

Social Analysis of the Benefit of Exclusive Breastfeeding among Muslim Women in Selected Communities in Edo State, Nigeria

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Food has always been a means of survival as its nutrient function for the survival of the body system, especially infants that need a proper building of their body system. The first, the best and the most complete nutrient a baby needs is the Breast milk. The act and practice of exclusive Breastfeeding have an advance impact on the child, the mother and the society at large, as the study examines the social analysis of the benefit and hindrances of exclusive breastfeeding among the Muslims in selected communities in Edo State, Nigeria. Social Action theory was used to buttress the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, 150 Muslim women were interviewed with the aid of a structured questionnaire and an in-depth interview administered face-to face to the respondents. A cluster and purposive sampling technique was utilized and the findings analyzed with the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 20.0 version. It was discovered that one of the hindrances to exclusive breastfeeding is caused by the health condition of the mother among others, inversely the benefit too numerous one off which is making the child/infant brilliant and healthy. Hence it is recommended that Exclusive Breastfeeding should be encouraged because of its medical/health benefit to both mother and child in both the national and international level for the realization of the Millennium Development Goal strategy by 2015.

Key Word: Infant, Exclusive Breastfeeding, Mothers and Muslim women

Introduction

Since creation of the world; man has always depend on food be it solid or liquid to survival. When a woman put to bed, the baby is tender and fragile, needing the mother's breast milk as the first and most secured source of food for proper building of the body system, and for its survival. In a country where the welfare and life of the citizen as enshrine in the constitution (Chapter 3, Section22, and Sub-section1) is of uttermost importance, Nigeria represent one of the countries that is striving to achieve the Millennium Development Goal by 2015.


According to Okolo et al (1990), to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs 4 & 5) which entails child survival and prevention of malnutrition, adequate nutrition and health during the first several years of life is fundamental. To this end, child (especially infant) in their early stage need to be well nourished with the necessary nutrient the body needs-exclusive breast feeding being the prime. The concept of exclusive breast feeding has been a universal issue at different times. Its widely accepted definition is that given by WHO (World Health Organization):

Exclusive Breastfeeding (EBF) means that the infant receives only breast milk, with no other liquid

or solid given, not even water with the exception of Oral Rehydration Solution, drop/syrup of vitamins, minerals or medicine. (WHO, 2005)

It is generally known that breast milk is the natural first food for babies. It provides the required nutrient necessary for the infant health in the first 6 months (six months) of the baby's life. This has been a policy for both developed and developing countries that recommends exclusive breastfeeding for six months, followed by the combination of continued breastfeeding and safe, appropriate and adequate feeding with other food (WHO, 2007). Research has shown that inadequate nutrition is an underlying cause of infant mortality of more than 2.6 million (Two million, six hundred thousand) children and over 100,000 (one hundred thousand) mothers yearly.

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Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, (2008) submit that Exclusive Breastfeeding (EBF) is recommended for every infant because breast milk is uncontaminated and contain all the nutrients necessary for children in the first few months of life. In addition it states that antibodies from the mother's breast milk provides immunity to disease, hence there are other subtle unrecognized benefits that are social, economic, health, religious in nature that stem from exclusive breast milk to the child, mother and the society.

Religion and Breastfeeding: The Nexus

Religion is one of the cores of most societies of the world which influences people's perception, practice and value. Scott et al (2005) opined that religion is a set of beliefs, symbol and practices. For example, ritual is based on the idea of the sacred and unites believers into a socio-religious community. Durkheim ([1912] 2001) as cited in Schaefer (2007) define religion as a "unified system of belief and practices relative to sacred things". Most religion in Nigeria supports the breastfeeding of infant because of its value and benefit. Of such religion is Christianity and Islam.

