

Exclusive Breastfeeding: Its Benefits from Islamic and Scientific Perspective

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Abstract

Exclusive breastfeeding has become a pressing issue in modern society due to misconceptions and lack of awareness regarding its benefits. Despite its proven advantages, many mothers face challenges in adhering to exclusive breastfeeding practices. This study examines the advantages of breastfeeding from Islamic and scientific perspectives, focusing on its impact on maternal and infant health and its religious significance. Using a qualitative approach, data was gathered from books, journals, and academic articles. Recent and relevant sources were analyzed and categorized into key themes for this purpose. The findings highlight that breastfeeding provides optimal nutrition, protecting infants from illnesses such as respiratory and gastrointestinal infections and allergies. Exclusively breastfed infants display stronger immune systems and better cognitive development. From an Islamic perspective, breastfeeding is regarded as a maternal duty with spiritual rewards, fostering an emotional bond between mother and child. The Quran encourages mothers to nurse their children for up to two years, emphasizing its importance in Islamic teachings. This study aims to bridge the gap by integrating insights from Islamic teachings and scientific findings to promote a holistic understanding of exclusive breastfeeding. It also recommends exploring community education to raise awareness about the significance of exclusive breastfeeding among young mothers. By integrating scientific insights and religious guidance, a deeper understanding can enhance breastfeeding practices, benefiting both current and future generations. These efforts could address societal challenges and promote the well-being of mothers and children.

Keywords: IQ, Colostrum, Exclusive Breastfeeding, Breast Milk, WHO

Introduction

Breastfeeding is a natural process that has been practiced throughout the history of human civilization. It is the best way to biologically meet the nutritional needs of a newborn baby. The female breast, which is genetically and hormonally prepared to produce milk, provides

food rich in essential nutrients such as protein, fat, vitamins, and minerals. Breast milk also contains antibodies and bioactives not found in formula milk. However, despite extensive campaigns by health organizations, the rate of exclusive breastfeeding remains low globally, primarily due to societal pressures, misinformation, and inadequate support systems. This poses significant health risks for both infants and mothers, which necessitates further exploration of the issue.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for six consecutive months. The aim of this program is to ensure that babies receive all their nutrients and are protected from disease. Exclusively breastfed babies have a lower risk of gastrointestinal infections, respiratory diseases, and allergies, according to studies. This is due to the antibodies in breast milk, which protect the baby from harmful pathogens. Breast milk provides half or more of a baby's energy needs between six and twelve months and one-third of a child's energy needs between twelve and forty-four months. Breast milk is the best food for babies, safe, clean, and contains antibodies to strengthen the baby's immune system while fostering a close mother-child bond (WHO, 2020).

In addition, breastfeeding can lower the risk of obesity and diabetes in adolescence. Studies have shown that breastfeeding is associated with increased IQ development in children. Exclusive breastfeeding also helps mothers reduce the risk of breast and ovarian cancer, and they regain their pre-pregnancy weight faster. This shows that exclusive breastfeeding benefits both mother and baby (Zaharah, 2023). Understanding the significance of exclusive breastfeeding through both Islamic and scientific lenses is crucial to addressing misconceptions, encouraging adherence, and ensuring the well-being of mothers and infants. This study addresses these gaps by emphasizing the spiritual, emotional, and health benefits that breastfeeding offers.

Breastfeeding also forms a strong emotional bond between mother and child in terms of psychological development. Oxytocin and prolactin hormones are released by the mother during breastfeeding, which increases milk production and helps build feelings of affection between mother and child. Studies show that breastfeeding can lay a strong foundation for a child's future social and emotional development. In such situations, breastfeeding has a positive impact on the baby's physical development as well as their cognitive and emotional development (Else-Quest, Hyde, & Clark, 2003).

Islam also emphasizes the importance of breastfeeding. In the Quran, there are clear texts encouraging mothers to breastfeed their children, highlighting the importance of this process in a baby's life. The story of Prophet Moses (peace be upon him), who was separated from his mother but eventually returned to her for breastfeeding, underscores the importance of breastfeeding in one's life. It involves deep spiritual and emotional aspects in addition to physical needs. Allah Almighty says;

Breastfeed him, and when you fear for him, cast him into the river. (Surah al-Qasas 28:7).

