



## EFFORTS AND CHALLENGES OF EXCLUSIVE BREASTFEEDING FOR SINGLE-PARENT WOMEN IN MEETING THE NUTRITIONAL NEEDS OF BABIES

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to analyze the efforts and challenges faced by single-parent women in providing exclusive breastfeeding to meet their infants' nutritional needs. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with four single-parent women (primary informants) who are currently breastfeeding exclusively in the Pesurungan Lor neighborhood, as well as with the company heads where they work (triangulation informants). The research findings identify three main challenges: health factors, family support, and social challenges. Health-related issues, such as nipple pain or maternal health problems, affect breastfeeding comfort, while a lack of support and understanding from family members can hinder the continuation of this practice. Additionally, social challenges, including societal stigma toward single-parent status and the practice of exclusive breastfeeding, also influence the success of this program.*

*Various efforts have been made by the mothers, such as seeking emotional and practical support from the community and utilizing available facilities to aid the breastfeeding process. The results of this study provide important insights into the complexities faced by single-parent women in fulfilling their infants' nutritional needs through exclusive breastfeeding and underscore the importance of support and strategic programs to address these barriers*

**Keywords:** Exclusive Breastfeeding, Single-Parent Women, Infant Nutritional Fulfillment, Efforts, Challenges

### ABSTRAK

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis upaya dan kendala yang dihadapi oleh wanita single parent dalam pemberian ASI eksklusif untuk memenuhi kebutuhan gizi bayi. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan empat wanita single parent (informan utama) yang sedang memberikan ASI eksklusif di Kelurahan Pesurungan Lor, serta Kepala Perusahaan tempat mereka bekerja (informan triangulasi). Temuan penelitian mengidentifikasi tiga kendala utama, yaitu faktor kesehatan, dukungan keluarga, dan tantangan sosial. Kendala kesehatan seperti nyeri puting atau masalah kesehatan ibu memengaruhi kenyamanan menyusui, sementara kurangnya dukungan dan pemahaman dari anggota keluarga dapat menjadi hambatan dalam melanjutkan praktik ini. Selain itu, tantangan sosial, termasuk stigma masyarakat terhadap status single parent dan praktik pemberian ASI eksklusif, turut mempengaruhi keberhasilan program ini. Berbagai upaya telah dilakukan oleh para ibu, seperti mencari dukungan emosional dan praktis dari komunitas, serta memanfaatkan fasilitas yang ada untuk mendukung proses menyusui. Hasil penelitian ini memberikan wawasan penting tentang kompleksitas tantangan yang dihadapi wanita single parent dalam memenuhi kebutuhan gizi bayi melalui pemberian ASI eksklusif, serta menggarisbawahi pentingnya dukungan dan program strategis untuk mengatasi hambatan-hambatan tersebut*



**Keywords:** ASI Eksklusif, Wanita Single Parent, Pemenuhan Gizi Bayi, Upaya, Kendala

## INTRODUCTION

Breastfeeding is a natural process that is very important for the well-being of both the baby and the mother, including for women who are single parents. The breastfeeding process not only provides the necessary nutrition for the baby but also contributes to the emotional development and bonding between the mother and child. However, for single-parent women, practicing exclusive breastfeeding often involves more complex challenges. They face the dynamics of dual roles as breadwinners and primary caregivers for their babies. This forces them to manage their time and planning more carefully to meet the demands of their jobs while still providing exclusive breastfeeding to meet their babies' nutritional needs. In this situation, it is clear that single-parent women need to develop specific strategies to overcome various obstacles and ensure the success of exclusive breastfeeding (Vaz et al., 2021) (Dutheil et al., 2021).

The use of appropriate strategies, along with adequate support from both the work and social environments, is crucial to facilitate the smoothness and sustainability of exclusive breastfeeding practices amid their busy lives as single parents. For example, single-parent women can utilize technology, such as breast pumps, to help manage breastfeeding time and provide breast milk when they cannot be near their babies. Additionally, emotional support from family and friends, as well as company policies that support breastfeeding mothers, are key factors in creating a conducive environment for exclusive breastfeeding (Fang et al., 2024) .(Perez-Escamilla et al., 2021).

