



Abstract

TITLE

Barriers to Optimal Breastfeeding Behaviors in Rural Indonesia

AUTHORS

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ABSTRACT

Background: Early and exclusive breastfeeding is considered an important part of infant nutrition, yielding many health benefits to infants. As of 2012, the rate of exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life in Indonesia was only 42%. Despite the low rate of exclusive breastfeeding in Indonesia, there is a paucity of data on factors that influence or act as barriers to optimal breastfeeding behaviors in the country. **Objectives:** The purpose of this study was to examine determinants of breastfeeding behaviors in rural Indonesia, with an added focus on barriers related to child gender. **Methods:** A cross-sectional survey was administered to 2086 women between the ages of 14 and 55 years old living in seven regions of rural Indonesia who have at least one child younger than two years of age. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all demographic variables related to the respondents and their children under the age of two. Multiple logistic regression was used to identify factors associated with optimal breastfeeding behaviors, including whether breastfeeding was initiated within one hour of birth, how long the child was breastfed for, and whether the child received food other than breastmilk in the first three days of life. Logistic regression models were adjusted for potential confounders. **Results:** More than half (58.2%, 595/1023) of male babies were breastfed within one hour of birth, while 64.0% (680/1063) of female babies were breastfed within one hour of birth. After adjusting for confounding factors, female children were more likely to be breastfed in the first hour of birth (OR=1.268; 95% CI 1.062-1.515). Male babies were breastfed for an average of 6.4 months, while female babies were breastfed for an average of 9.2 months. Nearly half (48.9%, 500/1023) of male babies received food or drink other than breastmilk within the first three days of life, while 40.0% (425/1063) of female babies received food or drink other than breastmilk within the first three days of life. The belief that boys need better nutrition than girls (OR=0.706; 95% CI 0.572-0.872) is associated with lack of exclusive breastfeeding in the first 3 days of life. Protective factors against supplemental feeding in the first 3 days of life include the child being female (OR=1.383; 95% CI 1.160-1.649), and the perception that breastmilk is sufficient nutrition for the baby for the first 6 months of life (OR=1.605; 95% CI 1.294-1.990). **Implications for the Field:** Results indicate that suboptimal breastfeeding behaviors persist among women in Indonesia, particularly among male infants. Given this, interventions to improve breastfeeding behaviors in rural Indonesia should continue to be prioritized. Health communication strategies that target optimal breastfeeding behaviors in mothers, attitudes and beliefs related to baby gender and breastfeeding, social norms, and religious and cultural practices that contribute to non-exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life, particularly those that differ by baby gender, are central to inform sustainable behavior change.