

# Husbands' Feelings Toward Their Wives' Breastfeeding in Public Places in Yogyakarta

Indonesian Nursing Journal of Education and Clinic (INJEC)

IN PRESS

Volume 6, Issue 2, December 2021

DOI: 10.24990/injecv6i2.419

[injec.aipni-ainec.org/index.php/INJEC/index](http://injec.aipni-ainec.org/index.php/INJEC/index)

Received : 2020-05-09

Accepted : 2021-09-13

The Association of Indonesian Nurse

Education Center (AINEC)



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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Breastfeeding has so many benefits for both mother and child. In Indonesia, there are only 42% of children who were exclusively breastfed. There were still many husbands who do not know about the importance and barriers of breastfeeding, especially in public spheres and how they took part in it. The study aimed to explore the husbands' feeling towards their wives' breastfeeding in public places in Yogyakarta.

**Methods:** The study conducted the qualitative exploratory design. The terms of exploratory was related with investigation husband's feeling through in-depth interview. There were 7 participants who were interviewed selected through purposive sampling and analyzed using thematic analysis.

**Results:** This study collated 4 major themes based on the responses. These were Feelings based on religion, Feelings based on socio-cultural influence, Feelings based on personal views and Feelings related to health reason. A brochure was created by providing guidelines for husband on his role to support wives' breastfeeding in public places.

**Conclusion:** Increasing public awareness needs to build breastfeeding-friendly facilities in public places in accordance the laws and regulations. The role of nurse as an educator needs to promote exclusive breastfeeding and contributes to provide accurate information to the family.

## Keywords

breastfeeding; feeling; husband; public places

## INTRODUCTION

Having a baby is the most incredible thing for parents. This experience comes with the mother breastfeeding a child. Breastfeeding has so many benefits for both mother and child (Ciampo & Ciampo, 2018). The child's nutritional needs are completely contained in breast milk, especially for the child's healthy growth and development, as well as for the child's protection from illnesses or diseases

(Rocha et al., 2014). Beyond healthiness, breastfeeding, according to (McCrary & Murray, 2013) improves the relationship and interaction between parents and child. The importance of breastfeeding is also acknowledged to provide psychological benefits for parents. Breastfeeding is natural; a supportive husband will feel proud of his wife who can breastfeed his child, and the mother will completely feel happy to do her task as mother and wife (Clara Wiggins, 2018). It

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supports the family's goals that husband and wife should have a good relationship in their married life, especially in raising children.

Globally, about 44% of infants 0–6 months old are exclusively breastfed (WHO, 2021). Rwanda, an east-central Africa country, shows the highest rate of breastfeeding in the world, which is an impressive rate of 85% and in Indonesia, however, only 1 in 2 infants under 6 months of age are exclusively breastfed, and slightly more than half of children continue to be breastfed up to 23 months of age (UNICEF Indonesia, 2020).

In August 2016, during the Breastfeeding Week, WHO encouraged people to support mothers to breastfeed anytime and anywhere they have to. Somehow, breastfeeding practice seems to be women's task as a mother, while there are still many husbands who do not know about its importance and barriers of breastfeeding, especially in public spheres and how they took part in it (Office of the Surgeon General (US) et al., 2011). In Indonesia, breastfeeding in public places is still considered as taboo. Breasts, according to some public perceptions, are sexual organs and parts of the body that are 'challenging' when viewed openly (Abdul Hadi, 2020). There is still lack of lactation room in shopping centers in Yogyakarta, even though there was a regulations for it (Anggraini & Mufdillah, 2016).

Hannan et al. (as cited in Rollins et al., 2016) stated that in some settings, women who want to breastfeed in public experience negative reactions. A mother will think how she can breastfeed her baby in public places, because she might consider that others will be uncomfortable or certainly she cannot relax to breastfeed her baby anytime and anywhere she has to. This situation can influence a mother to do short duration of breastfeeding (Scott et al., 2015). These ideas also were cited as reasons for a mother who chooses to express and do bottle-feeding their expressed milk for her baby when they are in public places. This is stated by a maternal expert in WHO office that lack of knowledge and sociocultural, economic and personal reasons mean that many women may choose to bottle-feed with formula milk completely (WHO, 2014)

This kind of dilemma is very challenging for the mother to do breastfeeding. A husband's role is very important because the baby is the responsibility of both the parents.