The Christianity faith states: *"Can a woman forget her baby who nurses at her breast. Can she withhold compassion from the child she has borne? Even if mother were to forget, I could never forget you! (Isaiah 49:15. Translated Bible)*

Islamic faith states: *Mothers shall suckle their children for whole two years (that is) for those who wish to complete the suckling...if they decide to wean the child by mutual consent, it is no sin for them and if ye wish to nurse. It is no sin for you, provided you pay what is due from you in kindness (Qur'an chapter 2 verse 233).*

The value and benefit of breastfeeding is overwhelmingly important and critical to maternal and child health. If the larger society is to remain healthy and sane given the religious and moral support for exclusive practice and the fundamental virtue entrenched in it, its obvious practice should be encourages as mist religious outfit supports, preach and advocate for the breastfeeding of their infants as it is clearly documented in the Holy Book (the Bible and the Qur'an) and it benefit are unquantifiable.

Hinderances to Exclusive Breastfeeding to Infant

It calls to note that every cause mediate an effect, hence the hindrance to exclusive breastfeeding cannot be neglected. In an agrarian society, women tend to spend more time at home with families, as most

agricultural jobs or duties like cultivating of crops like Yams, Cassava, Fishing and hunting in most Nigeria societies were the duty of the men (Omorodion, 1997). Therefore the women have enough time for domestic chores, cater for the children and when they (women) are delivered of their baby(s), they have enough time to breastfeed their baby irrespective of their status and belief. One contributing factor to this is due to the communal life that existed then, as they (women) live in close proximity with other women and are guided by the most elderly among them, taking into cognizance of Emile Durkheim idea of Mechanical Solidarity (Schaefer, 2007).

Since the industrial revolution that besiege the human society especially in England during the 18th and 19th century which led to the creation of industrial societies and positioned the concept of organic solidarity in most cities, even in Nigeria. It gave room for collective consciousness that rest on mutual interdependence (Schaefer, 2007). This wide but collective consciousness gave room for other ripple effect that acted as hindrance to women wishing to practice exclusive breastfeeding in urban centers. Lancet (2008) outline hurdles to proper nutrition and infant feeding(exclusive breastfeeding) practices, they includes; Poverty, Increase in cost of living, stress, anxiety, depression among working women, lack of support in good feeding practices especially breastfeeding for the first six months of life, which is paramount to reducing infant mortality.

In a study carried out by Muhammad et al (2012), it was observed that the following factor affect exclusive breastfeeding, they include: Poor socio-economic condition of mothers, lack of appropriate birth space, lack of knowledge and awareness among mothers about the benefits of breastfeeding, poor health of mothers, maternal employment and cultural norms of the society. UNICEF (2012) observed the following as challenges in improving exclusive breastfeeding practices;

- Widespread promotion of breast-milk substitute.
- Belief that infant need water in addition to breast milk.
- Lack of support for breastfeeding at home, in work places, linked to perception that behaviour change is difficult or even impossible.
 - Poor understanding of the role of breastfeeding in advancing human and health right etc. (UNICEF, 2012).

Benefit of Exclusive Breastfeeding to Infant

There are numerous benefit of exclusive breastfeeding on the infant. According to the Nigeria Demo-

graphic and Health Survey (NDHS, 2008), the first breast milk contain colostrums, which is highly nutritious and has antibodies that protect the new born from disease. It further states that early initiation of breastfeeding also foster bonding between mother and child. Studies carried out by the American Academy of Pediatrics (2005) shows that breast milk provides infant with significant protection against chronic diseases such as allergies and asthma, and other infectious diseases including meningitis, diarrhea, ear infection and pneumonia.

IP et al (2007) asserted that exclusively breastfed infant are not likely to develop diabetes mellitus type1 and appear to have a lower likelihood of having/developing a type 11 later in life. Breastfeeding protects against child obesity as evidence in 2013 study (Moss and Yeaton, 2014). Breastfeeding protect infant against Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), allergic diseases, digestive disease and cognitive development enhancement in children (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2005). While UNICEF (2012) suggested that breastfed infant, because of the effects of breastfeeding on the development of Oral Cavity and airway have a good chance of good dental health than artificially fed infant.

In elucidating why breastfeeding is best according to the National Association of Nigeria nurses and midwives in recent sensitization suggested that breast milk is the most nutritional sound food mothers can provide for their baby, it is very easy to digest by the baby's little stomach, it help strengthen the mothers baby natural defenses, it contributes to protect your baby from disease and finally it helps the baby cognitive development.

