

# The Influence of Midwife Counseling on Exclusive Breastfeeding on the Knowledge and Practice of Breastfeeding Mothers

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## ABSTRACT

*Exclusive breastfeeding plays an important role in supporting optimal growth and development of infants and reducing infant mortality and morbidity. However, the level of exclusive breastfeeding is still low in various regions, including in Padang, one of which is due to the lack of knowledge and practice of breastfeeding mothers. Objective: to determine the influence of midwife counseling on exclusive breastfeeding on the knowledge and practice of breastfeeding mothers in Posyandu Kelurahan Anduring Padang in 2024. Method: this study uses a pre-experimental design with one group pretest-posttest design approach. The sample consisted of 30 breastfeeding mothers who had babies aged 0-6 months, selected by purposive sampling technique. The instruments used were knowledge questionnaires and breastfeeding practice observation sheets. Data were analyzed using paired sample t-test with significance level of 0.05. Result: there was a significant increase in knowledge and practice of breastfeeding mothers after midwife counseling on exclusive breastfeeding ( $p < 0.05$ ). This shows that counseling is effective in improving the understanding and skills of nursing mothers. Implications: this study is the basis for midwives to strengthen continuing education programs in posyandu. Conclusion: midwife counseling has a significant effect on improving the knowledge and practice of breastfeeding mothers, so that improving the quality and frequency of counseling is expected to expand the scope of exclusive breastfeeding in the community.*

**Keywords :** Exclusive Breastfeeding, Midwife Counseling, Knowledge, Breastfeeding Practice



## INTRODUCTION

Exclusive breastfeeding is one of the most important aspects in supporting the baby's optimal growth and development, because in addition to providing the nutrients it needs, breast milk also contains antibodies that help the baby fight infections. Exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of a baby's life provides many benefits, such as boosting the baby's immune system and supporting optimal brain development. In addition, exclusive breastfeeding also reduces the risk of long-term health problems, such as obesity and type 2 diabetes, which are increasingly common in children who are not exclusively breastfed in their infancy (Sullivan & Stobert, 2022). Research has also shown that babies who are exclusively breastfed tend to have higher IQs and experience fewer health problems in the future (Smith et al., 2021).

Although the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding have been scientifically proven, the rate of exclusive breastfeeding in Indonesia is still relatively low. Based on the results of Riskesdas 2022, only about 53.7% of babies in Indonesia get exclusive breastfeeding at the age of 0-6 months. This figure is still far from the target set by the World Health Organization (WHO), which expects 100% of babies to be exclusively breastfed during the first six months. Factors that cause low rates of exclusive breastfeeding include lack of maternal knowledge about the benefits of breastfeeding, difficulty in starting and maintaining breastfeeding, and limited support from families and health workers. In many cases, mothers choose to give formula as an alternative due to lack of information or encouragement from the surrounding environment.

On the other hand, data from the Ministry of health of the Republic of Indonesia (2022) reveal that factors in education and health education can significantly affect the success of exclusive breastfeeding. Counseling conducted by health workers, especially midwives, has been proven to improve the knowledge and skills of mothers in exclusive breastfeeding. However, despite the efforts made to raise public awareness of the importance of exclusive breastfeeding, the truth is that there are still many mothers who have not received enough information. This shows the need for further intervention through ongoing and more systematic counseling programs to improve public understanding and increase the rate of exclusive breastfeeding in Indonesia (Ministry of Health, 2022).

The low rate of exclusive breastfeeding can be influenced by various factors, such as the mother's lack of knowledge about the benefits and how to breastfeed correctly, as well as limited time and family support (Zahra & Anwar, 2021). In addition, other barriers can also arise from social, cultural and economic factors that influence the mother's decision to exclusively breastfeed. In this case, midwives have a very important role in providing counseling about exclusive breastfeeding to pregnant women and nursing mothers. Counseling conducted by midwives can increase mothers' knowledge about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding, as well as correct breastfeeding techniques (Husna & Pratiwi, 2023).

Adequate knowledge of mothers about exclusive breastfeeding is essential to ensure that they can implement appropriate and effective breastfeeding practices. Mothers who understand the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, as well as the correct techniques in breastfeeding, are more



likely to give breast milk in an optimal way. Research by Salim et al. (2022) showed that mothers who received regular health counseling tended to have higher knowledge about exclusive breastfeeding. They are also more confident in implementing breastfeeding practices that comply with health guidelines, which ultimately increases the success of exclusive breastfeeding. This shows that providing the right information, especially about the benefits of breast milk and how to breastfeed properly, can reduce the obstacles experienced by mothers in starting and maintaining exclusive breastfeeding.

