

INFORMASI ARTIKEL

Received: February, 01 2026

Revised: February, 10, 2026

Available online: February, 25, 2026

at : <https://e-jurnal.iphorr.com/index.php/mchc>

The relationship between father's involvement in breastfeeding (father's involvement) and success

Nur Azizah*, Kamelia Sinaga, Rosmani Sinaga, Ribur Sinaga,
Aufa Risna, Ayumahara, Fatiyah, Furie Estie Honez

Mitra Husada Medan College of Health Sciences

Corresponding author: Nur Azizah. *Email: nurazizah@mitrahusada.ac.id

Abstract

Background: Failure to provide exclusive breastfeeding significantly increases the risk of infectious diseases in infants, particularly diarrhea, which can increase up to 30-fold. Globally, exclusive breastfeeding rates remain below established targets, including in Indonesia. In Aceh Province, exclusive breastfeeding coverage has not yet reached the national target of 80%. Various factors influence breastfeeding success, one of which is father involvement, which is currently considered the strongest external variable. Emotional and instrumental support from fathers has been shown to help regulate oxytocin levels and increase mothers' confidence in breastfeeding.

Purpose: To analyze the relationship between father involvement and the success of exclusive breastfeeding.

Method: This study used a quantitative method with a correlational design through a cross-sectional approach. The study was conducted from February to June 2025 in Pante Raya Village, Wih Pesam District. The study population was mothers with infants aged 7–12 months, with a purposive sampling technique of 30 respondents. The research instrument was a Likert-scale questionnaire to measure paternal involvement and an interview with infant feeding history to assess the success of exclusive breastfeeding. Data analysis was performed using the chi-square test with a 95% confidence level (p value = 0.05).

Results: Univariate analysis results showed that the majority of fathers had good levels of involvement (73.3%) and most mothers were successful in providing exclusive breastfeeding (80.0%). Bivariate analysis showed that good paternal involvement was followed by a high level of exclusive breastfeeding success (95%). Chi-square test results showed a p value of 0.002 ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: There is a significant relationship between father involvement and the success of exclusive breastfeeding in Pante Raya Village. Fathers' support is a crucial factor in increasing the success of exclusive breastfeeding.

Keywords: Exclusive Breastfeeding; Father's Involvement.

INTRODUCTION

Babies who are not exclusively breastfed are at a significantly higher risk of infectious diseases such as diarrhea. Studies show that the risk of diarrhea increases up to 30-fold in babies who are not exclusively breastfed compared to those who are exclusively breastfed. Furthermore, not exclusively breastfeeding is also associated with an increased risk of stunting, malnutrition, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and even death in children. According to global

estimates, optimal breastfeeding can prevent approximately 823,000 deaths of children under five years of age and approximately 20,000 deaths from breast cancer each year (Spillman, 2016; World Health Organization, 2023). Although the benefits of breastfeeding for health and cognitive development have been demonstrated through numerous studies, the practice of breastfeeding as recommended remains unevenly distributed in many countries. The

WHO recommends immediate initiation of breastfeeding within the first hour after birth, and exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life (World Health Organization, 2023).

Globally, the rate of exclusive breastfeeding remains relatively low. In 2021, only about 44% of infants aged 0 to 6 months received exclusive breastfeeding, far below the global target of 70% expected to be achieved by 2030 (Alhreashy, Alhammadi, Aljabar, Chokor, Hakami, Albalawi, & Nasreddine, 2025; UNICEF, 2023). In Indonesia itself, the trend of exclusive breastfeeding showed an increase during the period 2020 to 2022. Based on data from the Ministry of Health, the coverage of infants receiving exclusive breastfeeding in 2022 reached 72.04%, approaching the national target of 80% set for 2024 (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022). Based on the latest data, the coverage of exclusive breastfeeding in Aceh Province shows a positive increase. In 2023, the percentage of infants aged 0–6 months receiving exclusive breastfeeding reached 67.05%, an increase from 65.88% in 2022 and 66.66% in 2021. However, this figure is still below the national target of 80% set for 2024 (Aceh Provincial Health Office, 2023).

