

THE PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS BREASTFEEDING

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ABSTRACT

In Malaysia, the National Breastfeeding Policy recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life and continuing up to two years. It has been proven that breastmilk is the best for the baby by given the optimum nutrient. Besides, it also provides benefits to the mothers physically and emotionally. Thus, lots of promotion and campaign have been done in order to promote the awareness on the importance and the benefits of breastfeeding to the baby and to the mother herself. However, looking at the trend nowadays, the awareness of exclusive breastfeeding is still at average level. The demand for formula milk still exists and increase from time to time. Therefore, this study tries to investigate the perception and attitude regarding breastfeeding among women. The study involving 457 mothers with baby at the age of six months old and below. These mothers were attending maternal and child health section of the government health clinics in Klinik Kesihatan Tanjung Lalang, Temerloh. Data were collected was for 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017. Based on the findings, the study revealed that the achievement was below the target that set by the clinic. However, the trend is improving for year to year. Additionally, the rate for 2017 is more than national rate. Therefore, we conclude that most of the respondents agree with the benefits of breastfeeding and give positive perception and attitude towards breastfeeding but the practice of exclusive of breastfeeding is still lacking. Hence, the promotion on the benefits of breastfeeding should be emphasized more, the ministry can put stress on the economic impact of breastfeeding.

Keywords: Breastfeeding, attitude, perception

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, National breastfeeding policy was introduced in 1993 and the policy has recommended every mother to exclusively breastfeed their babies up to 6 months old and continuing until 2 years old. Besides, World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) also recommended exclusive breastfeeding up to 6 months old baby and they should continue as long as they wish to.

Everyone agrees to the benefits of breastfeeding to the baby, mother and the society. It has been proven that by breastfeeding, it gives the best optimum nutrient to the babies. Breastmilk contain a special nutrient that prevent babies from a lot of diseases (Normadiyah Daud, Nadhirah & Mariam, 2015; Radzniwan, Azimah, Zuhra & Khairani, 2009). A research done by World Health Organization (2013) showed that breastfeeding may provide some prevention on obesity or overweight among babies and breastfeeding can be related to Intelligence Quotient (IQ). Besides, another study done by Kuma (2015) found that exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months and continuing up to years may reduce the death rate of children who are under five years by 13%.

In Malaysian culture, breastfeeding is being accepted as common and normal practice for a mother to their newborn child. However, since women nowadays has involved in working sector and the introduction of formula milk and bottle feeding, may affect the practicing of breastfeeding. In addition, looking at Malaysia breastfeeding rate, it is still low. According to National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2016 which is part of NHMS V (2015-2018) cycle, the rate of exclusive breastfeeding is from 0 to 6 months old baby only 47.1% and only 39.4% baby aged 20 to 23 months old were continued on breastfeeding. Therefore, this study tries to investigate the real perception and attitude of women regarding breastfeeding. Furthermore, the findings from this study may assist the minister to plan their promotion and campaign strategies and help the support group to get the best technique to tackle this mother in attracting them to practice exclusive breastfeeding.

This paper has been organized as follows; previous study on breastfeeding issues, followed by methodology section, finding and discussion and lastly is conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends all mothers to breastfeed their babies for six months and continuing to 2 years along with introduced them with additional food. Research conducted by Isaac Petit (2008) among 203 women who attended antenatal follow up in Uganda found that 49.8% of the respondents had exclusively breastfeed their babies for six months. Majority of respondents also believed that they need to exclusively breastfeed their babies for six months due to the benefits of breastfeeding such as baby will gain more protection from various infections as breast milk provides ideal nutrition for infant, lower the risk of diarrhea and allergies (Kuma, 2015). This is supported by Lutsiv et al. (2013), who identified that benefits of breastfeeding was extend even further in reducing the rate of sudden infant death syndrome, obesity, diabetes and lymphoma. While for the mothers, breastfeeding can burn extra calories and lower the risk of breast and ovarian cancer (Adewuyi and Adefemi, 2016).

However, new study has found that breastfeeding trend has declined over the last few years. According to Isaac Petit (2008) this trend is related to several reasons including lack of confidence that the babies get enough milk supply, work overload at the office and discomfort on breastfeeding in public. According to Medya (2010), there are several factors that influence women's decision to breastfeed their babies included their intention, self-efficacy and social support. This is supported by a study conducted by Lutsiv (2013), who found that women who have the intention to breastfeed have more initiative of actual breastfeeding with support from family, hospital and healthcare provider.