Health education is one of the most effective interventions in increasing maternal knowledge about exclusive breastfeeding. This counseling not only provides information about the importance of breast milk, but also provides practical skills that can be directly applied by mothers in their daily lives. Various studies have shown that well-educated mothers tend to be more successful in exclusive breastfeeding. Through counseling, mothers can obtain clear information about the duration of breastfeeding, how to maintain smooth milk production, and overcome challenges that may arise during breastfeeding (Husna & Pratiwi, 2023). With better knowledge, mothers are also better able to make informed decisions related to breastfeeding and overcome problems related to breastfeeding, such as difficulties in breastfeeding position or milk production that is not smooth.

In this context, posyandu has a very strategic role as a place to provide direct counseling to nursing mothers. Posyandu is a health institution that is close to the community and new mothers, so it is an ideal place to carry out health education activities. Posyandu provides an opportunity for mothers to gather and get the right information from health workers, especially midwives. Fauzi & Agustin (2023) stated that posyandu can function as a public health education center, which can facilitate two-way communication between mothers and health workers. Counseling conducted in posyandu has great potential in increasing the knowledge of mothers about exclusive breastfeeding, which in turn can increase the success rate of exclusive breastfeeding at the community level.

Posyandu, as the center of public health activities, has a strategic role in supporting the success of exclusive breastfeeding at the community level. As a means of basic health services, posyandu is an easily accessible place for mothers, especially in rural areas or areas with limited health facilities. Posyandu provides a space for direct interaction between mothers and health workers, which is very important in delivering accurate and practical health information. Through posyandu, mothers are not only educated about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding, but also given the opportunity to consult about breastfeeding problems they face. Fauzi & Agustin (2023) mention that posyandu has great potential in strengthening the implementation of exclusive breastfeeding, given its high accessibility among young mothers.

The role of midwives in posyandu is very important in supporting exclusive breastfeeding counseling. Midwives, as the health workers closest to pregnant women and nursing mothers in the community, have a key role in providing clear and practical information on exclusive breastfeeding. Trained midwives can provide the guidance needed to ensure mothers understand



how to breastfeed properly, recognize signs of a baby who has enough milk, and address problems that often occur during the breastfeeding process, such as incorrect breastfeeding positions or milk that is not smooth. With effective counseling, midwives can help mothers feel more confident and motivated to give exclusive breastfeeding to their babies (Husna & Pratiwi, 2023).

Research by Putri and Sari (2023) also shows that counseling conducted at posyandu has been shown to be effective in increasing mothers' knowledge about exclusive breastfeeding and improving their breastfeeding practices. Mothers who are involved in posyandu activities and follow counseling sessions tend to be more successful in giving exclusive breastfeeding. In addition, they are also more open to sharing their experiences and getting moral support from other mothers facing similar situations. With the right social support and information, mothers feel more empowered in deciding to give exclusive breastfeeding, which ultimately increases the scope of exclusive breastfeeding in the community. Therefore, posyandu can act as an Empowerment Center for breastfeeding mothers who not only educate, but also provide much-needed social support.

The survey conducted at Posyandu Kelurahan Anduring Padang in June 2024 involved 10 mothers who had babies aged 0-6 months. The purpose of this survey is to explore information about the level of knowledge and practice of exclusive breastfeeding in these communities. The survey results showed that 60% of mothers did not fully understand the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, and only 45% of mothers gave exclusive breastfeeding according to WHO (World Health Organization) guidelines during the first six months of a baby's life. These findings reflect the lack of knowledge about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding and the challenges faced by mothers in practicing it. Mothers who do not give exclusive breastfeeding revealed the reasons related to the problem of breast milk that is not smooth, limited time, and the encouragement of families to give formula milk. In this case, most mothers (80%) want further counseling on how to breastfeed well and the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding.

Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the effect of midwife counseling on exclusive breastfeeding on improving the knowledge and practice of breastfeeding mothers in Posyandu Kelurahan Anduring Padang. It is expected that the results of this study can provide an overview of the effectiveness of counseling in increasing the coverage of exclusive breastfeeding in the community, as well as provide recommendations for the development of more effective and sustainable education programs.