Data shows that the rate of exclusive breastfeeding in Indonesia increased from 59.8% in 2020 to 66.7% in 2021. However, in some areas, such as Tegal Barat Subdistrict, the rate of exclusive breastfeeding remains low, at only 33.8%. This low rate is closely related to various challenges faced by mothers, especially single-parent women, in the practice of exclusive breastfeeding. In addition to time limitations caused by dual responsibilities, many of them also experience a lack of support from their social environment and workplace. This becomes a major barrier in meeting their babies' nutritional needs, as the success of exclusive breastfeeding is greatly influenced by the support received (Smith, 2019) (Golan & Assaraf, 2020).

Exclusive breastfeeding is widely recognized as one of the most effective ways to meet babies' nutritional needs and support the development of their immune systems. Breast milk contains complete nutrition, bioactive substances, and antibodies that are crucial for the baby's health and play a role in preventing various infectious diseases and chronic diseases in the future.



Therefore, efforts to provide exclusive breastfeeding are very important, especially for single-parent women who must face various challenges in carrying out their dual roles (Zakarija-Grkovic & Stewart, 2020).

The importance of this research lies in the effort to delve deeper into the strategies and challenges faced by single-parent women in providing exclusive breastfeeding to meet their babies' nutritional needs. By analyzing the existing challenges and identifying the strategies used to overcome them, this study is expected to provide better insights into how single-parent women can successfully practice exclusive breastfeeding. Additionally, this research aims to provide recommendations that can enhance the support they need from the government, society, and workplaces so that exclusive breastfeeding can be implemented optimally.

This research is expected to contribute to the development of more effective and sustainable support programs, which in turn will support the health and well-being of both babies and mothers. By raising awareness and providing practical solutions to the challenges faced, it is hoped that success in exclusive breastfeeding can be achieved, ensuring that every baby, including those from single-parent families, receives the best nutrition for optimal growth and development.

## **METHODS**

This research employs a qualitative approach to delve deeper into the strategies and challenges experienced by single-parent mothers in practicing exclusive breastfeeding in Pesurungan Lor Village. The research method utilizes in-depth interviews as the primary tool for data collection. The main participants in this study are four single-parent mothers who are currently providing exclusive breastfeeding. The interviews are conducted individually to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences, the strategies they implement, and the challenges they face in exclusive breastfeeding. Data from the interviews will be recorded, then transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using content analysis methods. To ensure the reliability of the data, triangulation will be conducted by involving triangulation informants, namely the heads of the companies where the mothers work. The validity of the research will be strengthened by comparing the findings with relevant theories, as well as ensuring that the data interpretation accurately reflects the participants' experiences. The research instruments used include the researcher themselves as the primary instrument, supported by an interview guideline sheet, informed consent via Google Forms, voice notes through WhatsApp, and field notes. This study is expected to provide in-depth insights into the strategies and challenges faced by single-



parent mothers in carrying out exclusive breastfeeding practices and to offer recommendations that can support the success of exclusive breastfeeding in the future.

## RESULTS

### 1. Challenges

#### a. Health Factors

Health challenges are one of the main obstacles for single-parent women in providing exclusive breastfeeding. Some respondents reported difficulties related to their health conditions, such as:

**R1:** "I face several health challenges, such as pain in my nipples and excessive fatigue. To address this, I sought help from health workers and received advice on proper breastfeeding techniques and how to relieve the pain. Additionally, I try to maintain a healthy diet and get enough rest to keep my body healthy."

**R2:** "I experienced issues with milk production. Initially, I was worried because my milk supply felt low. After consulting with a doctor, I received advice regarding a proper diet and stimulation techniques to increase my milk production. This was very helpful, and eventually, my milk supply increased."

**R3:** "I had a severe flu and had to take medication. At first, I was concerned about the effects of the medication on my breast milk, so I consulted with a doctor to ensure the medication was safe to take while breastfeeding. The doctor provided appropriate recommendations, allowing me to continue exclusive breastfeeding while taking care of my health."

**R4:** "Sometimes I feel exhausted and lack sleep because I have to wake up at night to breastfeed the baby. To cope with this, I try to nap when the baby sleeps, and my husband helps with household chores, allowing me to rest more."