Benefit of Exclusive Breastfeeding to Mothers

The practice of exclusive breastfeeding is not only beneficial to the child but also the mother. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2005), breastfeeding also benefits the mother by reducing risks of developing ovarian cancer, Pre-Menopause breast cancer, Osteoporosis and hip fractures later in life. NDHS (2008) states that early initiation of breastfeeding is encouraged for a number of reasons. Mothers benefit from early suckling because it stimulates breast milk production and it facilitates the realization of oxytocin which helps the contraction of the uterus and reduces post partum blood loss. In summing the benefit of breastfeeding (especially exclusive breastfeeding), IP (2007) supported the statement above and added that it helps mothers to rapidly return to their pre-pregnancy weight, increase Oxytocin-the love or bonding hormone, lowering the

risk of uterine cancer, endometrial cancer later in life among others.

Theoretical Explanation

Social Action Theory captures the thought and elaborate on the issue of exclusive breastfeeding in modern society, and hence its adoption to explain this social phenomenon. Sociology according to Max Weber in one of his works; *Economy and Society* (1978), opined that it is a science that concern itself with the interpretative understanding of social action and thereby with a casual explanation of its cause and consequences (Taiwo et al, 2011). Weber's view on social action being carried out by an individual is based on the meaning attached to it. Hence in His work, to understand social action we need to explain it cause and consequence.

Weber was also interested in particular qualities of human actors and the meaning they ascribe to their actions. His ultimate unit of analysis remains the concrete acting person (Coser, 1977). Motive and consequences speak volume of individual action considering the four basic types of which social action must be understood and they include;

- **Affection:** comes from an actor's feeling, impulse and emotion. Every woman will desire to breastfeed her child because of the benefit and the survival of the child.
- **Traditional Action:** Habit/action that is deep seated in acceptance of tradition. Traditionally, virtually all cultures/ethnic groups in Nigeria encourage breastfeeding of their infant irrespective of the position, status or class she (mother) belongs to.
- **Value Rational Action:** an action oriented toward an ultimate end. Here, the actor practice of exclusive breastfeeding is unquestionable due to the value attached based on choice.
- **Action Rational:** This has to do with a rational deliberation here state a rational deliberation about the choice among various alternative ends and a calculated assessment means to be employed as this support the popular slogan "Prevention is better than cure" (Taiwo et al, 2011).

Statement of Problem

Though the dream of most women is to get married to their ideal man, have her own family and in this case carry her own baby..... for the man that would be her husband (Alenkhe, et al, 2013). When the "bundle of joy" finally arrives, parents and societies celebrate for the long awaited child that needs food for survival. It is known that the most complete,

balance and soluble food the baby need as an infant is the breast milk and in Nigeria breastfeeding is a common practice but large proportion of mothers do not practice breastfeeding optimally. This is because attention tends to be shifted away from this long awaited gift (child) to something else, not knowing the future implication to both mother and child. Hence the study seeks to examine the social and health benefit of exclusive breastfeeding of some group of women (Muslim) in Benin City.

Research Question

- What are the hindrances to exclusive breastfeeding among Muslim women in Benin City?
- What are the benefit of exclusive breastfeeding to both mother and child?

Research Objective

- To investigate the hindrances to exclusive breastfeeding among Muslim women in Benin City.
- To examine the benefit of exclusive breastfeeding to both mother and child Benin City.

Method and Materials

The study was conducted in Benin City (Oredo, Ikpoba-Okha and Egor L.G.A) from 3 major Mosque. The study populations comprises of Muslim women worshipping in some selected mosque in the designated Local Government Area. The respondents are married nursing mothers and those with children who are grown up. A cluster sampling was used for classifying the respondents by location then a purposive sampling method was used for selecting the 150 respondents from the study location were the structured copies of the questionnaire was administered on a face-to-face basis, while 6 in-depth interviews were conducted within the 150 respondents. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the structured questionnaire and content analysis for the In-depth interview conducted. Data gathering for the study began in February and ended in April 2015.

