

Advocating Community Support for Exclusive Breastfeeding for Women Workers: A Critical Review

Dhita Nur Fitriyani Sukamto^{1*}, Ray Wagiu Basrowi²

^{1,2}Occupational Medicine Master Program, Department of Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine,
Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia,

*Correspondence: Dhitacutzz1991@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: With the increasing participation of women in the workforce, the dynamics of motherhood, especially for mothers who breastfeed, have undergone significant changes. These changes have had considerable implications, prompting an exploration of the challenges and advantages women workers face to balance breastfeeding and their professional commitments. This comprehensive review delves into complex views on breastfeeding among working women. The main objective is to explain the benefits, barriers, and relevant strategies related to breastfeeding in the workplace, with the aim of providing insight into forming an effective support system. The benefits of breastfeeding while working, including decreased absenteeism, increased productivity, and decreased worker turnover rates, are powerful incentives. However, various challenges hinder this practice, including inadequate research, inadequate support on the part of employers, logistical problems such as distance between home and workplace, lack of lactation facilities in the workplace, and decreased milk production during working hours. The discussion emphasized the need for a strong lactation promotion model, consisting of seven essential components, tailored to strengthen breastfeeding support in the workplace environment. To facilitate successful breastfeeding for working mothers, it is recommended to provide options such as part-time work or early return for mothers with babies under six months, coupled with important company provisions such as dedicated lactation support staff, educational materials, and peer groups, which are crucial. The integration of occupational physicians in the proposed lactation promotion is an important step toward achieving high breastfeeding rates among female workers.

Keywords- Breastfeeding, Working Moms, Workplace Support, Lactation Promotion, Women Workers

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INTRODUCTION

Today, more women are working outside the home than ever before ever before. This phenomenon is not only happening in developed countries, but also in developing countries such as Indonesia (Basrowi et al., 2018b). The integration of women into the world of work has been a transformative shift in the paradigm of society, reshaping the dynamics of family roles and responsibilities, particularly regarding the practice of motherhood and breastfeeding. As more women pursue professional careers and make significant contributions to a variety of industries, the intersection between work commitments and the demands of motherhood becomes increasingly complicated. This evolution has prompted a critical review of the challenges, benefits, and strategies that are important to support breastfeeding among female workers in the workforce.

Historically, people's perceptions of women's roles have mainly revolved around household responsibilities, including childcare and managing the household. However, recent decades have seen a huge surge in the feminization of the workforce, with women actively participating in various career fields, contributing their skills, expertise, and creativity to the professional arena. This evolution in the labor market, although it symbolizes progress and gender equality, has created a complex environment for working mothers, particularly those who are committed to continuing to breastfeed.

Breastfeeding is one of the essential components of a baby's health and offers a myriad of benefits that go beyond a child's physical nutrition (Kurniasih & Pasanti, 2023). Breastfeeding fosters a deep bond between mother and child, provides the baby with essential nutrients, strengthens the immune system, and contributes to the baby's health, significantly to overall well-being. However, women's evolving view of work presents unique challenges that may hinder the continued desire to breastfeed. Despite the health and social benefits, awareness about breastfeeding is still not sufficiently communicated in many communities, especially in modern countries. A woman who has chosen to breastfeed needs the right support and environment to begin and extend her breastfeeding journey (Cardoso et al., 2022).

The main challenge faced by working mothers is aligning work obligations with the physiological demands of breastfeeding. This delicate balance is often disrupted due to factors such as limited duration of maternity leave, inadequate lactation support in the workplace, absence of a conducive environment for milking and storing breast milk, and psychological impact caused by overriding the mother's professional commitments and responsibilities (HR, 2016). As a result, it raises curiosity to explore strategies and interventions conducive to maintaining breastfeeding among working women.

Despite the many challenges, the combination of breastfeeding and professional work provides many benefits, both for mothers and employers. Research has underscored the positive impact of breastfeeding in reducing maternal absenteeism, increasing employee productivity, and reducing turnover within organizations. These advantages reinforce the idea that supporting breastfeeding in the workplace

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is not only a mother's concern but also a company prerogative, creating a conducive environment that fosters maternal bonding and organizational productivity (Darus et al., 2023).

