

## THE PERCEPTIONS OF MARRIED MEN ON BREASTFEEDING PRACTICE

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### ABSTRACT (250 words)

**Background:** Breastfeeding is the common practice for women soon after birth. As early as the baby is born, the mother will start to have milk production and enhance lactation period post-delivery. Thus, the mother becomes naturally embrace with the needs of breastfeeding, even for the first time mother. However, men somehow shows lack of awareness towards breastfeeding practice and have little information regarding the support required during the practice and the impacts of the support.

**Materials and Methods:** The objectives of this study were to explore the perceptions of married men on breastfeeding practice and to identify the men's understanding as well as the experience during breastfeeding practice. Methodology: A qualitative study employed semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted among married man in Kuantan. Data were analysed using thematic analysis.

**Result:** The married men perceived that the breastfeeding practice is essential to provide nutrients and antibody for the child's growth. They expressed the feelings of being motivated during the breastfeeding which enabled them to motivate their wife to continue the breastfeeding practice. The commonest challenges that shared by the married was to ensure their baby to have enough stock of breast milk and to sacrifice their sleeping time in order to support the continuity of breastfeeding practice. Despite these challenges, they acknowledged that it is their responsibility to support and care for their wife throughout breastfeeding practice.

**Conclusion:** The married men perceived that breastfeeding practice is an important element to provide basic necessities and good nourishment for the children's growth. Their understandings, experiences, beliefs, responsibilities and challenges faced during the breastfeeding practices were explained in this study.

**Keywords:** Married men, breastfeeding practice, perceptions, experiences, challenges, support, responsibilities.

## 1.0 Introduction

Breastfeeding is the common practice for women soon after birth. As early as the baby is born, the mother will start to have milk production and enhance lactation period post-delivery. Thus, the mother becomes naturally embrace with the needs of breastfeeding, even for the first time mother. However, for married men they somehow shows lack of awareness towards breastfeeding practice and have little information regarding the support required during the practice and the impacts of breastfeeding itself (Susin & Giuglani, 2008).

It is also found men with moderate level of education have more negative views on breastfeeding compared to those who are well-educated (Sittlington et al, 2007). Men tend to neglect breastfeeding practice because they think that the formula milk is more convenient than the breast milk and majority of them acknowledge that formula feeding is more favourable than breastfeeding especially for women who work outside the home (Wagenen, Magusson & Neiger, 2015).

Nevertheless, most of married men are eager to participate in breastfeeding practice. Parents who were expecting their first child perceive the breastfeeding as important and valuable (Lantera et al, 2010). It is also identifies married men who already had experience with previous breastfeeding before tends to accept the practice faithfully and shows positive attitudes (Muda et al, 2016). Breastfeeding practice definitely needs serious support this study may develop the attention for the husband to stay concern and support the practice.

## 2.0 Materials and Methods

### 2.1 *Study design*

The fundamental aim of qualitative research is to explore the meaning and understanding of individual's subjective experiences in their social context. The qualitative approach is considered as an appropriate method to explore breastfeeding practice from the perspective of married men. Employing a qualitative approach allows for flexibility and openness in exploring the practice by providing an opportunity for the men to describe their experiences and perspectives in detail.

### 2.2 *Sample and Procedures*

The data were collected using individual face to face interviews with semi-structured questions. A total of 15 participants were approached personally to be involved in this study. All the interviews were conducted in participants own pace of time and at location of their choice. Informed consent was obtained prior to the interview and the sessions were tape recorded. The duration of interview session was carried out approximately 60 minutes each.

### 2.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used concurrently. The recordings from the interview were transcribed into verbatim. Next, the coding process was used to identify important features of the data that might answer the research question. Afterwards, the researcher identified the categories arise and recognized the relationships of each themes according to the meaning paragraphs. This phase involved developing detailed analysis and naming of themes. Then, for the final phase, writing data interpretation and contextualizing based on existing literature was involved.