Result and Discussion of Findings

Table 1: Hindrances to exclusive breastfeeding among Muslim women in Benin City.

How many children do you have?			
My first (30)20%	2-3 (55)36.6%	4-5(22)14.7%	above 5 (43) 28.6%
Do you practice breastfeeding as stipulated by the Quran?			
Yes (24) 16.0%	No(48) 32.0%	Not fully practiced (78)52.0%	
Do you know what exclusive breastfeeding is? Yes (135)90% No(15) 10%			
Did you practice exclusive breastfeeding on your child/children?			
Yes (64) 42.7%	No(48) 32.0%	Not fully practiced(38)25.3%	
Reasons for the Question 4 above?			
It is good, and since no paid job I have enough time (39) 26.0%			
That is my product (Baby) (31)20.7%			
Limited time (23)15.3%			
Health reasons (11)7.3%			
Not sufficient for the baby (14) 9.3%			
Personal reason (32)21.4%			
What are the hindrances to exclusive breastfeeding among Muslim women?			
Engagement in paid jobs(29) 19.3%			
Health condition of mothers(30) 20.0%			
Quick conception of the 2 nd and successive children(17) 11.3%			
High consumption of breast milk, that makes the child not satisfied(20) 13.3%			
Number of children born same time by one woman(17)11.3%			
Sometimes the child just refuse to take breastmilk (16) 10.7%			
When the mother feels that the baby is not satisfied with breast milk(21) 14.0%			

Source: Fieldwork 2015

Implication of the Table 1

The result above shows that most of the respondents have more than one child, and that 52.0% of the en-

tire respondents do not fully practice breastfeeding as stipulated by the Quran. It is obvious that 90% of the respondents have idea of what exclusive breastfeeding is and 68% of the respondents either prac-

ticed/still practiced exclusive breastfeeding or couldn't practiced it fully. The respondents gave various reason for their responses, some of which include; being unemployed thereby having enough time, personal reasons, limited time among others. On the hindrances to exclusive among Muslim women, the following were stated in the following degrees; engagement in paid jobs (19.3%), health condition of the mother (20.0%) and 11.3% represent respondents that said quick conception of the 2nd and successive children. 13.3% opined that the high consumption of breast milk makes the baby not satisfied while 11.3% gave it to the number of children born same time by one woman. The respondents that gave it to the child just refusing to take breast milk repre-

sents 10.7% and finally one of the hindrance is when the mother feels that the baby is not satisfied with breast milk with 14.0%.

This finding supports the interview of one of the respondents which goes thus; *I would have really loved to practice breastfeeding as stated by the Quran, but for my health condition after the birth of my daughter which changed my wish on medical reasons. Exclusive breastfeeding is a very good practice because breast milk is free, convenient, clean and safe alwaysbut I know sometimes situation may change the practice like mine after child birth. Other hindrances I know include being a working mother and lack of child spacing (IDI-15/04/15).*

Table 2: Benefit of exclusive breastfeeding to both mother and child Benin City

Does exclusive breastfeeding have any benefit to mother and child that you know?	
Yes (150) 100%	No(0) 0%
Benefit of exclusive breastfeeding to mothers?	
It makes mother healthy (27)	18.0 %
It increases the bond between mother and child(27)	18.0 %
It makes mothers maintain shapes (30)	20.0 %
It makes mothers happy (21)	14.0 %
Cost effective and takes less/no stress (24)	16.0 %
Having some other medical benefits(21)	14.0 %
Benefit of exclusive breastfeeding to infants?	
Makes the baby to be healthy (14)	9.3%
Tightens the bond between mother and child (23)	15.3%
It makes children brilliant (30)	20.0%
Protects children against some sickness that can be deadly (23)	15.3%
If well practiced, the child display some coordinated attitude/behaviour (27)	18.0%
It flush out anything that is not good for the baby system after birth (20)	13.3%
It is easy to digest, hence prevent constipation on the child (13)	8.7%