As the discourse on breastfeeding in the workplace has evolved, it has become clear that comprehensive support mechanisms are essential for successful integration into the professional environment. A deep understanding of the diverse challenges faced by working mothers, coupled with strategic approaches to overcoming these barriers, underscores the importance of this exploratory review (Basrowi et al., 2018a).

Therefore, this review begins a comprehensive exploration of the complex interaction between the professional world and the obligations of mothers in breastfeeding among working women. Through an in-depth analysis of the existing literature, empirical studies, and critical insights, this review seeks to illustrate the challenges, advantages, and strategies that are indispensable for fostering an environment conducive to sustaining breastfeeding practices among female workers. The ultimate goal is to provide actionable recommendations that combine individual and organizational initiatives, fostering a supportive ecosystem that empowers working mothers to sustain breastfeeding while developing their professional careers.

RESEARCH METHODS

Diverse exploration and analysis of breastfeeding practices among female workers requires a systematic approach to assimilate diverse perspectives, empirical evidence, and critical insights. This methodological framework includes a comprehensive review of existing literature, empirical studies, and official sources, using qualitative synthesis to distill key themes, challenges, and strategies related to breastfeeding in the workplace (Koslo, 2020).

The methodological approach undertaken in this review involved an extensive search in leading academic databases, including but not limited to PubMed, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and related institutional repositories (Husenbauer & Haddaway, 2020). Keywords such as "breastfeeding," "working mothers," "workplace support," "lactation promotion" and "women's employment" were used in various combinations to pick up scholarly articles, peer-reviewed journals, book chapters, and reports published within two decades. This time frame ensures a contemporary analysis while including important works underlying the historical evolution of this discourse.

Inclusion criteria in the literature selection include research focusing on breastfeeding practices among working women, challenges faced in maintaining breastfeeding while working, strategies used to support breastfeeding in the workplace, and empirical evidence highlighting the impact of breastfeeding on mothers and organizations. Peer-reviewed articles, key texts, government reports, and organizational guidelines relating to breastfeeding support in professional settings are included in this review.

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The collected literature must go through a rigorous screening process, which involves assessing relevance, credibility, and methodological rigor. Studies that align with the thematic scope, offer empirical evidence, and present insights into challenges, advantages, or strategies associated with breastfeeding in the workplace are retained for further analysis (Scott et al., 2019). Conversely, sources that do not have an empirical basis, relevance to the objectives of the review, or resilience methodology are excluded to ensure the quality and integrity of the synthesized information.

After conducting a comprehensive selection of related literature, a qualitative synthesis methodology is used to distill the main themes, challenges, and strategies described in the selected studies. This synthesis involves iterative processes in data extraction, thematic coding, and identification of repetitive patterns or different perspectives in the literature. This synthesis of iterative approaches, aims to encapsulate the breadth and depth of the challenges faced by working mothers, outline the benefits of breastfeeding support in the workplace, and describe effective strategies used to maintain breastfeeding practice amid professional commitment (Van Dellen et al., 2022).

The culmination of this methodological framework resulted in a comprehensive synthesis of the literature, providing a different understanding of the challenges, advantages, and important strategies needed to foster a supportive environment for breastfeeding among female workers. This qualitative synthesis offers insights that underlie subsequent discussions and the formulation of important recommendations to support breastfeeding practices in diverse work environments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Workplace Support for Breastfeeding

Workplace support for breastfeeding is an important factor influencing the success of continued breastfeeding among female workers. The integration of lactation support programs in the workplace not only provides benefits for working mothers but also provides significant benefits for employers and organizations. The research underscores the diverse benefits of creating a breastfeeding-friendly environment in the workplace. Reduced absenteeism is one of the main benefits, this is due to improved health outcomes of breastfed babies, thereby reducing the amount of maternal leave taken due to illness in children. In addition, research consistently highlights the positive impact of workplace support on employee productivity, as mothers who receive adequate breastfeeding support tend to show higher levels of job satisfaction and engagement. The correlation between breastfeeding support and increased productivity is an attractive incentive for companies to invest in comprehensive workplace lactation programs (Darus et al., 2023).