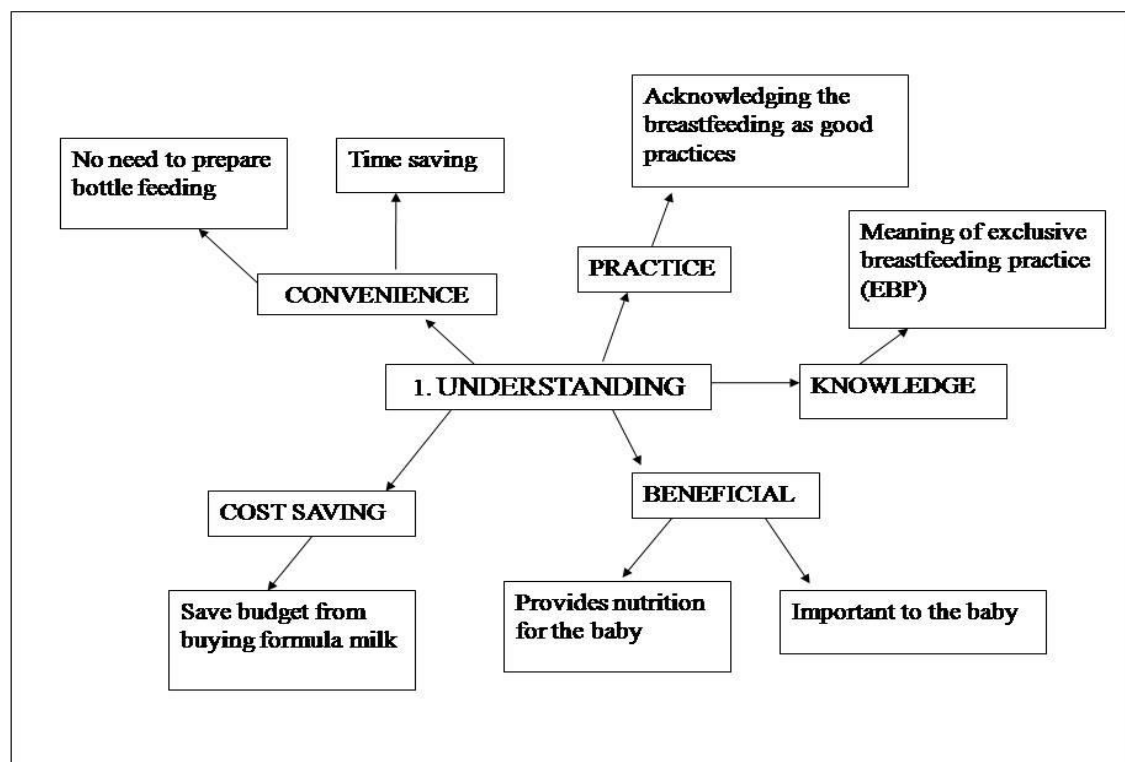
## 3.0 Result

The findings show five major themes emerged; (1) the men's understanding; (2) the experiences; (3) challenges faced; (4) responsibilities and (5) beliefs of the married men.

### 3.1 Theme 1: The Understanding of Married Men on Breastfeeding Practice.

Men expressed their thoughts and understandings regarding breastfeeding practice. They shared their understandings of exclusive breastfeeding and the importance of the practice. This theme is explained by four subthemes: knowledge, practice, benefits and convenience. Figure 1 illustrates the participants' understanding of breastfeeding practice.

**Figure 1:** The Husband Understandings.



### **3.1.1 Practical and knowledge**

The participants expressed the idea of exclusive breastfeeding practice well and the needs to continue the practice:

“...exclusive breastfeeding practice is, you should breastfeed your child until 2 years old age.....after 6 months, additional foods can be added” (Respondent 1).

“...due to my background in nursing, I encourage my wife to breastfeed until the age of my baby 2 years old....they need to exclusively take the breast milk until the age of 6 months” (Respondent 2).

“...fully breastfeed for 2 years, well at least exclusively for 6 months...” (Respondent 3)

### **3.1.2 Beneficial and convenience**

Participants understood that the breastfeeding practice is essential in providing nutrients and antibody for the child's growth.

“...gives a baby nutrient, so it makes my baby feel healthier. It also makes my wife healthier” (Respondent 4).

“...milk contains antibody and other nutrients that suitable for the baby's growth” (Respondent 5).

