Partner's Role in Breastfeeding Continuity: A Systematic Review of Qualitative Study

Peran Pasangan dalam Keberlangsungan Menyusui: Tinjauan Sistematik Studi Kualitatif

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ABSTRAK

Background: Breast milk is optimal for infant nutrition, and to ensure its sustained practice, paternal assistance from partners is essential, so that the breastfeeding process runs according to the expectations of the couple.

Objectives: To identify the forms of support offered by partners for breastfeeding continuity.

Methods: This research was conducted through a systematic review of qualitative research using three databases, namely PubMed, Scopus, and ScienceDirect, published from 2014 to 2023. The JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Qualitative Research was utilized to critically evaluate the included publications, resulting in the inclusion of five studies.

Results: Within the breastfeeding context, “husband support” can refer to several types of assistance, including emotional support, seeking breastfeeding information, helping with the mother’s work, assisting in parenting responsibilities, and confiding in the mother and financial support. Only two of the seven studies indicated receiving financial support to replace the husband’s role. Support from a partner makes a mother feel more confident about breastfeeding her baby. A positive response from the partner will help the mother feel more comfortable while breastfeeding her child.

Conclusions: This systematic review provides a valuable reference for future research development by considering the phenomenon of spousal support for breastfeeding participation.

INTRODUCTION

Breastmilk is the best nutrition source for infants, providing all the nutrients and energy required in the early months of life. It is recommended that infants be exclusively breastfed within one hour of birth and continue until six months of age. After this period, additional food can be given, but breastfeeding should be continued until the babies are two years old. Infants get benefit from the development of a good immune system and protection on infectious and chronic diseases because of breastmilk. Exclusively breastfed infants receive effective additional protection on many diseases, resulting in a reduced prevalence if infections, pneumonia and diarrhea compared to non-breastfed infants.

In 2020, it was noted that the global prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding for infants under 6 months of age was 44%. WHO set a target to increase the exclusive breastfeeding rate to 50% in 2025 and expects to reach 70% by 2030. In the East Asia and Pacific Ocean region, exclusive breastfeeding rates are lower are around 30% than the other regions. Meanwhile, rates of early initiation of breastfeeding, exclusive breastfeeding, and continuation of breastfeeding until two years of age are still below optimal standards in many regions.

Child health has been evidenced to increase with exclusive breastfeeding. Parents, including fathers and other family members, are responsible for their child’s health, with husbands providing the most support during breastfeeding process. Research conducted by Ngoenthong in several studies showed that father’s behavior towards supporting breastfeeding were influenced by his understanding of breastfeeding and their involvement in the breastfeeding process. The correlation between father’s knowledge and attitudes towards breastfeeding and exclusive breastfeeding rates highlights the importance of involving fathers in interventions to promote breastfeeding. In family, the husband is a source of strength, where his positive behavior and support for EBF practices can influence a mother’s subjective criteria related to breastfeeding.

Previous studies have suggested that husband’s support determines breastfeeding success, especially in the first six months of life. Mothers, who receive...
support from their husbands will be more enthusiastic and happy in the breastfeeding\(^{10-12}\). Husband’s support is very important for breastfeeding continuation, the higher the husband’s support score, the higher duration of breastfeeding by the mother\(^13\). A study conducted by Kayode (2023) found that support from husbands had an impact on breastfeeding practices, with mothers who received its support has 86.47 times more likely to exclusively breastfeed compared to mothers who did not receive support from their husband\(^14\). This study looked more specifically at the forms of support provided by husbands during breastfeeding. The advantage of this study is to obtain information on the forms of husband support, as a basis for further research that wants to examine quantitively the support received from husband.

**METHODS**

The study was conducted through a systematic review utilizing three databases, namely PubMed, Scopus, and ScienceDirect, published between 2014 and 2023 with the keywords ('Married Persons' or 'Married Person' or 'Spouse' or 'Husbands' or 'Husband' or 'Domestic Partners' or 'Domestic Partner' or 'Spousal Notification' or 'family') and ('Breastfed' or 'Breastfeeding' or 'Exclusive Breast Feeding' or 'Exclusive Breastfeeding' or 'Milk Sharing' or 'Wet Nursing'). References in this study were taken based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria for this study included: (i) research highlighting support provided by husbands; (ii) research evaluating support from husbands; and (iii) original articles. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria included: (i) research that did not ascertain the form of support from husbands; and (ii) quantitative research.