Creating an environment conducive to breastfeeding in the workplace requires a strategy that has many aspects. Companies have begun implementing a range of measures to accommodate breastfeeding mothers, from setting up dedicated lactation rooms equipped with privacy to offering flexible working

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hours conducive to breastfeeding. However, challenges remain, especially regarding the implementation of these measures across various industries and organizational structures. Small and medium-sized businesses may face constraints in the allocation of resources to set up lactation rooms or provide additional rest periods for milking, unlike larger companies that have broader organizational resources and capabilities.

The role of organizational policy cannot be underestimated in facilitating successful breastfeeding in the workplace. Companies that implement supportive policies, such as extending maternity leave, providing flexible work arrangements, and implementing breastfeeding-friendly workplace guidelines, show higher rates of sustainable breastfeeding among their employees.⁹ In addition, the integration of educational programs, workshops, and access to lactation consultants further enhances the effectiveness of workplace support initiatives. This educational pathway not only benefits working mothers but also fosters a culture of mutual understanding and support among colleagues and supervisors, thus creating an inclusive environment conducive to breastfeeding (Darus et al., 2023).

However, despite tangible gains and emerging support initiatives, gaps remain in the widespread implementation of breastfeeding-friendly policies across industries and geographic regions. Cultural norms, lack of awareness, and varying levels of commitment from employers pose challenges to the universal implementation of support measures. To bridge this gap, collaborative efforts between governments, employers, health professionals, and advocacy groups are essential. Policymakers play an important role in enacting laws mandating measures that support breastfeeding in the workplace, ensuring equality for all working mothers in various industries and socioeconomic strata (Darus et al., 2023).

In conclusion, the integration of breastfeeding support programs in the workplace shows a win-win situation, benefiting both working mothers and employers. However, there is still an urgent need for more comprehensive and universally applicable policies, coupled with concerted efforts to raise awareness and foster a supportive culture within organizations, which will ultimately create an environment where working mothers can integrate their professional roles and motherly roles seamlessly.

Impact of Breastfeeding Practices on Infant Nutritional Status

The impact of breastfeeding practices on infant nutritional status is an important focal point in assessing the gap between working and non-working mothers. Research comparing the nutritional outcomes of infants who experienced different breastfeeding patterns in early infancy—particularly between working mothers and mothers dedicated solely to childcare—provided valuable insight into the developmental trajectories of these children. Research often investigates anthropometric indices, including weight gain, body length, and head circumference, as key parameters for measuring the nutritional adequacy of breastfed infants.

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Comparative analysis often reveals interesting trends between the two groups. Although both working and non-working mothers may begin breastfeeding, there are variations in the duration and exclusivity of breastfeeding (Choubey, 2023). Research often highlights that non-working mothers tend to maintain exclusive breastfeeding over a longer period compared to working mothers. The reason behind this gap may be due to the challenges faced by working mothers in maintaining exclusive breastfeeding due to work-related commitments, limited rest periods, and the absence of a conducive environment for milking and storing breast milk at work.

Anthropometric assessments often show differences between the two groups, especially in terms of growth parameters such as weight and length. Research often notes that babies born to non-working mothers tend to have a slightly higher average weight and length than babies born to working mothers (Choubey, 2023). While these gaps may not be particularly stark, they can be indicators of potential influences on infant nutritional status based on the mother's occupation and subsequent breastfeeding practices.

However, this comparison needs to be done carefully, considering that many factors affect the nutritional status of babies apart from breastfeeding practices. Socio-economic factors, access to health services, maternal diet, and overall parenting environment all play interrelated roles in shaping infant nutritional outcomes (Choubey, 2023). Therefore, while the practice of breastfeeding working and non-working mothers provides valuable insights, they represent only one thing. aspects of the complex interaction of factors affecting infant nutrition.