“...the breastfeeding practice is essential in order to give the best nutrition for the baby at the early period...” (Respondent 5)

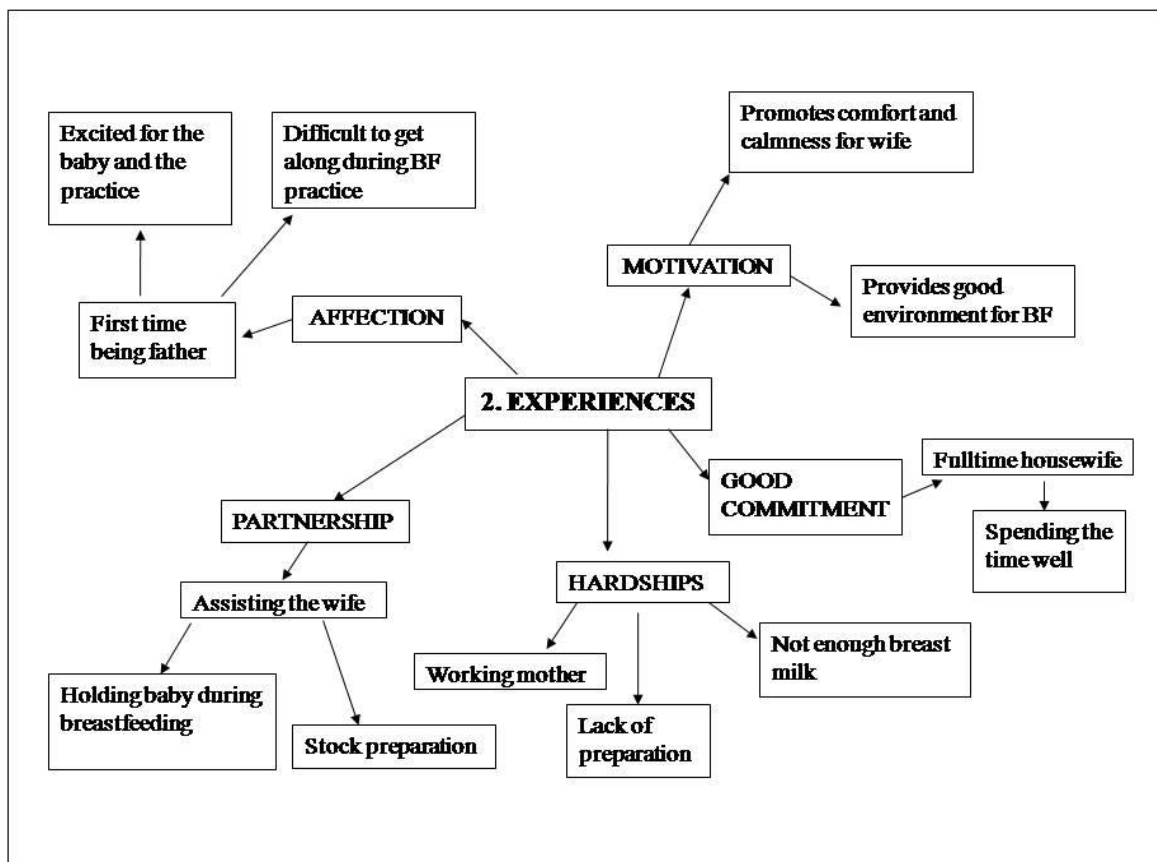
On the other hand, this sub theme shows that the breastfeeding practice is convenient in terms of time and cost savings. This has been illustrated from quotations by the participants:

“...give breastfeeding without any soft diet until 2 year... due to source of nutrition and everything. Also it can save the cost and money” (Respondent 4).

“...the practice is very convenient as you don't have to make bottle feeding...” (Respondent 5)

## **3.2 Theme 2: Experiences of Married Men during Breastfeeding Practice**

Few sub themes were emerged and these reflect the experience of the husbands during the breastfeeding practice as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2:** Experiences of the husband.

### 3.2.1 Good commitment and hardships

The participants experienced the condition where the wife is fulltime housewife and this had helped the spouse to continue breastfed the children.