Prophet Moses was returned to his mother by Allah, even though they had been separated. When Prophet Moses returned healthy and was able to be breastfed and cared for by his mother under the protection of Pharaoh himself, the promise was fulfilled. Qutb

(1983) states that this situation illustrates how Allah arranges every aspect of life with wisdom. Conversely, al-Sobuni (2001) emphasizes that breastfeeding is an important way to build a strong bond between mother and child. This story clearly demonstrates the importance of breastfeeding and how Allah orchestrates everything. It also teaches humanity about the role of breastfeeding in fostering love and a strong relationship between mother and child.

By understanding breastfeeding from a scientific perspective, we can see more clearly how important this practice is in shaping a healthy, strong, and balanced generation. Breastfeeding is not merely an act of providing nourishment but also a form of love that supports the holistic development of the baby, while enhancing the mother's well-being.

Literature Review

It is essential for babies to receive breast milk, whether from their biological mother or a wet nurse, for their physical and emotional growth. Breastfeeding does not necessarily need to be done by the biological mother, as wet nurses can also fulfill this role, especially when the biological mother is unable to do so. Even if the biological mother is not the one breastfeeding, wet nursing still provides significant benefits to the baby (Thorley, 2009). This reflects the efforts and support provided by society to ensure that all babies, regardless of family background, have access to optimal nutrition.

In cases where the biological mother is unable to breastfeed her child due to health problems or physical conditions, Wickes (1952) suggests that the services of a wet nurse should be employed. Additionally, in some cases where the biological mother passes away shortly after childbirth, leaving the baby without the necessary food source, the services of a wet nurse can provide the infant with breast milk rich in antibodies and nutrients needed for growth and development (Steven et al. 2009). Hence, breastfeeding by another woman not only saves the baby's life but also fosters strong social bonds within a community where women support one another in nurturing the next generation.

According to Zilal (2015), before the widespread availability of formula milk in the 20th century, humans relied entirely on breast milk as the ideal source of nutrition for newborns. In such situations, they had only three options: the baby could be breastfed by its biological mother, by another woman as a wet nurse, or risk losing milk. These three options underscore the importance of breastfeeding for a baby's survival, making it a highly valued practice in society. This also highlights the importance of ensuring that all babies receive the necessary nutrition to grow and develop healthily. While previous studies have extensively explored the health benefits of breastfeeding, there is limited research integrating these benefits with religious teachings, particularly from an Islamic perspective. This gap in literature highlights the need for a comprehensive study that examines both scientific and spiritual dimensions of exclusive breastfeeding.

Breast milk, which Allah has created to meet the nutritional needs of infants and protect them from infections, is unparalleled, according to Al-Najjar (2007). Breast milk offers numerous benefits that are not provided by formula or other artificial milk substitutes. According to Normah (2012), breast milk maintains an exceptional balance of benefits in appropriate proportions, making it ideal for the developing baby. Specific components in

breast milk protect infants from various diseases and infections. Breast milk is unique because it not only provides complete nutrition to the baby but also strengthens their immune system, making it an extraordinary source of nourishment for long-term health development.

Formula milk has become popular in the 21st century, especially among working mothers. However, according to Pomeranz et al. (2023), numerous studies have shown that formula milk does not provide the same benefits as breast milk. Despite this widely acknowledged evidence, formula milk manufacturers employ various strategies to attract customers, particularly young expectant and postpartum mothers. They achieve this by incorporating breastfeeding support and advice in their advertisements and product labels. This strategy demonstrates how marketing can influence mothers' perceptions and decisions, despite the fact that breast milk holds unparalleled advantages.

The content of colostrum is the primary difference between breast milk and formula milk. The first milk produced by the mother after giving birth, which has a distinctive yellow color, is known as colostrum, and this component is not present in formula milk. According to Talbert, Jones & Mataza, (2020), the rich antibodies and nutrients in this milk are crucial for newborns. It acts as a natural "vaccine," protecting them from various infections and diseases in the early stages of life. Colostrum also helps prepare the infant's digestive system to receive breast milk. Exclusive breastfeeding is often considered the best option for a baby's long-term health, as formula milk lacks sufficient colostrum to provide the necessary immunity and nutrition that newborns require.