As a partner, the husband is expected to have the same role in decision making as regards mother breastfeeding in public places (Sherriff et al., 2014). A study held by Chang et al., (2012) shows men are less knowledgeable about breast feeding and more positive about artificial milk than women. Considering that the relationship between husband and wife brings significant impact in breastfeeding, the father's perception is supposed to lead as to how they should proceed as a part of a breastfeeding-friendly community (Health Population, 2015). On the other hand, health workers also play a role to promote exclusive breastfeeding, such as nurse, which is the experience in a postnatal unit contributes to provide accurate information, demonstrating, teaching, supporting the mothers, and motivating them to do breast feeding to their baby (Raha et al., 2010).

This study aimed to explore the husbands' feelings towards their wives' breastfeeding in public places. The researcher wanted to investigate what are the opinions of the husbands when his wife breastfeeds in public places and how the husband views it.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a qualitative study that used exploratory qualitative design. An exploratory qualitative research was conducted to address an issue or problem in need of a solution and/or understanding (Grove et al., 2013). The topic of interest in this study is breastfeeding in public places, while the husband's feelings become a problem which has been explored. The terms of exploratory is related with investigation, meaning that the husband's feelings need to be investigated more deeply in order to get an insight. This study is expected to have an insight for husbands in facing situation on their wives' breastfeeding in public places through in-depth interview.

The setting of this study is in one of birth clinic in Yogyakarta. This birth clinic is situated in the locality of people in the lower to middle socio-economic strata, and it has many patients each day. They are pregnant mothers who come for antenatal care, babies born until toddler for check-up and immunization, and women who practice contraception.

Table I. Demographic profile of participants

Participant	Age (years)	Occupation	Religion	City of Origin	Working wife	Number of Children	Length of Marriage
P1	31	Police	Islam	Cilacap, Central Java	No	2	6 years
P2	25	Employee	Islam	Solo, Central Java	No	2	4 years
P3	31	Entrepreneur	Islam	Yogyakarta	No	2	7 years
P4	35	Technical consultant	Islam	Yogyakarta	Yes	3	9 years
P5	33	Vendor	Islam	Yogyakarta	Yes	2	6 years
P6	35	Travel agency	Islam	Yogyakarta	Yes	2	10 years
P7	34	Vendor	Islam	Yogyakarta	Yes	3	10 years

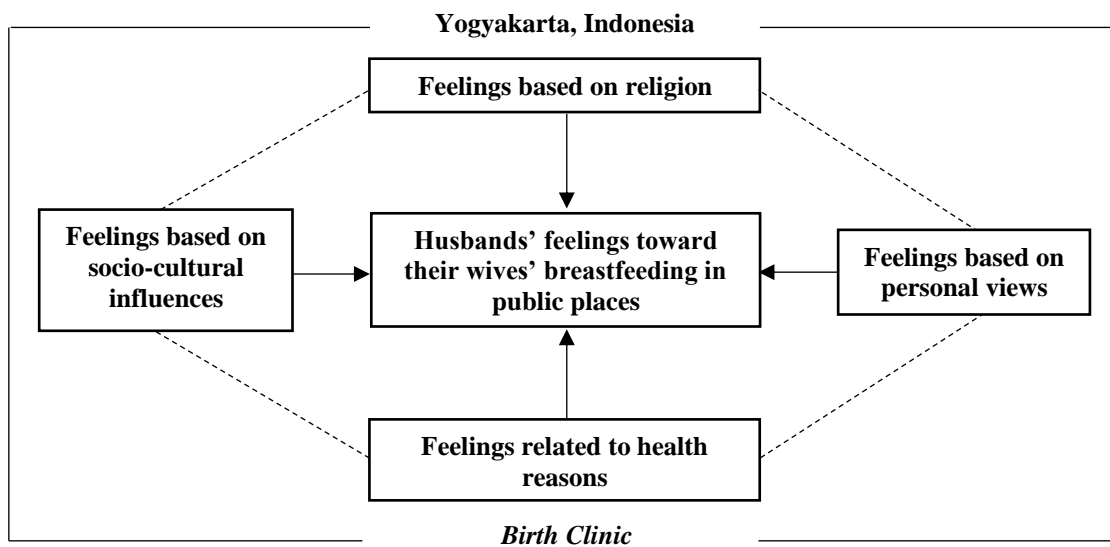


Figure I. Diagram of Husbands' Feelings toward Their Wives' Breastfeeding in Public

Participants of this study were selected through purposive sampling. Participants of this study were fathers whose wives breastfeed baby at age 0-6 months old, and couples who are married and living together. Husbands were excluded from the study if he lived separately from his wife because of work in another place. Participants were men who have more than one child in the family. The determination of this criterion is based on assumption that fathers who have more than one child will also have more experience. Whereas fathers who lived separately from his wives do not directly experience their wives breastfeeding in public, so this can affect his real feelings. Only those who voluntarily agreed to be a participant were interviewed. There were 7 husbands interviewed. After the data saturated interview were stopped.