Source: Fieldwork 2015

Implication of the Table 2

In examining the benefit of exclusive breastfeeding to both mother and child the study revealed that the entire respondents have idea of the benefit to both mother and child. From the table the benefit to the mothers include; making healthy mothers (18%), tightening the bond between mother and child (18%) while 20% stated that it makes the mothers to maintain shape. Others include making mothers happy (14%), it is cost effective and takes less stress (16.0%) and finally having other medical benefit with 14%. On the part of the baby, the benefit includes: making the baby healthy, uniting the bond between mother and child, making children brilliant, protects children against some illness that can be deadly, creates some coordinated attitude on exclusively breastfed children, help to flush out some unhealthy things inside the baby and lastly, helps to prevent constipa-

tion. This supports some of the in-depth interviews conducted; *There are many benefit of Exclusive breastfeeding that I know: it prevents sickness like diarrhoea, deviance attitude, under 5 mortality and draws mother closer to the baby. Once you start baby food, it kills the essence of mother/ child bonding. I have 2 children and I practiced EBF for the second child, during that period he was never sick because I practiced it very well. It was quiet easy for me because I eat well to have enough breast milk, as you known in Islam we were told that one of the breast (I think the right) is food while the other is water, because of this I gave the right breast very well to my child, then support it with the left. Generally EBF is very good (IDI-25/04/15).*

Another respondent said: *Exclusive breastfeeding is good oh! But in my time it was different because I was told I suckle my mother for 5 years, according to my mother before now women breastfeed*

for 3 years. This one is good (EBF), after I gave birth to my child Azeez, that was when a matron told me to do EBF for 6 months (then in a small hospital). I mixed food for my baby because after delivery, I usually lost strength. The Quran says we should breast-feed our children well; I use to stop at 18 months until our Alfa now told us that the Quran specifically stipulated 2 years before we stop breast feeding. We heard that if well practiced (EBF), the baby takes the picture of the mother, it is true but I think they make a mistake by saying no water or other food is to be added to the breast milk for a period of 6 months, if they put it in the Quran way like 2 years with other supplement it will be well practiced by all Muslim women as it makes the baby strong, healthy, sound and lively (IDI-25/04/15)

A respondent has this to say: As a Muslim I know the Holy Quran stipulates 2 years for breastfeeding (which is called "Sunnah") I have 4 children, I didn't do baby friendly it was because of the process involved. That is a process of breastfeeding without water or nothing, I tried it for 5 months on one of my child but it was not easy. For the benefit, I know it makes children sharp (brilliant) and healthy, breast milk is also medicinal as I was told that it can stop worm coming out of the eye of a child. In at least 2 of my children, I practiced breastfeeding as prescribed by the Quran that is for 2 years but not EBF and I can tell the difference (IDI-25/04/15)

Conclusion

Breast milk is unarguably the most convenient, safest and most healthy food for newly born infant as it has many benefits for both the mother and the child, not only to the Muslims but to all mothers (irrespective of their religion, social status and belief system). As the study shows that most of the hindrances to the practice of Exclusive Breastfeeding are based on personal premonition due to what will be termed tasking, as they will prefer the prescribed 2 years breastfeeding as stipulated by the Quran but not exclusive. Also the study also shows the women though religiously know the benefit of practicing EBF outside the Sunnah that is prescribed by the Quran. Universally there was a consensus that Exclusive Breastfeeding is beyond doubt good.

Recommendation

The study identifies Exclusive Breastfeeding as the most convenient, soluble, safest and most economic food for infant as the benefit for both mother and child are enormous and the hindrances are mostly on personal decision except for few medical reasons or

health ground. Hence the recommendations this study presents take into cognizance the wider society.

Exclusive breastfeeding should be fully encouraged by all mothers who desire to nurture a generation of brilliant and well-mannered leaders as there are many medical/health benefits to both mother and child. There should be conscious and regular sensitization on the benefit of exclusive breastfeeding to the women in the society. The government should not relent in her effort on the awareness of exclusive breastfeeding. Same is advocated in communities where the women at the grassroots level are at best able to create a society by the off-spring they raise, considering that the Nigeria society is more of the rural than the urban setting. As this will not only reduce under-5 mortality in Nigeria but will also ensure that the country is recognized in terms of her desire in the Millennium Development Goal strategy.

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