The problem of stunting remains a major focus of national health development until 2026. Failure to provide exclusive breastfeeding has been identified as a major risk factor for malnutrition in the first 1,000 days of life, which has long-term impacts on the quality of human resources (Safaah, Yunitasari, Efendi, Sunanita, & Suhartono, 2022; UNICEF, 2023). In the past five years, the health paradigm has begun to shift from focusing solely on mothers to a "breastfeeding team." The concept of Father's Involvement is now seen as the most powerful external determining variable in breastfeeding success, where fathers are no longer mere observers, but active supporters (Krikitrat, Sansiriphun, Abboud, Koenig, Park, & Patil, 2025).

Fathers' involvement in breastfeeding encompasses both emotional and instrumental dimensions. Fathers' participation in infant care and moral support have been shown to physiologically support the release of the hormone oxytocin in mothers, which plays a crucial role in breast milk production (Poljanec & Greif 2022). The psychological impact of husbands' involvement is significant; mothers who feel supported tend to have higher breastfeeding self-efficacy. Conversely, social isolation and the lack of a father's role often trigger anxiety that leads to premature cessation of breastfeeding (Coo, García, Mira, & Valdés, 2020).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design: This study uses a quantitative correlational design using a cross-sectional approach. This design was chosen to analyze the relationship between the independent variable, Father's Involvement, and the dependent variable, Exclusive Breastfeeding Success, with observations conducted at a single point in time. This study will be conducted in Pante Raya Village, Wih Pesam District, Bener Meriah Regency, from February to June 2025.

Population and Sample: The population in this study is all mothers with infants aged 7–12 months in Pante Raya Village, as recorded in the 2025 Posyandu baseline data. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling with specific inclusion criteria (such as mothers living with their husbands). **Questionnaire:** Used to measure father involvement: A Likert scale was used to measure husbands' participation in the emotional, instrumental, and informational aspects during breastfeeding and breastfeeding success, based on interviews and feeding history. Bivariate analysis uses the Chi-Square statistical test with a 95% confidence level (p value = 0.05) to determine whether there is a significant relationship between variables.

Nur Azizah*, Kamelia Sinaga, Rosmani Sinaga, Ribur Sinaga, Aufa Risna, Ayumahara, Fatiyah, Furie Estie Honez

Mitra Husada Medan College of Health Sciences

Corresponding author: Nur Azizah. *Email: nurazizah@mitrahusada.ac.id

RESEARCH RESULTS

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Father Involvement and Exclusive Breastfeeding Success

Variable	Results	P-value
Husband's Support (n/%)		0.002
Insufficient	3/10.0	
Enough	5/16.7	
Good	22/73.3	
Exclusive Breastfeeding (n/%)		
No	6/20.0	
Yes	24/80.0	

Table shows that the majority of respondents (20 respondents) categorized their fathers as having good involvement, with 6 (20.0%) having moderate involvement, and 4 (13.3%) having insufficient involvement. This indicates that most husbands in Pante Raya Village actively support breastfeeding mothers. Tabel it shows that most of the mothers at the research location have succeeded in providing exclusive breastfeeding to their babies, namely 24 respondents (80.0%), while 6 respondents (20.0%) have not succeeded in providing exclusive breastfeeding for 6 full months. The results of the Chi-Square test showed a p-value = 0.002 ($p < 0.05$), which means there is a significant relationship between father's involvement and the success of exclusive breastfeeding in Pante Raya Village. High father involvement is a major supporting factor that motivates mothers to continue breastfeeding consistently.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of statistical tests using the chi-square test, p-value = 0.002 ($p < 0.05$), which means there is a significant relationship between father's involvement and the success of exclusive breastfeeding.

The Impact of Psychological Support: High paternal involvement creates a stable emotional environment for mothers. Physiologically, the mother's sense of comfort and support stimulates the release of the hormone oxytocin, which plays a role in the milk let-down reflex. Conversely, a lack of paternal involvement can trigger stress in mothers, which inhibits milk flow. Therefore, the significant relationship in this study demonstrates the vital role of fathers in the biological aspects of breastfeeding (UvnäsMoberg, Ekström-Bergström, Buckley, Massarotti, Pajalic, Luegmair, & Dencker, 2020).