According to Hinde & German (2012), colostrum is naturally produced by the mother's body after childbirth. It contains many essential nutrients, such as proteins, vitamins, and minerals, along with antibodies that help protect newborns from a variety of diseases. Colostrum is rich in immunoglobulins, playing a critical role in strengthening the infant's still-weak immune system during the early stages of life. Colostrum also aids the baby's digestion by speeding up enzyme production and preparing their digestive tract to handle breast milk. Therefore, colostrum is vital for the health of the baby and the development of their immune system.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach by conducting an in-depth analysis of literature on breastfeeding. Data is collected from academic articles, books, and journals discussing the benefits of breastfeeding from both Islamic and scientific perspectives. To ensure the accuracy of the information, the data collection process involves selecting the most current and relevant sources. The content and findings of these sources are evaluated and categorized into key themes related to the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding for the purpose of analysis. This methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of the importance of exclusive breastfeeding in modern society, grounded in evidence from both scientific and Islamic viewpoints.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- i. To address misconceptions about exclusive breastfeeding by highlighting its holistic benefits from scientific and Islamic perspectives
- ii. To investigate the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding from a scientific standpoint for both the health of the baby and the mother.
- iii. To analyze the awareness and acceptance of exclusive breastfeeding within society.

Research Findings

By examining the interplay between Islamic guidance and scientific findings, this study offers a unique perspective on exclusive breastfeeding, filling a gap in the literature that has often treated these areas in isolation.

Exclusive Breastfeeding

Many countries around the world, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have launched campaigns to promote exclusive breastfeeding. This is due to their understanding of the significant benefits that breast milk provides for a baby's development. Exclusive breastfeeding refers to the practice of feeding a baby solely with breast milk, without any additional food except for vitamins and medications (Couto, Dias, & Oliveira, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months after birth. During this period, infants should not be given water, supplementary milk, or complementary foods.

To support exclusive breastfeeding initiatives, the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) was launched by WHO in June 1991 in Ankara, Turkey. The primary goal of this program is to ensure that newborns receive the best possible nutrition and to encourage exclusive breastfeeding. BFHI aims to make hospitals more conducive to helping mothers breastfeed their infants. The program assists mothers in overcoming breastfeeding challenges and enhances the health and well-being of their babies by providing information, training, and support. BFHI anticipates that more babies will receive breast milk as their main source of nutrition through these efforts.

WHO has designated August 1st to August 7th as World Breastfeeding Week annually. According to Petri, Ian Darnton & Gonzales (1992), this week is celebrated worldwide to raise awareness about the benefits of breastfeeding. The celebration aims to encourage mothers to breastfeed with confidence. Throughout the week, numerous activities and programs are organized to provide mothers with the information and support they need to exclusively breastfeed.

Although many studies have highlighted the benefits of breastfeeding for both babies and mothers, the practice of exclusive breastfeeding remains low, particularly among working mothers. Returning to the workplace often presents challenges that impede breastfeeding. Employment-related issues are commonly cited as the primary reason why working mothers either struggle to breastfeed or stop breastfeeding prematurely. Some of the frequent complaints include limited break time, a lack of suitable spaces or environments for expressing milk, and short maternity leave, all of which make breastfeeding while working more difficult (Zaharah et al. 2023).

The Importance of Exclusive Breastfeeding

Exclusive breastfeeding is essential because breast milk contains the nutrients needed for a baby's growth and development. Colostrum, the first milk produced after birth, plays a crucial role for infants during this period. Colostrum is produced within the first five days after birth and is alkaline in nature, serving as the baby's first natural vaccine. It contains three times more protein than regular breast milk, making it an important source of protection against diseases and infections (Jackson et al. 2006). Therefore, it is vital for mothers to ensure their babies receive as much colostrum as possible in the first days of life.

Colostrum protects babies from various infections because it is rich in antibodies and white blood cells. It acts as a shield against diseases such as diarrhea, colds, and pneumonia. Mata & Wyatt (1971) recommend that mothers breastfeed their babies frequently during the first few days after birth to ensure the infant receives an adequate supply of colostrum. This stage is critical in building the baby's immune system and providing the necessary protection to adapt to a new environment. This wise step not only offers complete nutrition but also helps the baby develop resistance to illnesses.