Several single-parent mothers face health issues such as nipple pain, low milk production, and other personal health conditions that complicate the process of exclusive breastfeeding. However, with the assistance of medical professionals and family support, these mothers have successfully found ways to overcome these health challenges.

#### b. Family Support

One important factor in the success of exclusive breastfeeding is support from family; however, for single-parent women, this support can vary. Based on the interview



results, respondents shared diverse experiences regarding the family support they received:

**R1:** "Even though I am a single parent, my extended family is very supportive. They help with household chores so that I can focus more on providing exclusive breastfeeding. This support is crucial because it gives me time to rest and more energy to care for my baby."

**R2:** "At first, I found it difficult because not all family members supported my decision to provide exclusive breastfeeding. Some of them felt that I should use formula milk instead. However, I kept trying to share information about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding and its benefits for the baby. Eventually, they began to understand and offer their support."

**R3:** "As a single parent, I often feel awkward or uncomfortable breastfeeding in public places. Family support is not always present, but I have learned to be more confident and focus on the benefits that breast milk provides for my baby's health, even if not everyone around me directly supports it."

**R4:** "I often feel lonely because I have to handle everything by myself while my family members are far away or busy. Therefore, I actively joined support groups for mothers who also provide exclusive breastfeeding. We share experiences, encourage each other, and this really helps me feel more supported despite being a single parent."

The lack of support from family or the surrounding environment can be a serious challenge for single-parent women in providing exclusive breastfeeding. Some mothers must face a lack of understanding from their families, while others feel socially isolated. Nonetheless, they strive to seek support from other communities or groups of mothers facing similar challenges, which becomes an important effort to overcome these obstacles.

#### c. **Social Challenges**

Single-parent women often face social challenges in providing exclusive breastfeeding, particularly concerning societal perceptions and support from their surroundings. Based on the interview results, here are some experiences shared by the respondents:

**R1:** "Initially, I felt very awkward and uncomfortable when I had to breastfeed in public places. I was worried about what others would think and feared receiving negative comments. However, over time, I learned to be more confident and focus on my baby's needs. I know how important it is to breastfeed wherever my baby needs it."



R2: "Several times, I felt that I did not receive enough support from friends or family. They did not fully understand the importance of exclusive breastfeeding, and sometimes I felt I had to defend my decision. However, I tried to remain steadfast and focus on my baby's health, even though social support felt minimal."

R3: "I felt the need to educate the people around me about the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding. When I heard comments or perspectives that were less supportive, I tried to provide accurate information. I realized that many people simply lack understanding of the importance of breast milk, so I made an effort to explain why I chose exclusive breastfeeding."

R4: "To overcome my discomfort, I started looking for comfortable and quiet places when I had to breastfeed outside the home. I also wore clothes that made breastfeeding easier and more practical. Additionally, I talked to my friends and family to ensure they understood and supported my decision."

Social challenges such as stigma or a lack of understanding from the environment become obstacles for single-parent women in providing exclusive breastfeeding. Many feel awkward when they have to breastfeed in public or feel unsupported by those closest to them. However, through education and seeking support from other communities, these mothers successfully confront these challenges and remain focused on their babies' health.

## 2. **Effective Strategies**

### a. Educational Programs

Based on the research findings, single-parent women expressed that educational programs on exclusive breastfeeding were very helpful in increasing their understanding and confidence. Here are some views from the respondents regarding the effectiveness of educational programs:

R1: "This educational program is invaluable to me. As a single parent, I feel more knowledgeable about the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding and how to do it correctly. This knowledge makes me more confident in facing the challenges that may arise."

R2: "Before participating in the educational program, I only had general knowledge about exclusive breastfeeding. After attending these educational sessions, I gained a deeper understanding of the nutritional and immunological benefits provided by breast milk. This program opened my eyes to how crucial exclusive breastfeeding is for my baby's growth and development."





R3: "This educational program provides concrete solutions to the issues I face, such as how to manage nipple pain and increase milk production. This knowledge makes me better prepared and more able to tackle various obstacles in exclusive breastfeeding."

