

Relationship of Paternal Attitude and Psychosocial Support on Duration of Exclusive Breastfeeding of First-Time Mothers in Health Clinics in Kuching

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INTRODUCTION

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) defined exclusive breastfeeding as the practice in which the infant is solely fed breast milk, without any other form of milk, infant formula, water or solid food, in the first six months of infant life.¹
- In Malaysia, the third National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) in 2016 reported that the prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding among infants under six months of age was 47% which is below the national target of 70%, to be achieved by the year 2025.¹
- Paternal knowledge, attitude, and psychosocial involvement are crucial factors in successful breastfeeding outcomes and decision-making, exclusivity, and continuation of breastfeeding practices.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

- In Malaysia, studies assessing paternal attitude and support on exclusive breastfeeding and its duration are limited. To our knowledge, none of these studies were conducted in Sarawak despite it having one of the lowest exclusive breastfeeding rates in Malaysia.

OBJECTIVES

- 1) To determine the prevalence and duration of exclusive breastfeeding among first-time mothers attending health clinics in Kuching.
- 2) To determine the paternal attitude and paternal psychosocial support towards first time mother exclusively breastfeeding.
- 3) To determine the relationship between paternal attitude and psychosocial support with the exclusive breastfeeding duration of first time mothers..

MATERIALS AND METHODS

- This cross sectional study involved partners of first-time mothers in Klinik Kesihatan Batu Kawa and Klinik Ibu dan Anak Bau in Kuching, Sarawak between April and November 2023 recruited via convenience sampling.
- Paternal breastfeeding attitude was measured using the lowa-Infant-Feeding-Attitude-Scale (IIFAS), whereas paternal psychosocial support was assessed using the Paternal-Breastfeeding-influence-Scale (PBIS) questionnaire.
- Descriptive statistics and inferential analysis (Pearson correlation coefficient analysis) were conducted.

RESULTS

- A total of 200 partners participated in this study. The mean duration of exclusive breastfeeding among first-time mothers was 21.87 ± 13.57 weeks.
- The average score for paternal attitude toward breastfeeding was 58.89 (±5.44), which shows a negative attitude towards breastfeeding.
- The average total paternal breastfeeding psychosocial support score was 126.12 (±17.49).
- There was a significant positive correlation shown between paternal attitude ($r=0.26$, $p<0.001$) with exclusive breastfeeding duration in first time mothers. Paternal psychosocial support ($r=0.13$, $p=0.064$) was found to also have a statistically significant correlation with exclusive breastfeeding as the confidence interval was between -0.01 to 0.21 which did not cross 1.

DISCUSSION

- The study found that the prevalence and duration of exclusive breastfeeding remained significantly below the national target. There were many reasons why mothers do not initiate or stopped breastfeeding such as the perception of having insufficient breast milk, stress related to expectations of breastfeeding by their family and community and finding difficulty adjusting to their new maternal role.^{2,3}
- These fathers had negative paternal attitude, but at the same time, they had positive support towards breastfeeding probably because they respected their partners who opted to breastfeed and did not want them to feel left out in the process of breastfeeding.
- Although some studies have found a paradoxical effect of paternal support on exclusive breastfeeding, some literature does support a role of fathers for maternal breastfeeding. Hence, partners should be given advice and encouraged to provide support that is sensitive and individualized according to the mothers' needs.

CONCLUSION

- This study found that paternal attitude towards breastfeeding was positively correlated with exclusive breastfeeding duration in first-time mothers.
- Partners should be given exposure to breastfeeding education to increase their awareness and improve their attitude individualized according to their partners' needs.
- Increasing awareness amongst partners regarding benefits and importance of breastfeeding should be an important focus in antenatal care in primary health care in Sarawak. This can be provided in the form of breastfeeding classes or talks involving partners and sharing of educational information on breastfeeding on social media platforms.

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