In addition, colostrum contains several important elements such as immunoglobulins, lactoferrin, and fat-soluble vitamins and minerals like A, D, E, and K, which are essential for the baby's health. According to Sova Evie & Hasni (2022), these nutrients aid digestion and help prevent digestive issues, intestinal infections, respiratory infections, and diarrhea. Therefore, to ensure the baby receives all the benefits of colostrum, it is highly recommended to initiate exclusive breastfeeding within 30 minutes of birth. This step not only gives the baby a healthy start but also helps establish a strong bond between mother and child. With greater awareness and understanding of the importance of exclusive breastfeeding and colostrum, more mothers will be encouraged to keep their babies healthy.

Knowledge about exclusive breastfeeding ensures that babies are not given any food other than breast milk during the breastfeeding period. Abekah-Nkrumah et al. (2020) state that this practice brings significant benefits to both mother and child, promoting the baby's physical growth and boosting the immune system. Therefore, both mother and baby prefer exclusive breastfeeding. Babies should be exclusively breastfed for six months to ensure they receive optimal nutrition. With increasing awareness of the importance of exclusive breastfeeding and colostrum, it is hoped that more mothers will take the initiative to practice exclusive breastfeeding for their babies.

Breastfeeding from the Islamic Perspective

Islam, as a religion of mercy, places great emphasis on the issue of breastfeeding. In the Islamic family system, there is a specific chapter dedicated to this matter, known as "al-radha'ah." The chapter of al-radha'ah addresses the topic of breastfeeding with seriousness (Mohd Tamyas & Mat Hussin, 2020). Interestingly, Islam is the only religion that discusses breastfeeding in detail within its holy scripture. This includes numerous hadiths of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that emphasize the importance of breastfeeding. For mothers who wish to continue breastfeeding, both the Quran and the hadith encourage them to nurse their children from birth until the child reaches two years of age. The teachings conveyed by Prophet Muhammad through the Quran and hadith align with the global practice of exclusive breastfeeding. Allah SWT says:

وَالْوَالِدَاتُ يُرْضِعْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ حَوْلَيْنِ كَامِلَيْنِ لِمَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُتِمَّ الرَّضَاعَةَ وَعَلَى الْمَوْلُودِ لَهُ رِزْقُهُنَّ وَكِسْوَتُهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ لَا تُكَلَّفُ نَفْسٌ إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا لَا تُضَارَّ وَالِدَةٌ بِوَلَدِهَا وَلَا مَوْلُودٌ لَهُ بِوَالِدِهِ وَعَلَى الْوَارِثِ مِثْلُ ذَلِكَ فَإِنْ أَرَادَا فِصَالًا عَنْ تَرَاضٍ مِنْهُمَا وَتَشَاوُرٍ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا وَإِنْ أَرَدْتُمْ أَنْ تَسْتَرْضِعُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا سَلَّمْتُمْ مَا آتَيْتُم بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

The mothers shall give such to their offspring for two whole years, if the father desires to complete the term. But he shall bear the cost of their food and clothing on equitable terms. No soul shall have a burden laid on it greater than it can bear. No mother shall be Treated unfairly on account of her child. Nor father on account of his child, an heir shall be chargeable in the same way. If they both decide on weaning, by mutual consent, and after due consultation, there is no blame on them. If ye decide on a foster-mother for your offspring, there is no blame on you, provided ye pay (the mother) what ye offered, on equitable terms. But fear Allah and know that Allah sees well what ye do. (Surah al-Baqarah 2:233)

Therefore, it is ideal for mothers to breastfeed their children for a full two years, for those who wish to complete the breastfeeding period, although this also depends on their ability. According to al-Zuhaili (2018), both parents are not sinful if they decide to stop breastfeeding before the two-year mark, provided there is mutual consent and agreement between them. The cessation of breastfeeding should not occur if one party disagrees or if it is not in the best interest of the child.