“For me it is not a big problem since my wife is a full time housewife...” (Respondent 1)

“Now with no other commitment, she can give full breastfeeding to my second child well” (Respondent 5).

The participants justified the hitches and bars that they faced and those have made them to learn new lesson throughout the breastfeeding practices.

“She used to have problems to breastfeed my first child because of working” (Respondent 5).

“...my son, yes, we mix together between breast milk and a bit formulated milk because when we gave the breast milk only, that will not be enough for him” (Respondent 3).

### 3.2.2 Partnership and affection

Involvement of the husband was perceived as a good practice while breastfeeding.

“...when my wife wants to prepare meals and our baby is crying, I will hold the baby and give the prepared breast milk.” (Respondent 4)

“I helped my wife holding the baby while she went for massaging....” (Respondent 5)

The participants elucidate their feelings, saying that somehow they were excited to have that first experience as a father.

“For the first time being a father, I was quite excited.” (Respondent 5)

The participant also expressed the difficulty experienced for the first time being a father.

“I found that it was difficult at first...” (Respondent 4)

### 3.2.3 Motivation

The participants feel that they were motivated while observing the breastfeeding and this enabled them to motivate their wife to continue the breastfeeding practice.

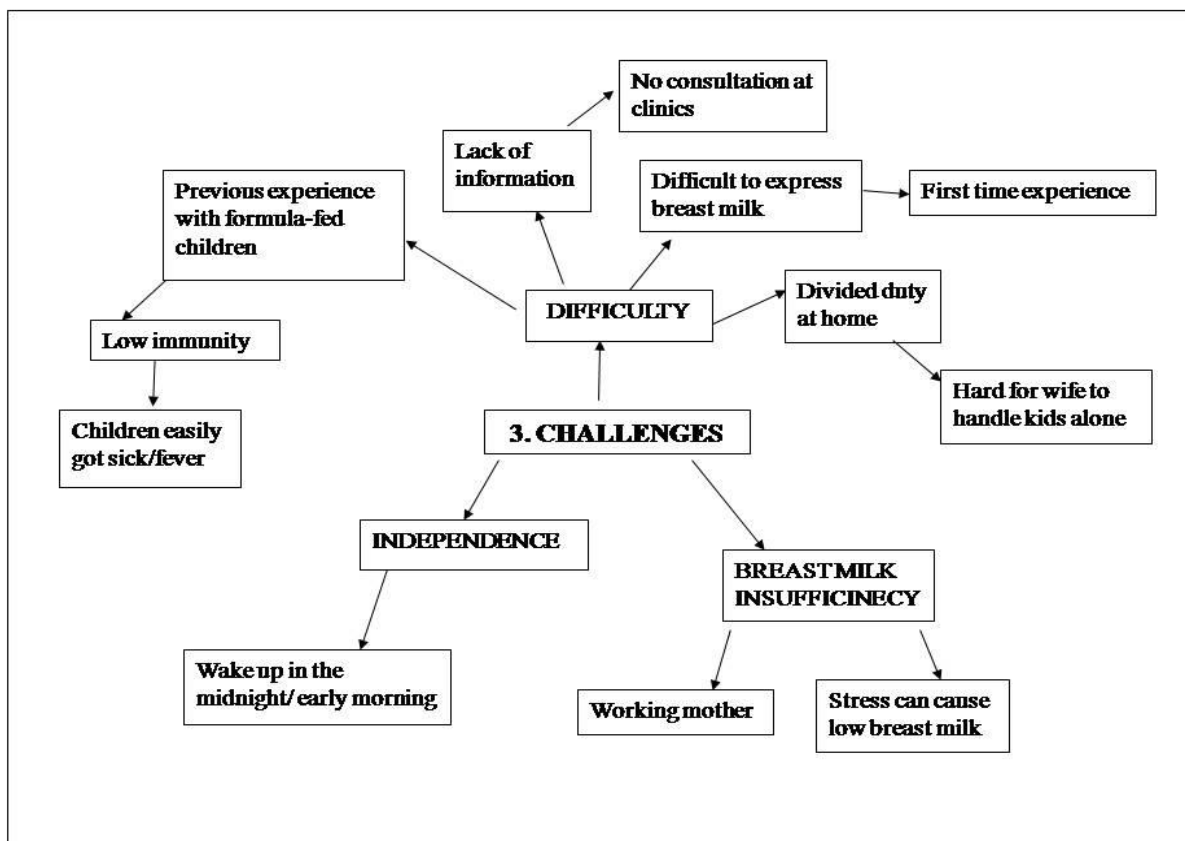
“...I remember, I just put a pillow at the back of my wife and asked her to stay calm” (Respondent 2)