In addition, emphasizing comparisons between working and non-working mothers may inadvertently reinforce certain stigmas or misconceptions about working mothers' ability to ensure optimal infant nutrition (Choubey, 2023). Conversely, a different understanding of the challenges working mothers face in balancing professional commitment with breastfeeding is important for designing supportive strategies that accommodate their needs without compromising infant health.

In conclusion, research on the impact of breastfeeding practices on infant nutritional status between working and non-working mothers explains important differences in breastfeeding duration, exclusivity, and potential differences in growth parameters. However, it is important to approach these findings with an awareness of the multifaceted influence on infant nutrition and recognize that breastfeeding practices represent only one aspect of the broader parenting context that shapes infant health outcomes. This understanding is critical in formulating inclusive strategies that support working mothers in maintaining breastfeeding while maintaining optimal infant nutrition.

Community Support and Exclusive Breastfeeding for Women Workers

Community support and workplace environmental support play an important role in determining the success of exclusive breastfeeding practices among female workers. This subsection delves into the

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intricate interrelationships between public policies, corporate initiatives, and their impact in creating an environment conducive to sustainable breastfeeding among working mothers. Government regulations and company involvement have a significant influence in shaping views of breastfeeding support in the workplace.

One of the main factors influencing the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among female workers is the length of maternity leave stipulated by government regulations. Research consistently shows that a longer duration of maternity leave is positively correlated with longer exclusive breastfeeding. Countries or territories that offer longer paid maternity leave show higher rates of continuous exclusive breastfeeding for working mothers compared to countries with shorter or no leave policies.¹⁰ These findings underscore the enormous influence government regulations have on providing basic support structures for working mothers to keep exclusive breastfeeding.

In addition, the involvement of companies and employers in implementing support measures is also an important factor in facilitating the success of breastfeeding for female workers. Workplace policies and regulations have a direct impact on the ability of working mothers to continue breastfeeding after returning to work. Flexible working hours dedicated breastfeeding spaces, on-site childcare facilities, and a supportive corporate culture contribute significantly to maintaining exclusive breastfeeding among working mothers. However, the implementation of these measures varies widely between industries, with large companies often having more resources to implement comprehensive breastfeeding-friendly policies than smaller companies (Rosida et al., 2020).

Government regulations in many countries often require workplace support for breastfeeding. For example, specific provisions in government regulations require companies to enter into agreements with workers or unions to provide adequate facilities and time for breastfeeding or milking.¹⁰ This legal framework provides the foundation for companies to integrate support measures for breastfeeding into their organizational structures.

In assessing the impact of community support on exclusive breastfeeding among working mothers, research often highlights a direct correlation between the magnitude of community support, workplace initiatives, and the success of exclusive breastfeeding. Areas or industries where companies are actively involved in creating supportive environments and aligned with government regulations tend to show higher rates of exclusively sustainable breastfeeding among female workers (Rosida et al., 2020).

However, there are still challenges in implementing these regulations and initiatives universally. Varying levels of compliance, lack of enforcement mechanisms, and cultural gaps pose barriers to ensuring consistent support for breastfeeding in the workplace in different environments (Rosida et al., 2020).

In conclusion, the relationship between community support, government regulations, and workplace initiatives plays an important role in determining the success of exclusive breastfeeding among

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female workers. Strong government regulations and proactive involvement from companies pave the way for an enabling environment to support working mothers to continue breastfeeding upon returning to work. However, comprehensive and consistent implementation of these measures remains a challenge, requiring concerted efforts from policymakers, employers, and advocacy groups to ensure broad support for working mothers in maintaining exclusive breastfeeding.

Implementation of Successful Breastfeeding in the Workplace

The sustainability of successful breastfeeding practices among working mothers depends on a variety of factors, from personal intentions to support structures in the workplace. This subsection explores the factors that influence the successful adoption of breastfeeding practices in the workplace, emphasizing the critical role of maternal readiness and organizational support (Basrowi et al., 2023).

