monitoring process. A nurse explained, "We record breastfeeding frequency and the mother's condition to track progress." [Nurse Informant, Pw1] This indicates that record-keeping serves as a crucial tool for evaluating breastfeeding success. With proper documentation, healthcare professionals can provide timely and appropriate follow-up.

Hospital policies such as Early Initiation of Breastfeeding (IMD) and rooming-in also influence the success of exclusive breastfeeding. A midwife stated, "With IMD, the baby learns to breastfeed right from the start." [Midwife Informant, Bd1] A postpartum mother said, "Because the baby is always with me, I breastfeed more frequently." [Postpartum Mother Informant, TR] This demonstrates that a supportive environment can make it easier for mothers to breastfeed optimally.

Repeated education provided during the care period is also a crucial factor. A nurse stated, "We repeat the education every day so that the mother truly understands." [Nurse Informant, Pw2] A postpartum mother remarked, "Because I was frequently reminded, I gained a better understanding." [Postpartum Mother Informant, WT] This indicates that the repetition of information enhances the mother's understanding and breastfeeding skills.

Overall, healthcare professionals play a strategic role in promoting exclusive breastfeeding. A lactation counselor stated, "Consistent support is very helpful for mothers." [Lactation Counselor Informant, KL2] This indicates that sustained interventions have a positive impact on breastfeeding success.

Healthcare workers also play a role in motivating postpartum mothers. A midwife stated, "We always offer encouragement so that mothers do not give up." [Midwife Informant, Bd2] A postpartum mother remarked, "That support gave me confidence."

[Postpartum Mother Informant, NY] This demonstrates that external motivation plays a role in maintaining a mother's consistency in breastfeeding.

Social factors, such as family support, remain a key determinant. A postpartum mother stated, "When my family is supportive, I feel more motivated." [Postpartum Mother Informant, SP] This indicates that successful exclusive breastfeeding requires support from the mother's immediate circle.

Hospitals play a strategic role in creating a supportive environment. A nurse stated, "We strive to create a comfortable atmosphere." [Nurse Informant, Pw3] This indicates that the care environment influences breastfeeding success.

Training for health workers is a crucial factor in maintaining the quality of care. A lactation counselor stated, "Training helps us provide the right solutions." [Lactation Counselor Informant, KL1] This demonstrates that the competence of health workers is a key determinant of the success of interventions.

Direct guidance has proven effective in enhancing mothers' capabilities. A postpartum mother remarked, "After receiving guidance, I became able to do it on my own." [Postpartum Mother Informant, DR] This demonstrates that hands-on practice has a tangible impact on maternal independence.

Collaboration among healthcare workers, mothers, and families is a crucial factor in the success of exclusive breastfeeding. A midwife stated, "Successful breastfeeding is a collaborative effort involving all parties." [Midwife Informant, Bd1] This underscores the necessity of a collaborative approach. The success of efforts to increase exclusive breastfeeding relies on sustained support. A postpartum mother remarked, "With support, I am confident I can exclusively breastfeed." [Postpartum Mother

Informant, LM] This demonstrates that a comprehensive approach can enhance the success of exclusive breastfeeding among postpartum mothers.

This research aligns with various previous studies [12] demonstrating that the role of healthcare professionals is crucial to the success of exclusive breastfeeding. Lactation education provided early in the postpartum period has been shown to improve mothers' breastfeeding knowledge and skills. Several studies also indicate that mothers who receive clear and repeated information regarding breastfeeding techniques tend to be more confident and consistent in practicing exclusive breastfeeding. This supports the findings of the present study, which show that education provided by midwives, nurses, and lactation counselors contributes significantly to breastfeeding success.

In addition, other research [14] It is demonstrated that direct guidance during breastfeeding sessions significantly influences the success of exclusive breastfeeding, particularly during the initial postpartum days. Mothers who receive assistance in correcting the baby's positioning and latch face a lower risk of experiencing lactation issues, such as sore nipples or poor milk flow. These findings align with the results of the present study, in which direct support from healthcare professionals proved effective in helping mothers overcome early challenges and progressively improve breastfeeding success.

The factor of social support has also been extensively discussed in previous studies [15]. Support from husbands and families, combined with a supportive healthcare environment, can boost a mother's motivation to breastfeed. Other studies also indicate that emotional support plays a role in maintaining a mother's psychological stability, which indirectly influences breast milk production. This aligns with the findings of the present study, showing that mothers who receive comprehensive

support from both healthcare professionals and family tend to be more successful in optimally practicing exclusive breastfeeding.

4. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that healthcare professionals specifically midwives, nurses, and lactation counsellors play a crucial role in increasing exclusive breastfeeding rates among postpartum mothers at RSUD Pasar Rebo, East Jakarta. Their role extends beyond service provision to include acting as educators, motivators, and support figures who directly assist mothers with the breastfeeding process. Through education on breastfeeding techniques, practical guidance, and emotional support, these professionals help boost mothers' confidence and overcome various lactation challenges. Furthermore, hospital policies such as the implementation of Early Initiation of Breastfeeding (IMD) and rooming-in practices further reinforce the success of exclusive breastfeeding.

To enhance the effectiveness of these efforts, a targeted and sustainable strategy is required; this includes building the capacity of healthcare workers through lactation training, reinforcing consistent education throughout the care period, and involving families in supporting breastfeeding mothers. Collaboration among healthcare workers, mothers, and families is key to the success of exclusive breastfeeding. Through a comprehensive approach and a supportive environment, it is hoped that exclusive breastfeeding coverage will increase optimally, yielding positive health outcomes for both mothers and infants.

5. Acknowledgement

The author wishes to express gratitude to Universitas Harkat Negeri for providing the opportunity and support for the conduct of this research. The author also extends appreciation to the staff at RSUD Pasar Rebo, East Jakarta

particularly the healthcare professionals, including midwives, nurses, and lactation counsellors as well as all the postpartum mothers who agreed to serve as respondents and participated actively in the data collection process. The support and cooperation provided were instrumental to the success of this research.

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