Before gathering the data, the researcher was given permission from the Research Committee of St. Paul University Manila on September 22, 2017. After the form had been signed, permission was asked from the National Unity and Politics Agency of Yogyakarta Special Region, the Local Development Planning Agency of Sleman District with number: 070/Bappeda/2416/2017, and lastly from the birth clinic where the study was conducted.

As ethical considerations, this study provides beneficence, respect for human dignity and justice. In this study, the researcher looked for fathers who were willing to participate and value the participants' time and activities. The participants have the right to expect that any data they provide will be kept in strictest confidence. This formed as anonymity of the participants' data.

The data analysis of this study used thematic analysis (Smith, 2015). This study revealed how the husband feels in viewing breastfeeding in public places in particular by questioned the grand tour question: "How do you feel about your wife's breastfeeding in public places?"

After the interview were conducted for about 30 minutes each participants and the data saturated, the dialogued was translated and transcribed. The researcher assigned codes to identify her participants. After that the data were coded manually, then the researcher clustered together codes to create a plausible mapping of key patterns in the data. This study found 4 major themes relevant with the topic of the study.

## RESULTS

Four (4) major themes with categories emerged from the collected and analyzed data from the participants. These themes served as a domain to answer one grand tour question and three follow up questions, such as: (1) Does your wife also breastfeed your children in public places?; (2) Do you agree with her?; (3) How is your feeling when your wife breastfeeding in public places?. These themes had been named as: (1) "Feelings based on religion", (2) "Feelings based on socio-cultural influence", (3) "Feelings based on personal views", and (4) "Feelings related to health reason". These themes are underlying the feelings of shameful, uncomfortable, and dislike feeling revealed by participants on wives' breastfeeding in public places. The demographic profile of participants of the study are described by this following table. All the participants' answers were mostly influenced by their experience on facing a situation of their wife breastfeeding in public places from previous children, their religion and where they came from.

Feelings based on religion were defined from participants' views on breastfeeding in public places based on the religious life that they believe. Based on the findings, all participants are Islam. These feeling are formed as a feeling of discomfort and lead to disagreement on their wife breastfeeding in public places.

*"It's clearly in Islam, how to say... hmm (thinking) exposing aurat in public places is*

*inappropriate, it is shameful. From my religious side and not comfortable to be seen by others."* (P1)

*"Because it was mentioned in religion. We cannot expose aurat in public places, right? ... I feel more to disagree. The point is because the aurat was exposed to other."* (P2)

The faith of God has a power to control someone's feelings. This theme was followed by the categories: (1) Exposing *aurat* in public places is less proper, meaning that personal organs of women cannot be exposed because it is inappropriate from the religious side; (2) Not appropriate in Islam; (3) Should be in a secluded area; (4) Stands on the religious norm and signifies obedience to what the religion says; (5) Prohibited by religion means that there is a set of beliefs held and taught by religion that breastfeeding cannot be done in public places.

Feelings based on socio-cultural influence were formed as feelings of discomfort and shame. This is defined by how the society and culture have a role in making a decision. Furthermore, it indicated as to where the fathers live. This theme includes categories such as: (1) Breastfeeding in public places is unethical.

*"... When we see the child's need is indeed to be breastfed by the mother; however, I say the reason of it is less ethical or inappropriate just because the personal part of the mother will be visible to others. Then I feel uncomfortable and ashamed."* (P3)

(2) Breastfeeding is not an intentional exposure; it means that breastfeeding practice in public places is not something to show intentionally. Husband feels ashamed to let her wife expose a personal part of the body in public places.