The process of identifying and screening the literature was assisted by Mendeley software to facilitate the extraction of articles. The initial stage was done through searching the literature from three databases using several keywords mentioned earlier, after finding the article, then extracting the data with the assistance of Mendeley software, finding duplicate data and screening the title and keywords of each article. Next, conducted a full text search. In the next stage, assessed the article and determined according to the research objectives in conducting the assessment using the JBI Qualitative Research Checklist. The PRISMA diagram of the literature search strategy used in this study is presented in Figure 1.

![PRISMA Diagram](https://example.com/prisma.png)

**Gambar 1. Diagram Prisma Pencarian Literatur**
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the literature search, 1,761 articles were identified and 100 duplicate articles were found. In the screening stage of 1,661 articles, 1,628 were found that did not fit the research objectives so that there were 33 articles that fit the research objectives. Only 27 articles have complete articles and 7 articles that met the criteria and research objectives. The results of article extraction can be seen in Table 1.

After assessing the eligibility of the articles, the researchers then conducted literature extraction. The results of the literature extraction identified that five articles stated that husbands provided emotional support. Four articles stated support in the form of helping with the mother’s work, four articles stated that the husband became the mother’s confidant, five articles sought information related to breastfeeding and shared the information obtained with the wife, four articles stated that the husband was involved in childcare, and two articles stated that financial support was needed to ease the mother’s work. (Table 2).
Table 1. Article Quality Assessment using Instruments “Checklist Qualitative Research JBI”

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*Y = Yes; **N = No; ***C = Not Explained; ****N/A = Not Used

Table 2. The Summary of Literature Extraction

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<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Country</th>
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<th>Total of Informant</th>
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| Alexandra Lundquist, Brent A. McBride, Sharon M. Donovan, Maris Wszalek15 | 2022 | Urbana (United States) | Qualitative using semi-structured interview | 25 breastfeeding mothers | **Emotional Support**: Motivating the mother that she can breastfeed, respecting her decisions regarding breastfeeding, reminding her when to breastfeed and pumping  
**Helping the Mother’s Work**: Assisting the mother in cleaning the pump every night. The husband waits for the mother to breastfeed or pump until the mother’s needs are met.  
**Confidential Friend**: Listens to the wife’s emotional outburst about something that is not going well.  
**Seeking Breastfeeding Information**: Husband seeks information by attending breastfeeding classes. |
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<tr>
<td>Tri Budiati, S. Setyowati, Seno Adjie, Jajang Gunawijaya</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Qualitative phenomenological approach</td>
<td>12 husbands having wives who are breastfeeding</td>
<td>Babysitting: Husband gives breast milk to the baby, warms the breast milk, changes the baby's clothes. When the baby cries, the husband immediately picks up and gives the baby to the mother and provides equipment, such as pillows or drinks for the mother.</td>
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<td>Hanna Palmqvist, Josene Za'ther, Margareta Larsson</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Qualitative using semi-structured interview</td>
<td>7 Husbands and 2 Mothers</td>
<td>Emotional Support: Keeping mother in a good mood, giving her extra attention, taking her for walks and massaging her to keep her happy. Confidential Friend: Talking about more things. Helping the Mother's Work: Husband helps with housework so that mother can rest, especially during the weekend. Financial Support: Giving mother lots of money. Providing Breastfeeding Information: Sharing breastfeeding information either articles from the internet or newspapers. Seeking information on the dangers of formula milk from the media and experienced friends. In addition, the husband attended prenatal classes.</td>
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<td>Margareta Johansson, Petra Östlund, Cecilia Holmqvist, Michael B. Wells</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>16 husbands having wives who are breastfeeding</td>
<td>Helping the Mother's Work: Cooking. Seeking Breastfeeding Information: Husband takes breastfeeding classes, reads breastfeeding books, and visualizes breastfeeding through videos and pictures. Confidential Friend: Listening every story from the mother.</td>
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<td>Pornpan Srisopa, Ruth Lucas</td>
<td>2021</td>
<td>United Stated</td>
<td>Qualitative analysis of a longitudinal observational safety study</td>
<td>A total of 115 breastfeeding women</td>
<td>Emotional Support: Providing breastfeeding support to the mother and trying together to keep the mother breastfeeding, support from the husband helps to get through the challenges of breastfeeding. Financial Support: Providing material support to mothers to pay their baby-sitter and meet their needs at home. Seeking Information: Learning about the types of crying babies. Babysitter: Coordinating their baby's feeding schedule and sharing feelings, observations, and information related to feeding their baby, helping the mother to express milk at...</td>
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<td>Shahnaz Kohan, Zeinab Heidari, Mahrokh Keshvari²⁰</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>Semi-structured Qualitative</td>
<td>18 mothers, 5 family members, and 10 health officers</td>
<td>Emotional Support: The husband encourages his wife or the mother to breastfeed, the husband’s encouragement makes the mother more determined to breastfeed, keeps the mother’s mood from being anxious and angry, gives thanks to the wife for struggling to breastfeed.</td>
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<td>Nahid Maleki Saghooni, Hossein Kareshki, Habibollah Esmaily, Khadigeh Mirzaii Najmabadi²¹</td>
<td>2022</td>
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<td>Qualitative using semi-structured interview</td>
<td>25 breastfeeding mothers, 9 health workers, and 2 family members</td>
<td>Emotional Support: When the husband does not give full support, the mother will stop breastfeeding, the praise given by the husband will affect the mother’s mood.</td>
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night and letting the mother rest. Assist in others childcare. Confidential Friend: Reflecting and sharing feelings about their challenges and joys in breastfeeding creates a valuable shared experience.
In emotional support, husbands provide support by motivating the mothers to continue breastfeeding, reminding breastfeeding decisions, providing comfort to mothers, keeping mothers in a good mood, giving massages to make them happy, reassuring mothers that they can breastfeed and ensuring they will get through it together, as well as thanking them for their efforts so that they feel happy.\textsuperscript{15,16,19–21} Support from husbands can strengthen the emotional bond between couples and ensure that mothers feel empowered and supported in their breastfeeding journey.\textsuperscript{22} There is a positive correlation between husbands’ emotional support and mothers’ breastfeeding duration.\textsuperscript{23}