“... a good experience though to see and able to feel the honesty in breastfeeding practice...” (Respondent 4)

### 3.3 Theme 3: Challenges of Married Men during Breastfeeding Practice

All the husbands rendered that they facing challenges from the breastfeeding practice. They described various difficulties that they had for the entire period of the practices.

Figure 3: Challenges faced by the husband.



### **3.3.1 Breast milk insufficiency and difficulty to breastfeed**

For instance, they reported that their wife complained of lack of breast milk. They suspected that the lack of breast milk most probably resulted from stress:

“I know that if my wife is stressed, the breast cannot be expressed and low milk will be produced...” (Respondent 2)

“Not enough milk, I think because my wife is a working mother.” (Respondent 3)

The hardships that the participants going through have been quite electrifying for them throughout the breastfeeding practice. The commonest is the difficulty to express enough breast milk. Plus, the result from the milk reduction has led them to use formula milk, thus leads to another consequence.

“During the first time my wife experiencing the breastfeeding, it is very difficult to express the milk.” (Respondent 2)

“...the milk production will become lesser. At the moment, we introduced the first child with formulated milk at his 1 year old. And he used to get sick and fever afterward” (Respondent 5).

### **3.3.2 Independence**

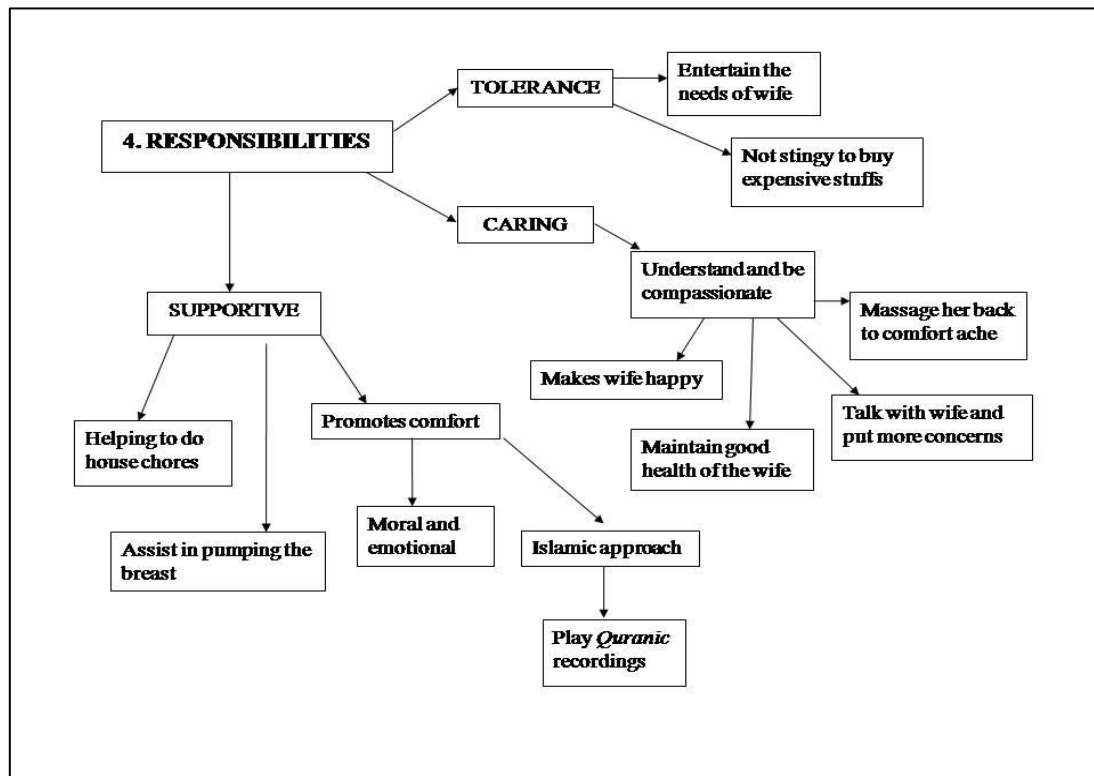
As a learning phase in becoming a father, the participants ascertained on how to be independent and at the same time help the wife to successfully breastfeed the children, which they found out as a challenging process. As detailed from the quotes below:

“.....we also need to wake up like in the midnight or at 4 am just to pump the breast milk and prepare the stock for my children.” (Respondent 3)

“....we need to wake up in the middle of the night to give breastfeeding and pump for the stock...” (Respondent 5)

### **3.4 Theme 4: Responsibilities of Married Men during Breastfeeding Practice**

The mother's role in breastfeeding is absolutely undeniable. However, the husband also needs to play his role so that the wife can precede to breastfeed the children. The sub theme is revealed from the care and supports shown by the participants.

**Figure 4:** Role and responsibility of the husband.

### 3.4.1 Tolerance

It is important for the husband to be tolerance especially towards the wife welfare during the breastfeeding practice. Giving what she wants can help to ease the wife's burden.

"I also buy Sunnah foods for her and they are quite expensive" (Respondent 2).

"I bought her foods that can improve breast milk production such as, more on dates, almonds and milk" (Respondent 3).

"...to make her happy, I will buy anything she wants to eat" (Respondent 4).

"I like to buy things for my wife like new purse, watch, shoes, just to entertain her and make her feel better..." (Respondent 5)

### 3.4.2 Caring

The participants expressed and explained the actions they perform just to prove their inner caring towards the wife and the breastfeeding itself.

"I need to make sure that my wife is in a very good condition and get enough nutrition..." (Respondent 1)

"..I just speak to her and make conversation, just to deviate her from the stressful feelings and bored..." (Respondent 2)



“...I will ask how’s she doing and regarding the breast milk also because she still breastfeeding...” (Respondent 3)

### 3.4.5 Supportive

The sub theme shows how important the supports given by the participants in motivating and helping the wife to go through the breastfeeding practice. Similarly, they also support the practices well. Holistically, the supports vary from the emotional, moral as well as Islamic approach.

“I bought a breast pump for my wife to help in preparing the milk” (Respondent 2).

“...giving moral and emotional supports is the main role of the husband towards wife....” (Respondent 3)