R4: "I am confident that this educational program will have a positive impact in the long term. The knowledge and skills I have gained not only help me provide exclusive breastfeeding for the next few months but also enable me to share this information with other single-parent mothers around me, creating a more supportive environment."

Educational programs play a vital role in helping single-parent women overcome the challenges of exclusive breastfeeding. The mothers feel more prepared, more confident, and have a deeper understanding of the importance of breast milk for their babies. Through this education, they can develop the practical skills needed and create a more supportive social environment for exclusive breastfeeding.

b. Support from Family Members

Support from family, even if limited to single-parent women, still plays a crucial role in the success of exclusive breastfeeding. Here are the experiences of single-parent mothers in facing this challenge:

R1: "As a single parent, I do not have a partner to support me directly, but I am very fortunate to receive support from my extended family, especially my mother. She helps take care of the baby and encourages me to continue providing exclusive breastfeeding. This is very helpful because I feel less alone in facing these challenges."

R2: "I receive support from my older sister, who always offers encouragement and assistance with household chores. This support is invaluable to me, especially when I feel tired or stressed. They always remind me of the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for my baby's health."

R3: "Even though I am a single parent, my friends and close family provide significant moral support. They often share experiences and tips on how to overcome difficulties in breastfeeding. This emotional support helps me stay motivated and confident in providing exclusive breastfeeding."

R4: "I feel that support from my extended family plays a significant role in keeping my spirits up. They often help me with household chores so that I can focus on caring for the baby. This support makes me stronger in my role as a single parent who provides exclusive breastfeeding."

Support from family members, even if not from a partner, is very helpful for single-parent mothers in practicing exclusive breastfeeding. This support is not only physical,



such as helping with household chores, but also emotional, making mothers feel more motivated, calm, and confident in providing exclusive breastfeeding to meet their babies' nutritional needs.

c. Breastfeeding Facilities at the Workplace

Working single-parent women face additional challenges in providing exclusive breastfeeding. The availability of breastfeeding facilities at the workplace is an important effort to support them. Here are the responses from the respondents regarding breastfeeding facilities at work:

R1: "I think having breastfeeding facilities at work is a very positive step. These facilities make exclusive breastfeeding easier and more comfortable for working mothers like me. It also shows that the company cares about the well-being of its employees and helps us fulfill our responsibilities as mothers."

R2: "The presence of breastfeeding facilities at work makes me more confident and motivated to continue providing exclusive breastfeeding. I feel at ease knowing there is a comfortable place with privacy for breastfeeding or expressing milk. This greatly helps maintain the quality of breast milk I provide to my baby."

R3: "I usually plan my exclusive breastfeeding schedule before going to work, and the breastfeeding facilities help me align that schedule with my breaks or work intervals. With these facilities, I can breastfeed or express milk more regularly and without worrying about the comfort of the work environment."

R4: "Companies play a crucial role in creating effective breastfeeding facilities. They need to ensure these facilities are comfortable, clean, and provide sufficient privacy. Additionally, companies can also provide education to employees about the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding and how to use these facilities optimally."

The respondents stated that breastfeeding facilities at the workplace have a positive impact on working single-parent mothers. These facilities enable them to continue practicing exclusive breastfeeding, providing comfort, and supporting both the baby's health and the mother's well-being. The role of companies in providing adequate facilities is crucial to supporting efforts for exclusive breastfeeding among single-parent women.

In the qualitative analysis, interviews with the families of single-parent mothers and healthcare providers revealed a variety of experiences and perspectives on exclusive breastfeeding. Many mothers reported facing various challenges in practicing this, including health issues, lack of support from family, and social pressures. Nevertheless,





mothers who participated in educational programs on exclusive breastfeeding reported increased knowledge and support, positively impacting their confidence in providing exclusive breastfeeding to their babies.

The integration of findings from interviews with the results of quantitative analysis indicates that educational programs have a significant impact on improving exclusive breastfeeding practices. Family support emerges as an essential factor in facilitating this practice. However, health and social challenges remain obstacles that need to be addressed to achieve the goal of meeting infants' nutritional needs through exclusive breastfeeding.