Reviews on previous studies in Malaysia showed that most of previous researchers focused on perceptions on exclusive breastfeeding. According to Tengku Ismail, Sulaiman, Jalil, Wan Muda, & Nik Man (2012), they believed that breastfeeding allowed women as a mother to fulfill their reproductive role. Women perceptions on breastfeeding are more important than the timing of her return to work to maintain her ability in breastfeeding journey (Sulaiman, 2017). Recognising the significance of breastfeeding and infant nutrition, a few studies revealed that almost all mothers aware the importance of breastfeeding to their infant's health (Juin, & Mohd Ghazali (2013), Normadiah, Nadhirah, Rahimah, Mohd A'Tarahim, Normila, Nor Hafizi & Wan Mohd Khairul Firdaus (2017)). However, mothers should be encouraged to healthier lifestyles and be knowledgeable on ways how to reduce possible harm to their infants for the success of exclusive breastfeeding among women in Malaysia (Tan, 2009).

Other than that, referring to a few scholars, exclusive breastfeeding also influenced by social and cultural context (Chang, Denney, & Cheah, 2015 and Jamil, 2017). There is a belief that they are responsible to breastfeed, and breast milk is a gift from God. Likewise, mothers' decision to breastfeed was influenced by their beliefs and values (Burdette & Pilkauskas, 2012). Moreover, social support is important to give positive impact on the continuation of exclusive breastfeeding. Availability of social support may provide a mother's ability in continuing exclusive breastfeeding (Solonen, Kaunonen, Astedt-Kurki, Jarvenpaa, Isoaha, & Tarkka, 2009). However, an emotional, appraisal, and informational support were perceived as effective support for breastfeeding (Clark, 2016). Yet, Mitchell-Box, & Braun (2012) found that all men valued breastfeeding's health benefits, recognized that it was natural and were empathetic to the effort of their partners. Otherwise, parents' mutual decision is also important factor practicing exclusive breastfeeding, whereas father's role is to approve the mother's decision and provide emotional and practical support (Draman, Mohamad, M. Yusoff, & Muhamad, 2017).

However, many women are not able to practice consistently and effectively exclusive breastfeeding because of many limitations and challenges. According to Tengku Ismail, et al. (2012), it has been found that it is challenging to practise exclusive breastfeeding especially when confronting with low milk supply, perceiving low nutritional quality breast milk, and having work commitments. Some obstacles faced by the mothers are lack of knowledge on breastfeeding and it is important to provide education on breastfeeding to mothers and fathers (Vijayalakshmi, Susheela, & Mythili, 2015). Absence workplace supports and facilities for breastfeeding (Hassan, 2014) resulted in increasing rate for women discontinue breastfeeding earlier than planned (Soomro, Shaikh, Saheer, & Bijarani, 2016).

Public acceptance may influence to the breastfeeding rate in communities. To breastfeed exclusively, mothers will face situation where they need to feed in public places. In Malaysia public breastfeeding is supported by mothers but it is encouraged to breastfeed in privacy (Aloysius1, Syed Jamaludin, & Aloysius2, 2017) because the Malaysian public still associates breasts with sexualisation rather than nurturing. According to Tay (2014), it is encouraging to note that most people are accepting of a mother nursing in public when it is done in a manner. Therefore, the accessibility baby care room in public places like shopping malls has been accepted positively in Malaysia (Nik Azhari, Salam, & Hasbullah, 2012) even though it still has some lacks like proper facilities to meet family-friendly environment for mothers and their baby needs.

In order to increase the awareness of exclusive breastfeeding, the planning and implementing of breastfeeding interventions need to be consider. The effects of combining prenatal and postnatal education were significant benefit to increase exclusive breastfeeding and that was an effective approach to prolong the duration of breastfeeding among mothers (Fauzi, Mohamed, Ismail, & Othman, 2018 and Imdad, Yaakob, & A Bhutta, 2011). A holistic approach must be used to help mothers to continue breastfeeding. This includes breastfeeding promotion and education, availability of breastfeeding support groups and provision of enough breastfeeding facilities at work and public places (S. B., Nazatul. 2009). The importance of workplace to support by providing a conducive and supportive environment to enhance breastfeeding among working women (Abdul Rashid, Shamsuddin, Raja Malek Ridhuan, Sallahuddin, & Navin Kumar Devaraj, 2018). Mohd Suan, Ayob, & Rodzali (2017), found that there is a positive attitude among childcare workers in nursery centre toward supporting and promoting exclusive breastfeeding practice.

Hence, this paper intent to fulfil the research objectives to explore the perception and attitude regarding breastfeeding among women who came to the *Klinik Kesihatan Tanjung Lalang*. Additionally, the findings of prior research significantly contributed to the minister and support group to plan more related activities to encourage and educate women the importance of exclusive breastfeeding.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs descriptive analysis whereby the researchers try to identify and investigate the perception and attitude towards breastfeeding. The data was given by *Pegawai Sains Pemakanan (PSP)*, *Klinik Kesihatan Tanjung Lalang, Temerloh*. The data was gathered from 457 mothers with their six months old and below baby who attending the Maternal and Child Care Clinic section in *Klinik Kesihatan Tanjung Lalang* for 2014 until 2017. The analysis was based on the trend of breastfeeding for 2014 until 2017.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Upon the formulation of National Breastfeeding Policy on 1993, various breastfeeding programmes and campaigns have been introduced. One of them is the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI), the Baby Friendly Clinic Initiative (IKRAB), celebration of Breastfeeding Week (1 – 7 August) for every year, Breastfeeding Training for Health Staff and Mother and the formation of Breastfeeding Support Group in every district and state.