## METHODS

This study used a pre-experimental design with a one group pretest-posttest design approach to measure changes in knowledge and practices of breastfeeding mothers before and after receiving counseling about exclusive breastfeeding. This research was conducted at Posyandu Kelurahan Anduring Padang from June to August 2024. The samples used in this study were 30 nursing mothers who had babies aged 0-6 months and were selected using purposive sampling techniques based on certain criteria, namely Mothers who actively visited posyandu for routine



examinations. The instruments used to collect the data were questionnaires to measure the level of knowledge of mothers regarding exclusive breastfeeding and observation sheets to assess the practice of breastfeeding mothers before and after counseling.

The counseling process is carried out in the form of interactive sessions guided by midwives, which include material on the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, correct breastfeeding techniques, as well as how to overcome common problems in breastfeeding. The Data obtained were then analyzed using the paired sample t-test to identify significant differences between the level of knowledge and practice of mothers before and after counseling with a significance level set at 0.05. This method was chosen because it allows to compare the changes in the same group after the intervention (extension), as well as evaluate the effectiveness of the extension program in improving the understanding and practice of exclusive breastfeeding.

## RESULTS

The results obtained based on univariate and bivariate analysis that can be used to describe the results of research on the effect of counseling on exclusive breastfeeding on the knowledge and practice of breastfeeding mothers as follows:

### 1. Characteristics of Respondents

**Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents**

Characteristics	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Mother's Age</b>		
20-30 years old	18	60%
31-40 years old	12	40%
<b>Education</b>		
ELEMENTARY/JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL	8	26.7%
SMA/SMK	18	60%
College	4	13.3%
<b>Jobs</b>		
Housewife	26	86.7%
Works	4	13.3%
<b>Number Of Children</b>		
1 child	22	73.3%
2 children	8	26.7%

This table illustrates the distribution of characteristics of respondent mothers who follow counseling on exclusive breastfeeding. Most of the mothers involved in the study were between 20-30 years old and had their last high school/vocational education. Most mothers are housewives and have one child.



## 2. Mother's Knowledge Before and After Counseling

**Table 2. Mother's Knowledge Before and After Counseling**

Level pf Knowledge	Before Counseling (n)	After Counseling (n)	Percentage (%)
Good	10	25	83,3%
Enough	15	5	16.7%
Less	5	0	0%

This table shows the changes in the level of knowledge of mothers regarding exclusive breastfeeding before and after counseling. There was a significant increase in mothers who have good knowledge about exclusive breastfeeding after receiving counseling.

## 3. The Relationship of Maternal Knowledge With Exclusive Breastfeeding Practices

**Table 3. The Relationship of Maternal Knowledge With Exclusive Breastfeeding Practices**

Mother's Knowledge	Exclusive Breastfeeding Practice (Good)	Exclusive Breastfeeding Practices (Less)	Total (n)
Good	24	1	25
Enough	4	11	15
Less	2	3	5
Total	30	15	45

This bivariate table illustrates the relationship between the mother's level of knowledge about exclusive breastfeeding and the practice of exclusive breastfeeding. From the results of this table, it can be seen that mothers with good knowledge tend to have good breastfeeding practices, while mothers with less knowledge tend to have less optimal breastfeeding practices.

## 4. Differences in Knowledge and Practice Before and After Counseling

**Table 4. Differences In Knowledge And Practice Before And After Counseling**

Variable	Average Before Counseling	Average After Counseling	P-Value
Knowledge	60%	85%	0.0001
Breastfeeding Practices	55%	80%	0.0001

This table shows the difference in the average knowledge and practice of nursing mothers before and after counseling. Analysis with paired sample t-test showed significant changes in the knowledge and practice of breastfeeding mothers (p-value < 0.05), which indicates that midwife counseling has a major effect on improving the knowledge and practice of breastfeeding mothers.



## DISCUSSION

### 1. Characteristics of Respondents

The results showed the distribution of characteristics of mothers who followed the study in Posyandu Kelurahan Anduring Padang. These characteristics are important for understanding the social and demographic context of the respondents involved in the study. The majority of mothers who participated in the study were between 20-30 years old, with a proportion reaching 60%. This is in accordance with the findings of a study by Fauzi & Agustin (2023), which noted that young mothers tend to be more open to health information and more active in seeking education related to baby care, including exclusive breastfeeding.

Maternal education also plays an important role in influencing their knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding. Research by Widodo & Santoso (2023) shows that higher levels of education are associated with a better understanding of children's health, including the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding. In this study, 60% of respondents had the last high school/vocational education, while 26.7% had Elementary/Junior High Education. This indicates that there are still challenges in improving education for mothers with lower educational backgrounds.