*"Hmm...(thinking) because in public places, there are many people and breastfeeding is not exposed intentionally, right? Better to use a cover."* (P5)

(3) Eastern culture, this category came from one father who explained that he lives in an Eastern culture that requires maintaining politeness:

*"I think it is the East Culture. It means we have to keep the politeness. Although in public places, okay for example in the train or other transportation, we are looking for a method so that other people will not notice, meaning to cover or anything can possible."* (P6)

Feelings based on personal views were formed as a feeling of discomfort. This feeling was defined as the participants' personal view about breastfeeding in public. This means that the feeling comes from within and belongs to the fathers' own principle.

*"For me as a man, if I see people breastfeed, I feel uncomfortable. Maybe if in public places there is a woman breastfeeds her baby, I will not go to that area and better go away. It will disturb her privacy. Therefore, I do not let my wife do that, so that she does not disturb others; she makes others feel comfortable too." (P4)*

Feelings related to health reason were formed as a feeling of dilemma for the husband. They might not give a scientific statement based on theories of health, but rather how they can see breastfeeding in public places has an impact on health, as related to their experiences. Not sterile – lots of dust and pollution areas are, considered as the main idea to this theme. The term public places in this study refers to any place outside the home, it can be on the sidewalk, outdoor market, etc. This gives a possibility to dust and pollution or any small particles that will have an impact on the child's health when mothers breastfeed them openly.

*"I think it just clearly not sterile, because there are many be transportation pollution or dust, it may be a lot, right? ... My feeling is... hmm... how to say... I just don't like it." (P1)*

*"It is not good for health, there might be pollution in public places."(P6)*

A thematic map has been created by the researcher for the collation of the themes. Figure 1 explains about four factors as integrated themes which have influenced husbands' feelings on their wives breastfeeding in public places. The feeling is placed at the center of the diagram because it was the topic of interest this study wants to reveal. The feelings are shameful, uncomfortable and dislike. There is a relation between the major themes shown by the broken line, meaning that it has the same level of the feelings of the husbands. The setting of the study and the research locale is the cover of the diagram seen at the top and bottom part of the illustrations. This diagram shows how the study went and summarizes the results.

## DISCUSSIONS

The first theme in this study is feeling based on religion. Religion is defined as the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods (English Oxford Dictionary, 2017). One of the participants described breastfeeding in public places as an established shameful feeling. Some husbands revealed how religion has been a basis to view about wives breastfeeding in public places. Based on the findings, all participants are Islamic. In this study, the personal part of the body they called *aurat* refers to a woman's breast. A study conducted by Nyonator (2017) stated that Islam requires women to dress modestly and not expose their bodies in public places. It was also stated in Zaidi (2014) about Surah 33:59 and Surah 24: 30-31 in the Qur'an, which command Muslims to respect their bodies, highlighting on modesty. This can be interpreted that women need to cover personal parts of the body so that these cannot be visible to others. This is like Pakistan which follows Islamic rules, accepts and respects breastfeeding in public as long as it is done discreetly (Donald et al. cited in Komodiki et al., 2014). One husband narrated that his wife uses a hijab that can cover the breast when she breastfeeds the baby. The practice of hijab, a head scarf often known as specific garments by Muslim women, also identifies women as Muslims (Eaton, 2015). As shown in Figure 1, there is a relation between hijab as a culture of Muslim women and religion that affects the feelings of the husband. As a personal interpretation, the researcher viewed the positive aspect of religion which is obeyed by the fathers as head of the family. But this lead to the dilemma of their wives breastfeeding in public places, and most of the participants indicated that it was shameful. The idea of covering the mothers' personal organs is the best way to breastfeed in public places and still obey religious norms.

The second theme, feelings based on socio-cultural influence, is related to an interaction with people or society, while culture describes the beliefs and behavior found in human societies, and is often linked with tradition. The context of socio-cultural in this study was related to the setting of the study, which was in Yogyakarta as a part of