As al-Sobuni (2001) states, "No one is burdened beyond their capacity." If a mother does not wish to breastfeed her child, she should not be placed under undue pressure to do so. Islam recognizes that there are circumstances where a mother may face challenges, whether physical, mental, or emotional, that could affect her ability to breastfeed. Parents may wean their child before the two-year period, as long as they mutually agree, particularly if the decision is made for the benefit of the child. In such cases, they are not considered at fault; instead, they demonstrate adaptability and concern for the individual's condition, highlighting that responsibilities must be aligned with the capability and well-being of all involved parties.

Ideally, the breastfeeding period is two years. However, Syamilah (2015) notes that breastfeeding may be stopped before this period under certain conditions. To reach this conclusion, both parents must come to a mutual understanding, carefully weighing the pros and cons of the decision and the best way to ensure their child's well-being. Islam obliges mothers to breastfeed their babies, ensuring the child benefits from breast milk if the mother is able to provide it. Fathers are also expected to support the mother by providing the necessary means for breastfeeding. This indicates that Islam views both mother and father as having a primary responsibility in providing breast milk for their child.

The two-year breastfeeding period is also mentioned in other Quranic verses. Breastfeeding not only provides the necessary nutrition for the baby, but it also fosters an emotional bond between mother and child, as this time is crucial for the child's physical and mental development. Allah SWT says:

وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهْنًا عَلَىٰ وَهْنٍ وَفِصَالُهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنِ اشْكُرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ إِلَيَّ الْمَصِيرُ

And We have enjoined on man (to be good) to his parents: in travail upon travail did his mother bear him, and in years twain was his weaning: (hear the command), "Show gratitude to Me and to thy parents: to Me is (thy final) Goal. (Surah Luqman 31:14).

According to al-Sayuti (n.d.), this verse emphasizes that humans must be dutiful to their parents. The mother has sacrificed herself by facing hardship after hardship during pregnancy and after giving birth. She breastfeeds her child until the age of two and cares for her child in a state of weakness and fatigue. All the difficulties faced by mothers demonstrate the enormity of their sacrifices to ensure their children are healthy. According to al-Zuhaili (2018), this verse clearly shows that the cessation of breastfeeding and the mahram relationship resulting from breastfeeding occurs until the child is two years old. This indicates the importance of parents giving attention and love to their children and appreciating their sacrifices for their children's future.

Mothers who are unable or cannot breastfeed their babies for any reason, such as due to the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), are encouraged to hire someone else to breastfeed their baby. Islam instructs the father to pay the wet nurse. In this way, Islam ensures that the child receives all their needs during the breastfeeding period. However, today, with the existence of many processed formula milk products, the role of wet nursing has become less significant (Syamilah Musa, 2015).

Similarly, according to al-Sobuni (n.d.), it is permissible for a baby to be breastfed by someone other than their own mother, and this is not considered wrong or sinful. However, the guardian must pay fairly. This shows how Islam cares for the rights and dignity of wet nurses and their babies. The command of Allah SWT states;

وَإِنْ تَعَاَسَرْتُمُ فَسْتَزْبِعْ لَهُ أُخْرَىٰ

But if you are in discord, then there may breastfeed for the father another woman. (Surah al-Talaq 65:6)

This, according to al-Sayuti (n.d.), shows the importance of breastfeeding in Islam. Al-Sobuni (2001) explains that a baby can be breastfed by a wet nurse if the mother is unable to do so for any reason. Allah's command for mothers to breastfeed their children for two complete years is a command for exclusive breastfeeding. After the child reaches the age of two, breastfeeding is not prohibited by Islamic law; however, after the child is two years old, breastfeeding does not make the wet nurse a mahram to the child, as explained by the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him):

لَا رَضَاعَ إِلَّا مَا كَانَ فِي الْحَوْلَيْنِ

There is no valid suckling except what occurs within the first two years. (Riwayat al-Daraqutni).

Although the Quran and hadith state that breastfeeding should continue for two years or more, this does not mean that breastfeeding must be exclusively practiced throughout this

period. The WHO (2011) indicates that exclusive breastfeeding should last for at least six months. Until the child is two years old or older, breast milk can be supplemented with other foods. The Islamic injunction to breastfeed illustrates the beauty and perfection of Allah SWT's teachings. As the Creator of mankind, Allah knows best what they need; thus, the legislation revealed to Prophet Muhammad SAW supports breastfeeding, which offers more benefits than formula or artificial products.