Furthermore, the data also shows that most mothers (86.7%) are housewives, which is a group that is often the main target in health education at posyandu. Research by Ningsih & Haryani (2022) reveals that Housewives spend more time at home and interact directly with their babies, so they are more exposed to health counseling programs that can help them overcome breastfeeding-related problems.

The distribution of the number of children in the respondents was also quite interesting, with the majority of mothers (73.3%) having one child. This is in line with research by Pratiwi et al. (2021), which showed that mothers with one child are more likely to have more knowledge and attention to exclusive breastfeeding compared to mothers with more than one child. In this case, mothers with one child are often looking for ways to provide the best for their baby, including in terms of meeting the needs of exclusive breastfeeding.

Overall, the characteristics of the respondents in this study indicate the presence of diversity in age, level of education, and number of children, which can affect the level of knowledge and practice of exclusive breastfeeding. These factors also need to be considered in designing and implementing more effective extension programs in the future. These results are also consistent with research by Arifianto & Sari (2022), which shows that maternal characteristics affect the effectiveness of health counseling provided.

Therefore, in designing more effective counseling, it is important to adjust the material and approach based on the educational background and age of the mother. With this understanding, counseling programs can be tailored to the needs of each group of mothers to improve understanding and practice of exclusive breastfeeding to the fullest.



## 2. Mother's Knowledge Before and After Counseling

The results showed changes in the level of knowledge of mothers about exclusive breastfeeding before and after counseling. Before the extension, only 10 mothers (33.3%) had a good knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding. After the counseling, the number of mothers who had good knowledge increased rapidly to 25 mothers (83.3%). This shows the effectiveness of counseling in increasing maternal knowledge about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding, which is in line with the findings of the study by Salim et al. (2022), which states that counseling can significantly improve mothers' understanding of the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding.

This significant increase in knowledge can also be explained by the theory of behavioral change in health psychology. This theory states that knowledge gained through health education can change a person's attitude and behavior (Glanz et al., 2015). Exclusive breastfeeding counseling conducted at posyandu provides mothers with clear and understandable information, which contributes to increasing their knowledge of how and why exclusive breastfeeding is so important for babies.

However, despite a large increase in mothers with good knowledge, there was a significant decrease in the group of mothers who had sufficient knowledge, from 15 mothers to only 5 mothers after counseling. This decrease may be due to a material mismatch or a lack of deep understanding by some mothers of how to practice exclusive breastfeeding even though they know its benefits. This is in accordance with the findings of Hidayati et al. (2023), which states that although knowledge is increasing, its application is often bumped by practical factors in the mother's daily life.

Based on these results, it is important to not only educate mothers about the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, but also provide techniques and practical ways to overcome obstacles encountered during the breastfeeding process. Research by Putri & Sari (2023) also shows that the success of exclusive breastfeeding is more influenced by the mother's practical skills in breastfeeding, in addition to the theoretical knowledge acquired.

Therefore, although this counseling is effective in increasing knowledge, it is important to involve mothers in practical sessions or provide more detailed material related to practical ways of exclusive breastfeeding. Comprehensive counseling, including technical and practical information, can have a greater impact on changes in maternal breastfeeding behavior.

Furthermore, the influence of this counseling should be continuously monitored to determine whether the increase in maternal knowledge continues in the long term. Long-term evaluation of the success of counseling can help in formulating better strategies in improving the understanding and practice of exclusive breastfeeding in the community.

## 3. The Relationship of Maternal Knowledge with Exclusive Breastfeeding Practices

The results obtained on the relationship between the level of knowledge of mothers about exclusive breastfeeding with the practice of exclusive breastfeeding among respondents. The results showed that 24 mothers with good knowledge of exclusive breastfeeding also had good



breastfeeding practices. Meanwhile, mothers with less or sufficient knowledge tend to have less optimal practices. This is in line with research by Rachmawati & Anwar (2023), which states that mothers' knowledge directly influences their decision to give exclusive breastfeeding.

These results support the Health Belief Model (HBM) theory which explains that individuals are likely to take health actions if they have adequate knowledge of the benefits of such actions and feel that they are important for their health or that of their family (Rosenstock, 1974). In this context, mothers who fully understand the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding tend to be more motivated to put their knowledge into practice.

However, there are some mothers with good knowledge who still have difficulty in breastfeeding practice. This shows that although knowledge is essential, other factors such as social support, access to health facilities, or the mother's personal problems in the breastfeeding process, can affect the mother's ability to practice exclusive breastfeeding well. Research by Kurniasari et al. (2023) also pointed out that social and physical factors such as lactation problems or lack of family support are often the main obstacles to implementing exclusive breastfeeding.