Husbands help mothers with various tasks, such as cleaning the milking equipment, cooking, cleaning the house, and other household works.\textsuperscript{15–18} Husbands’ role in helping mothers with household works and infant care has an impact on breastfeeding duration, and the high level of husband involvement prolongs the breastfeeding period.\textsuperscript{24} Husbands also provide support by assisting mothers in infant care by providing expressed breast milk to the baby, warming breast milk, changing the baby’s clothes, helping to put the baby to sleep, changing nappies and so on. Husbands provide financial support to ease the mother’s work when the husband cannot be involved.\textsuperscript{16,19}

The husband also became the mother’s confidant so that she felt calmer and happier that there is someone to listen to her complaints and a friend to share ideas.\textsuperscript{15,16,18,19} Husbands’ efforts to support mothers include seeking and providing information to mothers about breastfeeding by attending classes for pregnant women, looking for articles from the internet, newspapers, asking experienced friends, reading breastfeeding books, so that husbands can share information with their wife.\textsuperscript{15,16,18–20} This study also found that husbands seek information about breastfeeding, and their exposure to breastfeeding information affects the support they provide.\textsuperscript{25} The husband’s support will affect the duration of breastfeeding.\textsuperscript{26} Informational support is the factor most correlated with duration of breastfeeding.\textsuperscript{13} Similarly, spouses who do not have enough information about breastfeeding are more likely to make decisions not to breastfeed if they encounter breastfeeding problems.\textsuperscript{26–28}

Support by couple is more likely to occur if he or she has adequate knowledge about breastfeeding.\textsuperscript{29} Husbands know that breast milk can make the baby’s body strong and shape the baby’s body to be fatter.\textsuperscript{29} The husband participates in breastfeeding the baby, the mother receives emotional and practical support, and the husband continues to support the wife in breastfeeding even in public.\textsuperscript{22,27,22}

The strength of this study is that it obtained descriptive types of support from both mothers or wives and husbands. The first limitation of this study is bias in the selection of articles. Secondly, this research used a qualitative method so that the information obtained was based on the researcher’s ability to dig up information and the limited number of publishers used to search for articles where this study only used three sources. This study can be a reference in formulating policies related to efforts to increase husband support through education by prioritizing emotional support as the main support and continued with other supports.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Spousal support is essential for the successful breastfeeding process. The most common forms of spousal support received are emotional support, information support, helping the mother with care, helping with the mother’s work, and being a confidential friend where the mother expresses her grievances and financial support. Husbands or partners need to get information related to breastfeeding starting from pregnancy.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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**Conflict of Interest and Funding Sources**

All authors in this article declare no specific interests, particularly those related to the topic.

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