Historical facts also show that women among the nobility, such as in Egypt, Rome, and Greece, provided wet nurses for their children. At that time, breastfeeding had become one of the occupations due to the demand for wet nurse services. According to al-Mubarakfuri (1994), a similar situation occurred at the birth of our beloved Prophet Muhammad SAW. The Prophet Muhammad was nursed by Thuwaybah, the slave of Abu Lahab, along with her child Masruh after his own mother, Aminah, had breastfed her first child. Thuwaybah also nursed Abu Salamah bin 'Abd al-Asad al-Makhzumi and Hamzah bin 'Abd al-Muttalib. Masruh, Hamzah bin 'Abd al-Muttalib, and Abu Salamah bin 'Abd al-Asad al-Makhzumi were all foster siblings of Prophet Muhammad SAW.

Breastfeeding and Health

Breastfeeding plays a crucial role in the long-term health development of infants as it provides them with the best nutrition and also benefits breastfeeding mothers. Here are some studies that have been conducted on the relationship between breastfeeding and an individual's health:

Helps to Develop the Immune System

An infant's immune system is fully developed through breastfeeding. Breast milk contains immune cells, antibodies, and essential nutrients that help protect infants from diseases. Babies do not have a fully developed immune system in the first few months of life, and breastfeeding provides additional protection against infections. Breast milk contains nutrients such as lactoferrin and lactoglobulin that help combat viruses and bacteria. Breastfeeding also promotes the growth of healthy gut microbiota, which is vital for immune function. Therefore, breastfeeding is essential to ensure that infants receive the best immune protection. Amna et al. (2021) state that the development of a healthy immune system during the early stages of an infant's life is significantly influenced by breastfeeding. A child's vulnerability to diseases can be affected by the failure of breastfeeding.

Hanson (2004) also notes that breastfeeding provides complete food and nutrition by responding to the infant's daily and evolving needs, and it also offers active defense against diseases tailored to the unique circumstances of each baby. According to Vieira, Sharif, & Shoenfed (2018), breast milk plays a vital role in the development of the infant's immune system and can protect the baby from microbial infections while enhancing the infant's immune response to allergens and reducing vulnerability to immune-mediated disorders such as asthma, celiac disease, and multiple sclerosis. Breast milk provides all the nutrients necessary for infants as they grow, boosting their immune system to fight diseases.

The study by Plaza-Díaz et al. (2018) shows that the antibody immunoglobulin A (IgA) is present in breast milk, playing a crucial role in protecting infants from infections. This antibody helps build the infant's immune system, protecting them from viruses and bacteria

and increasing resistance to various diseases. Making breast milk the complete food for infants is one of Allah's wisdoms.

Reducing the Risk of Cancer

Both infants and mothers benefit greatly from breastfeeding. One of the advantages is the reduction in the risk of breast and ovarian cancer. Women who breastfeed their children have a lower risk of breast cancer compared to those who do not breastfeed. According to Renfrew et al. (2012), hormones such as prolactin found in breast milk stimulate milk production and control the growth of breast cells. Prolactin also helps inhibit the growth of abnormal cells and promotes the death of cells that could lead to cancer. Oxytocin, on the other hand, assists in milk production, maintains breast health, and reduces the risk of ovarian cancer. Both of these hormones help lower the risk of harmful cell changes. Thus, breastfeeding reduces the development of cancer cells. Renfrew further notes that breast cancer is found to be more prevalent among mothers who do not provide breast milk to their infants.

A study in the USA by Erica et al. (2017) indicated that breastfeeding can reduce the risk of breast cancer. The fact that Black women in the USA have lower breastfeeding rates compared to White women makes this finding even more intriguing, as Black women have nearly double the breast cancer rate compared to White women, highlighting a health disparity. Therefore, Erica emphasizes that increasing awareness and providing better support for Black mothers regarding breastfeeding is essential to reducing the risk of breast cancer.