It is important to note that although there is a significant relationship between knowledge and practice, these results show that efforts to improve knowledge alone are not enough. Further support, whether from health workers, families, or other groups of mothers, is needed to ensure that the knowledge gained can be translated into effective practice. Research by Maulidya et al. (2022) also states that the success of exclusive breastfeeding is strongly influenced by environmental factors, not just by maternal knowledge.

Therefore, health education programs should be followed by further support, such as breastfeeding classes, support groups, or continued guidance by midwives, to ensure that the knowledge gained by mothers can be properly applied in their daily lives.

Based on these results, it is advisable to design extension programs that not only educate, but also provide practical exercises and create a supportive environment for mothers to exclusively breastfeed their babies.

#### **4. Differences in Knowledge and Practice Before and After Counseling**

The results showed significant differences in the knowledge and practice of breastfeeding mothers before and after attending counseling. The average level of maternal knowledge increased from 60% before counseling to 85% after counseling, with a very small p-value (0.0001), indicating that counseling has a significant impact on increasing maternal knowledge about exclusive breastfeeding. These findings are consistent with research conducted by Salim et al. (2022), who found that systematic and structured counseling was effective in increasing mothers' knowledge about exclusive breastfeeding.

This significant increase in knowledge also supports the Social Cognitive Theory proposed by Bandura (1986), which states that individuals can learn and change behavior through observation, learning, and social interaction. Counseling conducted by midwives at posyandu provides an opportunity for mothers to observe and learn directly, both from the material



provided and from the experiences of other mothers in the group. This reinforces their understanding of the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for the health of the baby and mother.

In addition to knowledge, the practice of exclusive breastfeeding also showed a significant increase after counseling, from an average of 55% to 80% after counseling ( $p$ -value = 0.0001). These results indicate that an increase in maternal knowledge is followed by an increase in the practice of exclusive breastfeeding. Research by Pratiwi et al. (2023) also stated that effective counseling can change the attitude and behavior of mothers towards exclusive breastfeeding, and this is clearly seen in the results of this study.

However, despite a significant increase in the practice of exclusive breastfeeding, it is possible that some mothers still face challenges in the correct application of the practice, even though their knowledge has increased. Factors such as technical problems with breastfeeding, concerns about the adequacy of breast milk, or other socio-economic constraints can still affect the mother's ability to practice exclusive breastfeeding perfectly. Research by Hidayati & Pramesti (2022) found that even though mothers have sufficient knowledge, they often still find it difficult to implement exclusive breastfeeding due to other factors, such as lack of support from family or health workers.

Nevertheless, these results indicate that counseling in posyandu has a significant impact on improving the knowledge and practice of breastfeeding mothers, so that it can be used as a basis for strengthening similar educational programs elsewhere. Health counseling that focuses on improving knowledge and practical skills should be an integral part of a broader maternal and Child Health program.

One recommendation that can be drawn from these findings is the importance of combining counseling with practical guidance in more interactive sessions. For example, holding hands-on Sessions on the correct breastfeeding techniques in posyandu can strengthen the knowledge that has been given during counseling. This practical support can also help mothers overcome obstacles in breastfeeding practices that may arise.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that increasing maternal knowledge about exclusive breastfeeding through counseling can encourage mothers to better implement exclusive breastfeeding practices. Therefore, ongoing counseling that involves mentoring and hands-on practice is needed to achieve higher coverage of exclusive breastfeeding in the community.

## CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion of this study shows that counseling midwives about exclusive breastfeeding has a significant effect on improving the knowledge and practice of breastfeeding mothers in Posyandu Kelurahan Anduring Padang. Before counseling, most mothers had limited knowledge about exclusive breastfeeding, but after counseling, there was a significant increase in the knowledge of mothers about the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding. In addition, the practice of exclusive breastfeeding also showed significant improvements after counseling. These results



prove that structured and appropriate counseling can help breastfeeding mothers understand the importance of exclusive breastfeeding and implement it in their daily lives.

However, despite the increase in knowledge and practice, other factors such as social support, physical limitations or technical problems with breastfeeding continue to influence the effectiveness of the application of exclusive breastfeeding. Therefore, counseling on exclusive breastfeeding should be supplemented with practical support, such as breastfeeding training sessions or support groups for mothers, to ensure that the knowledge gained can be applied properly. This study suggests that continuous counseling programs in posyandu continue to be strengthened with a more comprehensive approach, including education, training, and social support to increase exclusive breastfeeding coverage more effectively in the community.

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