Indonesia which is in the South-East Asia region. Furthermore, all participants were Javanese, with five participants from Yogyakarta and two from Central Java. Related to the theme, a psychologist, Catherine A. Sanderson (2010), defined the socio-cultural perspective as a perspective describing people's behavior and mental processes as shaped in part by their social and/or cultural contact, including race, gender and nationality. A study conducted by Youngren (2014) found that culture dictates that the practice of breastfeeding be done in private and public breastfeeding is viewed a taboo among American society. This led to a sense of mothers violating social norms, while another study by Dettwyler (cited in Daglas & Antoniou, 2012) revealed that in some developing civilizations, such as Mali in Western Africa, Sierra Leone and Nepal, the breast has maintained the primary biological function; it is considered an organ used to feed neonates and babies. These studies showed that there is a different view about breastfeeding in public places regarding the breast organ. In Indonesia, most parts of this country are really sensitive about women exposing their breast in public, which is seen as inappropriate, while there is acceptance for men who expose their upper body. These kinds of differences reflect how society lives in a particular culture, and every society will keep the existing culture because it is what they believe in. This was reinforced by Griffiths et al. (2005) that differences in breastfeeding practices are seen among mothers from different ethnic groups (Datta et al., 2012). Based on this study, the researcher concludes that any region determines the culture within that region. Whether the society in the region is feeling free or thinks negatively about breastfeeding in public, it depends on the culture they believe in. Gender issues in the family raised a point as to how husband and wife should support each other. There should be a discussion in the family, about the financial terms and in the task of raising children. The researcher realized that people living today are heavily influenced by the hereditary religious teachings and culture in the community. This also shown on Figure 1 where the broken line between religion and culture shows the relationship between the two themes.

The next theme is feelings based on personal views. One participant revealed that the feeling comes from his feeling as a man who is uncomfortable to see other women breastfeeding in public places because it will disturb the mothers' privacy. Meyer (2012), a psychologist, stated in her article that feelings are ignited by the thoughts and images that have become paired with a particular emotion. The uncomfortable feeling of the husband leads to his action to not let his wife do the same thing so that she would not make other people feel uncomfortable. In this study, a husband also feels uncomfortable with something that will disturb the mother's privacy. This idea was supported by Li et.al. (cited in Amir, 2014) that discomfort with the idea of breastfeeding in public has been cited as a reason for some women choosing not to initiate breastfeeding. A study by Mitchell-Box and Braun (2012) found that 10 fathers felt uncomfortable with breastfeeding in public because it was not appropriate. The study also revealed that fathers think it was important to minimize the public interaction, because breastfeeding should be done out of sight. The researcher admits that there is an effect on how someone sees something uncomfortable, as then he would not do the same thing so that he can avoid that uncomfortable feeling. In this study, the researcher found that most of the participants encouraged their wives to look for a nursery room, so that there will be no public attention during breastfeeding as it is done in an appropriate place.

Feelings related to health reasons significantly address the environment. Related to the needs for breastfeeding is a way to improve the health of the child. It would be ironic if this practice precisely becomes not healthy because the environment is dirty. One participant narrated that his wife always extracts breast milk and places it in the bottle in case they are in public places. This concern is related to the hygiene of breastfeeding. Mothers should maintain her breast hygiene to prevent foreign particles entering the body during breastfeeding since her child might develop illness which may lead to breastfeeding problems. Oluka (2014) reported that breastfeeding mothers practicing good hygiene is essential. This includes cleaning their breasts and nipples before and after feeding their child using a warm towel, but, when mother is in

public places, then it possibly could not be done. Precisely, air pollutants will contaminate the breastfeeding. This is the reason why a husband expresses his dislike and this could lead to his disagreement for wife to breastfeed in public places. Health reasons are also related with personal views of the husband, shown by the broken line in Figure 1; not everyone will pay attention to cleanliness when doing something, so this is related to the husband's personal view. The researcher thinks this needs more attention from the government regarding public policy for breastfeeding, specifically the implementation. Related to the law and regulations on breastfeeding in Indonesia, there was a mention that mothers have the right to breastfeed in public places and the criteria of public facilities is also established in the Ministry of Health's Letter No. 872/menkes/XI/2006. But the implementation is still not distributed evenly, meaning that there is still lack of public facilities to support breastfeeding in Yogyakarta. There is still a need for more effort to make breastfeeding in public more comfortable.

## CONCLUSION

The feelings of husband on their wives breastfeeding in public places are shameful, uncomfortable and dislike, which were influenced by several factors. The factors found were religion, socio-cultural influence, personal views and feelings related to health reasons. Public places need to build breastfeeding-friendly facilities in accordance the laws and regulations. This awareness is in line with the WHO to support mothers to breastfeed anytime and anywhere they have to. This study is also related to the nursing practice especially in a community setting, as it is necessary to more educate and encourage the husband to support his wife breastfeeding exclusively, as stated as the fundamental role of nurse as educator to promote exclusive breastfeeding and contribute to provide accurate information to the family.

## Conflict of Interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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