Reducing the Risk of Asthma

Breastfeeding can reduce the likelihood of developing allergic diseases such as asthma and eczema. According to a study by Romieu (2000) involving 5,182 children in Brazil, it was found that children who were breastfed had a lower risk of developing asthma compared to those who were not breastfed. Thus, breast milk not only nourishes the infant but also protects them from various health issues. Dell (2001) studied 2,184 children in Canada aged between 12 and 24 months regarding the relationship between breastfeeding and infant health. He found that children who were breastfed had a lower risk of developing asthma compared to those who were not breastfed. These results indicate that breastfeeding can protect children or reduce the risk of asthma. Infants who receive formula before six months of age are more likely to experience asthma attacks compared to those who are breastfed (Jamil et al. 2022).

A study by Oddy (2002) in Australia involving 2,604 children examined the relationship between the risk of asthma and breastfeeding. The results showed that children who completely stopped breastfeeding before the age of four months were more likely to experience asthma attacks. These findings highlight the importance of breastfeeding in the early stages of an infant's life. This also aligns with WHO recommendations, which suggest exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months for every newborn. Following these guidelines can reduce the risk of asthma.

Reducing the Risk of Diarrhea

Diarrhea is a common issue that can affect infants and may lead to severe consequences. However, infants who receive breast milk are less likely to experience symptoms of diarrhea, intestinal infections, and respiratory infections compared to those who are fed formula. A

study conducted by the Child Malnutrition Prevention Center in Brazil demonstrated that breastfeeding can prevent deaths and harm caused by diarrhea in infants. The study found that infants not breastfed have a 25-fold higher risk of death due to diarrhea compared to those who are exclusively breastfed (Kuhn & Aldrovandi, 2010).

Research by Isyti'aroh, Siti Rofiqoh & Windha (2022) found that breast milk plays a crucial role in preventing health issues and infant mortality, including diarrhea. This is because breast milk contains colostrum, the first secretion from the breast after birth, which is rich in antibodies that protect infants from infections. Studies show a clear relationship between exclusive breastfeeding and a decrease in the incidence of diarrhea among infants. Research by Ruuska (1992) found that infants up to two years old with diarrhea and atopic eczema had lower levels of IgE compared to infants without diarrhea. However, higher levels of IgE are typically observed in infants experiencing acute diarrhea due to gastrointestinal (GI) allergies.

Infants are highly susceptible to diseases and infections in the first few months after birth; therefore, the passive immunity and probiotics found in breast milk provide significant benefits to infants. Infants receiving passive immunity from breast milk have the ability to combat infections such as *Shigella* and *Escherichia coli* (Norita, Nor'ainan & Zanariah, 2019). Thus, exclusive breastfeeding for more than six months can help enhance an infant's immunity, consequently reducing the risk of diarrhea.

Helping to Enhance Mind Intelligence

The study by Brown B.M. (2017) shows that breastfeeding provides benefits for the neurodevelopment of infants. This study involved 1,300 infants born at term, assessing two aspects of feeding: the duration of exclusive breastfeeding without formula and the duration of breastfeeding. The results indicated that longer breastfeeding, especially exclusive breastfeeding for six months, is associated with higher IQ scores during their school years. This finding supports the idea that breastfeeding can enhance children's verbal intelligence.

The study by Putri, et al. (2024) found that exclusive breastfeeding is crucial for brain development and cognitive function. This study also showed that exclusive breastfeeding provides the necessary nutrition for healthy brain growth, where neuron replacement, driven by the processes of synaptogenesis and apoptosis, is vital for cognitive function. The study supports the theory that exclusive breastfeeding is associated with improved cognitive levels. Therefore, exclusive breastfeeding affects neuron replacement by enhancing synaptogenesis and reducing apoptosis in the hippocampal dentate gyrus; both effects are recognized as beneficial for brain function. Thus, assisting exclusively breastfed infants is essential for enhancing their intelligence and cognitive abilities.

The study by Yao Zhang et al. (2022) demonstrates that breastfed infants have higher regional gray matter volume on MRI compared to formula-fed infants. Brain areas such as the left caudate nucleus, right temporal lobe (BA37), and right superior temporal gyrus (BA11, BA46) fall into this category. Additionally, breastfed infants show better brain activation on fMRI in the right superior temporal gyrus (BA41). At a similar age, breastfed infants exhibit better development and function of regional gray matter compared to formula-fed infants. Therefore, breastfeeding during the early postpartum period aids in the brain development of infants.