In Temerloh, all 7 clinics were appointed as Baby Friendly Clinic Initiative (IKRAB) and Klinik Kesihatan Tanjung Lalang was one of them. Therefore, all the post natal mothers that have come for check up will be exposed the benefits of breastfeeding to encourage them to exclusively breastfed their babies until 6 months old. Besides that, the Breastfeeding Support Group which is known as KUSSITEM also has been established and actively plays their roles. This support group was led by Non-Government Organization (NGO) and cooperates with hospital and clinics in their programmes.

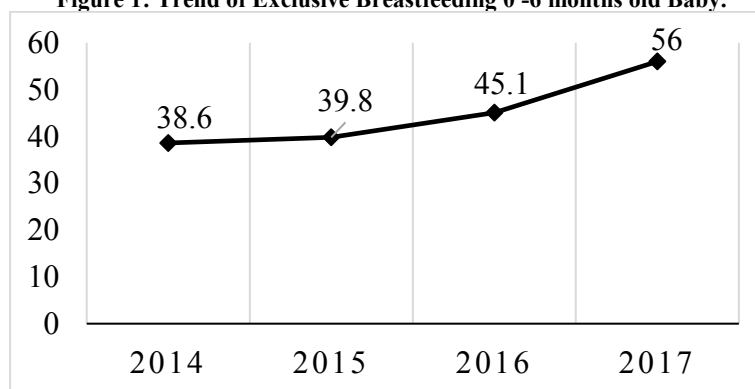
Unfortunately, despite all programmes that have been done whether in minister part or NGOs part, the breastfeeding rate still is not at satisfactory rate. From table 1 below, only for the year 2014 the target was achieved and for year 2015, 2016 and 2017, the achievement was below target which were only 39.8% instead of 45% for 2015, 45.1% instead of 50% for 2016 and only 56% for 2017 instead of 58%.

Table 1: Percentage of Exclusive Breastfeeding 0 – 6 months old Baby.

Year	Target	Achievement	Total (n)
2017	> 58 %	56.0 %	73/131
2016	> 50 %	45.1 %	46/102
2015	> 45 %	39.8 %	49/123
2014	> 38 %	38.6 %	39/101

Moreover, looking at the trend of exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months old baby as in figure 1 below, the trend is increasing from year to year. The percentage only 38.6% in 2014 and has increased to 39.8% in 2015 and increase up to 45.1 in 2016 and increase more to 56% in 2017. Therefore, although the target that has been set was not achieved, the trend is improving.

Figure 1: Trend of Exclusive Breastfeeding 0 -6 months old Baby.



Temerloh is a district in Pahang and Pahang has been listed among the least populous state in Malaysia (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2016), which is only 5.1% as compared to its geographical area which known as the biggest state in Malaysia. Besides that, Pahang also has been identified among the lowest urbanization level sate, 50.5 % (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). Originally, economic sector of Temerloh has been drive by agriculture sector. However, it has shifted to industrial sector, services sector and business sector (Temerloh, 2008). Majority of family in Temerloh are self working and support themselves with their own business. Therefore, this socio-demographic of Temerloh may become a factor that contribute to the positive trend of breastfeeding rate in Temerloh. Additionally, the latest rate for 2017 showed in table 1 above, the achievement in Temerloh were higher than national rate those reported in National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) V whereby the rate of exclusive breastfeeding is from 0 to 6 months old baby only 47.1% for Malaysia. Most of self-employed family may agree that the importance of breastfeed their baby interms of its economical effect. By breastfeeding they can cut their budget on buying formula milk. Besides, since Temerloh can be consider as semi urban and rural communities, women in this communities commonly expected to practicing breastfeeding. This supported by Manan (1995), who said that women who were not working is lack of exposure and mobility mostly practicing breastfeeding.

CONCLUSION

The finding suggests that breastfeeding was positively accepted, and the mothers have good attitude and perception towards breastfeeding. The benefits of breastfeeding have been accepted and the information on it has been widely known. Nevertheless, although the trending is improving but the target of breastfeeding rate that has been set still cannot be achieved. Besides, the limitation of the study is the author can't identify the factors that contribute to the failure of attainment the breastfeeding rate. Therefore, further study should be done to investigate the factor that contribute the disability of mothers to exclusively breastfeed their babies. Also, it is recommended that to the minister and the NGOs to plan their activities, promotions and campaigns strategies and highlight more on the economic impact of breastfeeding to the family. People normally will be more conscious when it relates to the cost and money benefits. Besides, people nowadays mostly are financially educated and try their best to have financial freedom. Therefore, people will feel more motivated and inspired to practise breastfeeding since it involves cost savings.

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