Based on the research findings, information was also obtained from triangulation informants regarding support for single-parent mothers who are practicing exclusive breastfeeding, as follows:

T1: "After hearing about the educational program my child participated in, I better understand the importance of exclusive breastfeeding. We strive to provide full support, whether by caring for the baby while she breastfeeds or encouraging her when she feels tired."

T2: "We always support our child's choice to provide exclusive breastfeeding. We try to help by doing household chores so she can focus more on breastfeeding her baby."

T3: "As parents, we feel it is important to support our child's decision. We teach other family members about the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding and why it is essential for the baby's health."

T4: "We try to provide both emotional and physical support. When our child struggles, we are always there to listen and help find solutions. Our support aims to keep her motivated in providing exclusive breastfeeding."

From these interviews, it is evident that support from family members, especially in terms of understanding and practical assistance, is crucial for single-parent mothers in fulfilling their infants' nutritional needs through exclusive breastfeeding. Family involvement creates a more positive and supportive environment for mothers in fulfilling their responsibilities.

## DISCUSSION

This research provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges faced by single-parent mothers in practicing exclusive breastfeeding. Health factors, family support, and social challenges emerged as the main obstacles affecting the success and consistency of this practice.



Health challenges, such as nipple pain or maternal health issues, can hinder the comfort and quality of exclusive breastfeeding. This is consistent with the findings of (Galindo-Sevilla et al., 2021), which indicate that physical factors of mothers are one of the challenges in implementing exclusive breastfeeding practices (Ceulemans et al., 2021). Additionally, inconsistent and uneven family support can affect a mother's motivation to continue this practice. Research by (Boccolini et al., 2023) demonstrates a relationship between a mother's employment status and family support concerning breastfeeding. Social challenges, such as societal views that are less supportive of exclusive breastfeeding practices, also play a significant role in facing these obstacles.

In response to these challenges, this research identifies key strategies that can assist single-parent mothers in practicing exclusive breastfeeding. Educational programs have proven to positively impact mothers' understanding of the importance of exclusive breastfeeding and help them address health challenges. (Revheim et al., 2023) also emphasizes the necessity of educational programs to ensure the success of exclusive breastfeeding initiatives.

Family support, particularly from other family members, plays a crucial role in helping mothers navigate these obstacles by providing the emotional and practical assistance needed. This study has elaborated on the complex challenges faced by single-parent mothers in practicing exclusive breastfeeding to meet their babies' nutritional needs (Puspitasari et al., 2022).

Through strategies such as educational programs and strong family support, we can enhance the success of exclusive breastfeeding and mitigate the impact of existing challenges. The implications of this research can serve as a foundation for developing more effective and in-depth interventions to support single-parent mothers in implementing optimal and sustainable exclusive breastfeeding practices (Puspitasari et al., 2022).

## CONCLUSION

In this research, aimed at exploring the efforts and challenges in providing exclusive breastfeeding for the nutritional needs of infants by single-parent women, we successfully identified the main challenges faced by mothers in the practice of exclusive breastfeeding. Health factors, family support, and social challenges emerged as crucial aspects influencing the success of this practice.

Health-related challenges, such as nipple pain or maternal health issues, can impact the comfort and consistency of exclusive breastfeeding. Family support, while important, is sometimes inconsistent and uneven, affecting the mother's motivation. Social challenges, such as societal views on exclusive breastfeeding practices, can also present significant barriers.



However, in addressing these challenges, this research also identifies important strategies employed by single-parent mothers. Educational programs have proven effective in enhancing mothers' understanding of the importance of exclusive breastfeeding and can help overcome health challenges. Family support, particularly from other family members, has a positive impact in overcoming these obstacles.

In conclusion, this research underscores the complexity of the challenges and strategies involved in providing exclusive breastfeeding for the nutritional needs of infants by single-parent women. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that includes health support, social support, and policies that promote breastfeeding. By implementing strategies such as educational programs and robust family support, we can assist single-parent mothers in maintaining exclusive breastfeeding practices more effectively, thereby ensuring optimal nutritional fulfillment for their infants.

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### **ETHICS OF STUDY**

Provide a 'Compliance with Ethical Standards' statement (for research involving human and/or animal subjects)

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

Authors should include a Conflicts of Interest declaration in their manuscript.

### **FUNDS**



## AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

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