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Exploring the Roles of Mothers, Fathers, Religious Leader, and Health Workers in Exclusive Breastfeeding in Palopo City, Indonesia: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Background: The rate of exclusive breastfeeding remains low due to multiple barriers. This study aimed to explore the perspectives of mothers, fathers, religious leaders, and health workers regarding obstacles to exclusive breastfeeding, with particular attention to the role of husbands and religious principles in breastfeeding practices.

Methods: This qualitative content analysis was conducted from June to August 2024 using MAXQDA software version 24 following the analytical framework proposed by Graneheim and Lundman. A total of 14 participants were included: three coordinating midwives, one religious leader, five mothers who did not exclusively breastfeed, and five husbands of mothers who did not exclusively breastfeed. Data were collected through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews based on an interview guide. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling.

Results: The study examined the perspectives of mothers, fathers, religious leaders, and health workers in

aregion with one of the lowest exclusive breastfeeding rates. Five major themes emerged: (1) lack of knowledge about the importance of exclusive breastfeeding and religious recommendations; (2) inadequate social support from husbands; (3) inappropriate attitudes toward breastfeeding; (4) the need for suitable educational content; and (5) the significance of religious modalities related to breastfeeding. Conclusion: Integrating Qur'anic teachings on breastfeeding and involving husbands in health education are key strategies for enhancing exclusive breastfeeding practices. Providing fathers with relevant knowledge and promoting their active participation can foster a supportive environment and improve breastfeeding outcomes. Hence, healthcare systems should acknowledge and strengthen the role of fathers in breastfeeding support so that both parents can jointly address breastfeeding challenges in accordance with religious values.