Fathers' Instrumental Role: Instrumental support, such as helping with household chores or looking after the baby while the mother rests, allows mothers to physically recover. In Pante Raya Village, actively involved fathers allow mothers to focus fully on

breastfeeding without the burden of excessive fatigue. This is key to the 95% breastfeeding success rate among fathers with good involvement (Ogbo, Akombi, Ahmed, Rwabilimbo, Ogbo, Uwaibi, & Agho, 2020).

Fathers as Gatekeepers: In the family structure of Bener Meriah Regency, husbands often play the primary role as decision-makers. Positive paternal involvement ensures that infant nutrition decisions remain focused on exclusive breastfeeding, unaffected by social pressures or myths about introducing complementary foods before six months of age. Fathers act as a shield against external influences that could undermine exclusive breastfeeding practices (Allotey, Flax, Ipadeola, Kwasu, Bentley, Worku, & Martin, 2022).

Access to Information and Education: The high level of father involvement at the research sites also reflects the success of health information dissemination at the village level. Fathers exposed to information about the benefits of breastfeeding tend to be more proactive in supporting mothers. The synergy between fathers' knowledge and concrete actions at

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home has proven effective in ensuring babies receive full nutritional support during the first six months.

Comparison with Other Research Findings These findings are supported), which also found that husband involvement significantly increases the chances of successful exclusive breastfeeding. The consistency of these findings across regions suggests that the phenomenon of father involvement is a universal public health trend, where male involvement is a catalyst for achieving maternal and child health targets (Simanjuntak, Novita, & Supardi, 2022). Intervention programs that involve fathers in breastfeeding activities and provide education on the importance of their role have shown positive results in increasing father involvement (Okelo, Onyango, Murdock, Cordingley, Munsongo, Nyamor, & Kitsao-Wekulo, 2022).

Implications for Infant Health: Given this significant relationship, the 80% exclusive breastfeeding rate in Pante Raya Village will directly reduce the risk of infectious diseases in infants. Optimal breastfeeding, thanks to fathers' support, helps strengthen the immune systems of infants in the region, which in the long term will contribute to a reduction in stunting rates in Bener Meriah Regency (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025).

Gender Role Transformation in Rural Areas: This research also captures the transformation of gender roles in rural areas. Fathers in Pante Raya Village are beginning to abandon the traditional view that breastfeeding is solely a woman's responsibility. This shift toward the role of "breastfeeding father" represents a very positive social advancement for the sustainability of future public health programs (Osio, 2022).

Based on the research results, researchers assume that father involvement is fundamentally linked to the success of exclusive breastfeeding. Researchers argue that husband involvement is not just physical assistance, but rather a manifestation of understanding and awareness of parenting responsibilities. Individuals who are actively involved tend to have a better understanding of lactation management than those who are passive, because direct interaction provides real-life experience in dealing with breastfeeding challenges. Researchers assume that this involvement is based on an emotional drive to create comfort for the mother.

Fathers who are highly involved will be more confident, less hesitant, and less afraid in making the decision to refuse supplementary feeding to their babies before six months of age. Actions taken by fathers such as providing oxytocin massage or helping with domestic work are carried out in accordance with the support procedures they are familiar with through health education. This is key for mothers to consistently provide exclusive breastfeeding without feeling psychologically burdened.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study showed that fathers with less involvement were 4 respondents (13.3%), sufficient involvement was 6 respondents (20.0%), and the majority of fathers with good involvement were 20 respondents (66.7%). Most mothers were successful in providing exclusive breastfeeding as many as 24 respondents (80.0%) and mothers who were unsuccessful in providing exclusive breastfeeding were 6 respondents (20.0%). The results of statistical tests showed a significant relationship between father involvement and the success of exclusive breastfeeding in with a p-value = 0.002.

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Mitra Husada Medan College of Health Sciences

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DOI: 10.56922/mchc.v4i11.2529