At the core of successful breastfeeding in working mothers is the mother's intention to breastfeed. Research consistently highlights maternal determination and intention to breastfeed as important factors in maintaining breastfeeding after returning to work. Mothers who have strong determination and a proactive approach to overcoming challenges tend to show higher rates of continuing to breastfeed despite professional commitment (Basrowi et al., 2023). This underscores the importance of maternal readiness and education in equipping working mothers with the tools and strategies needed to navigate the work-by-nursing balance.

Preparation and planning are also important pillars in facilitating successful breastfeeding in the workplace. Implementing a strategic breastfeeding plan before returning to work—which includes components such as milking and storing milk, establishing a pumping schedule, and understanding workplace policies—empowers mothers to integrate breastfeeding into their work routines seamlessly (Basrowi et al., 2023). Stress management and positive attitudes toward breastfeeding contribute further to the continued success of breastfeeding practices among working women.

In addition, the provision of adequate support from the work environment is an important factor. The availability of breastfeeding-friendly facilities, such as dedicated lactation rooms equipped with privacy measures and hygienic conditions, significantly affects mothers' ability to milk comfortably during working hours (Basrowi et al., 2023). In addition, a supportive corporate culture that values and accommodates the needs of breastfeeding mothers plays an important role in encouraging sustainable breastfeeding practices. Companies that provide flexible working arrangements, understanding supervisors, and peer support groups will create an environment conducive to continued breastfeeding among female workers.

However, the implementation of these measures faces challenges, especially in small companies or those with limited resources. Small and medium-sized businesses may face obstacles in providing extensive lactation support due to limited resources or organizational capabilities. This gap often leads

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to varying experiences among working mothers, with some mothers benefiting from comprehensive support at work while others face obstacles balancing work and breastfeeding (Basrowi et al., 2023).

In conclusion, the successful implementation of breastfeeding practices among working mothers requires a multifaceted approach that includes maternal readiness, workplace support, and a conducive organizational culture. A proactive approach to preparing for breastfeeding before returning to work coupled with strong support mechanisms in the workplace is key to maintaining breastfeeding amid professional commitment. Nonetheless, widespread implementation of these support measures across a range of organizational environments remains a challenge, underlining the need for universal and inclusive strategies to support all working mothers in their breastfeeding journey.

CONCLUSION

Exploration of breastfeeding practices among female workers underscores the intricate interplay between maternal responsibility and professional commitment. The challenges faced by working mothers in sustaining breastfeeding highlight the need for holistic and inclusive strategies that include maternal readiness, workplace support, public policy, and a global perspective. The merging of intention and personal readiness appears as a fundamental aspect in the successful continuation of breastfeeding among working mothers. Mothers' determination, education, and planning play an important role in empowering women to face the challenges of balancing work and breastfeeding. Maternal readiness equips women with the knowledge and strategies necessary to integrate breastfeeding into their professional lives. Support structures in the workplace serve as important pillars in facilitating successful breastfeeding practices among female workers. Adequate workplace policies and provisions, including lactation rooms, flexible working hours, and a supportive corporate culture, create an environment conducive to sustainable breastfeeding. However, the implementation of these measures faces challenges, especially among small businesses or regions with inadequate policies. Government regulations and public support mechanisms significantly affect the breastfeeding experience for working women. Longer and more flexible maternity leave policies, as well as supportive workplace initiatives, have a direct impact on working mothers' ability to maintain exclusive breastfeeding. However, gaps in cultural policies and attitudes globally underscore the need for strategies that are universally applicable, culturally sensitive, and comprehensive. In conclusion, the successful continuation of breastfeeding practices among working women requires joint efforts from various stakeholders. Empowering working mothers to navigate the balance between professional obligations and motherly duties requires a multifaceted approach that includes personal readiness, workplace support, supportive policies, and a global understanding of diverse cultural contexts. Only through inclusive and comprehensive strategies can we ensure that all working mothers receive the support necessary to integrate breastfeeding into their professional lives, thereby improving the health and well-being of mothers and babies around the world.

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