Reducing the Risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

Infants who do not receive breast milk have a higher risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) compared to those who are breastfed. According to Mathur & Dhingra (2014), breast milk provides protection to infants after birth against various viruses and bacteria. Breastfeeding is one of the most effective methods for reducing infant mortality. It is estimated that exclusive breastfeeding reduces the risk of death by 13% of all deaths in children under five years old, particularly in low-income countries. Breast milk meets the nutritional needs of infants while providing this protection and helps their immune systems fight diseases, making it essential for reducing premature deaths and increasing infant survival.

Hauck et al. (2011) state that breastfeeding can protect infants from SIDS, and this effect becomes more pronounced when breastfeeding is exclusive. A study by Pyrak, Cox, & Calza (2020) found that breastfeeding infants for at least two months can reduce the risk of SIDS, but the risk decreases further with prolonged breastfeeding. Therefore, this study recommends exclusive breastfeeding for six months, followed by continued breastfeeding while introducing solid foods for a year or more, to reduce the risk of SIDS. Thus, promoting exclusive breastfeeding should be accompanied by awareness campaigns highlighting its ability to reduce the risk of SIDS. This step can enhance community awareness about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for the safety of infants and mothers, as well as for long-term health.

Reducing the Risk of Bleeding

Excessive blood loss occurring within 24 hours after delivery is known as postpartum hemorrhage. Bleeding can occur for various reasons, such as tearing, retained placenta, or inadequate uterine contractions. To prevent complications, immediate monitoring and treatment are essential. A study conducted by al-Nuaimi et al. (2017) shows that breastfeeding provides various benefits, not only to infants but also to mothers. One of the main advantages of breastfeeding is its ability to reduce postpartum bleeding. The breastfeeding process helps the uterus contract more quickly, which in turn reduces the risk of excessive bleeding. Additionally, breastfeeding protects mothers from various other health issues, including postpartum depression, ovarian cancer, breast cancer, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes. Thus, breastfeeding is not only crucial for infants but also provides significant protection to mothers.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by combining Islamic teachings and scientific findings to address the challenges and misconceptions surrounding exclusive breastfeeding. By providing a dual perspective, it emphasizes the multifaceted importance of breastfeeding, paving the way for future research to build on these insights. Exclusive breastfeeding is crucial for infants as it is the most nutritious food for them. The colostrum present in breast milk immediately after birth provides essential nutrition and boosts the infant's immune system, aiding in their healthy growth process. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that infants receive only breast milk for the first six months of their lives. This underscores the importance of breast milk in building the health of infants. After six months, supplementary foods can be introduced, but breastfeeding can continue for an extended period. For over 1,400 years, Islamic law, as outlined in the Quran and Hadith,

has advocated for the practice of breastfeeding. This demonstrates that Islam prioritizes breastfeeding and emphasizes the importance of ensuring the well-being of infants.

To ensure that infants continue to benefit from breast milk, wet nursing can be arranged if the mother is unable to breastfeed her baby. This also enhances the emotional bond between the mother and child. The mother and family members who are committed to the well-being of the wet-nursed child have a positive social and familial impact. Breast milk is the best food for infants, providing complete nutrition and supporting their physical and mental development. This has been confirmed by numerous scientific studies. Additionally, research indicates the dangers faced by infants who do not receive breast milk, including long-term health issues. This highlights the critical importance of breastfeeding for health and nutrition.

Raising awareness about the benefits of breastfeeding is hoped to encourage more mothers to practice exclusive breastfeeding. Breastfeeding provides emotional and health benefits for both mothers and infants. We can ensure a healthier and more prosperous environment for future generations by continuing the practice of breastfeeding. By understanding the advantages from both scientific and Islamic perspectives, we can appreciate the vital role of breastfeeding in creating a healthy and balanced society.

Suggestions for Further Research

Further studies are needed to examine the effects of attitudes and knowledge on exclusive breastfeeding practices. Qualitative research is necessary to identify contributing factors to the failure to achieve the recommended breastfeeding levels. Surveys should be measured using various methods to avoid bias. Organizations that arrange breastfeeding activities and campaigns should pay attention to the dangers of not providing breast milk, the risks associated with formula feeding, and the impact of breastfeeding on family economics.

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