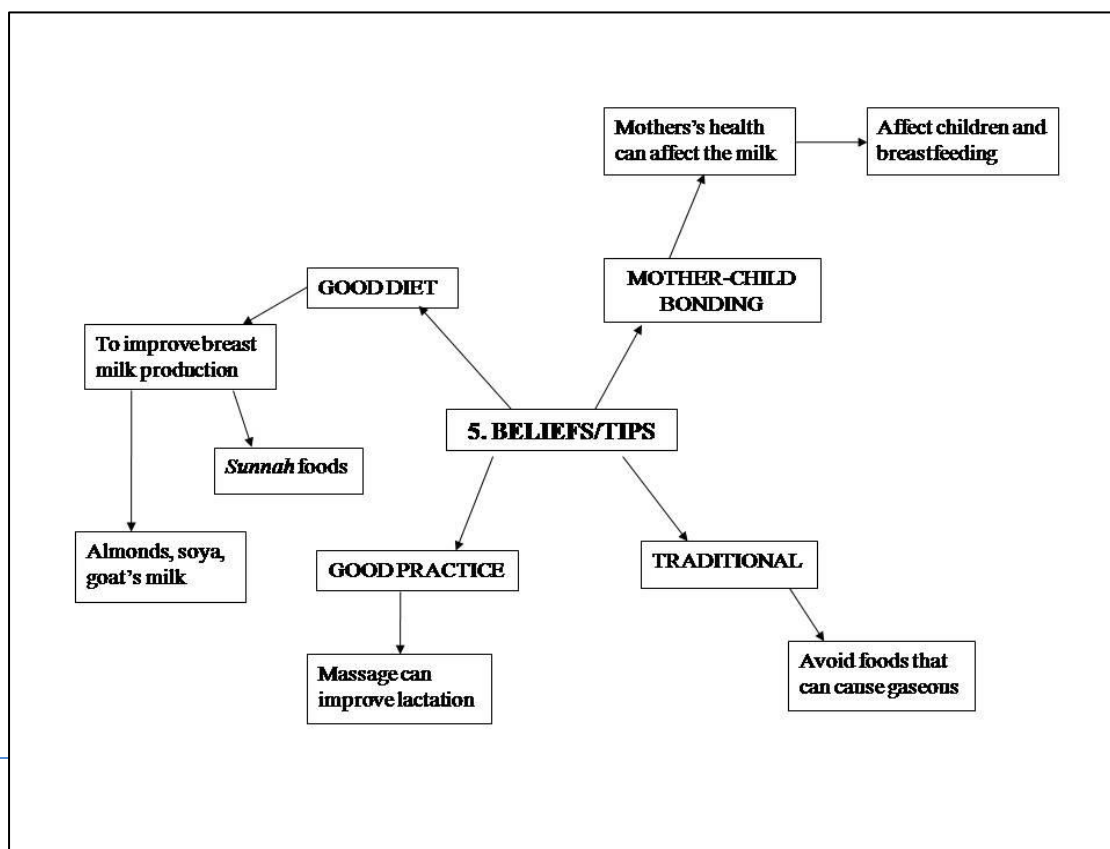
“...prepare the room comfortably for her to give breastfeeding” (Respondent 5).

“Sometimes I play recordings of Quranic verses while she breastfeed our children in the room in order to provide calm and peace” (Respondent 5).

### 3.5 Theme 5: Beliefs and Tips Practiced During Breastfeeding Practice

It is a norm for the couples who get married to have few beliefs from their in-laws or perhaps inherited from the family. The husbands also believed that the bond between the mother and children is far beyond from just a mere connection. Some tips also have been applied during breastfeeding practice in order to improve milk production. These can actually come from the old folk’s teaching in family or the husband’s own initiative to help the wife.

**Figure.5:** Beliefs and Tips Practiced by the Spouses.



### 3.5.1 *Mother-child relationship*

The relationship of a mother and the children is the greatest of all. Indeed, it shows how the participants believe that the mother's health is important for maintaining the child health as well.

"If the mother is sick, then it might affect the milk during breastfeeding..." (Respondent 1)

"... Even during my wife got fever, I wasn't allowed my wife to breastfeed my son..." (Respondent 3)

### 3.5.2 *Good diet*

A very healthy eating is important for a mother. That is what the participants believed.

"My wife really practicing the Sunnah way of eating such as dates and habbatussauda..." (Respondent 2)

"We blended together milk, dates and almonds. Every time I prepared the serving, like, one full glass, I blended 7 dates and almonds..." (Respondent 3)

"First take goat's milk as it will help to improve milk expression and..." (Respondent 4)

### 3.5.3 *Traditional*

For this sub theme, the participants elaborate the dos and don'ts from the traditional beliefs allocated for breastfeeding mother and the practices too.

"...some vegetables can cause gas and some might lead to severe jaundice..." (Respondent 2)

"...some vegetables can cause gas and some might lead to severe jaundice..." (Respondent 3)

## 4.0 Discussion

### 4.1 *The Understanding of Married Men towards Breastfeeding Practice*

Figure 1 illustrates men's understanding. They perceived that the practice is very important for the child's health. Similarly, they also believed that the practice can provide highly nutritional contents; be it nutrients and the antibody, which eventually can help to improve the child's health and immunity level. It has been proven that the majority of the married men are aware that the breast milk works as an ideal food for the babies (Wagenen et al, 2015). Even though the husbands are less to care about the problematic issues on breastfeeding, but they still understand and have knowledge regarding the advantages and benefits of the effective feeding (Noraini et al, 2015; Nesbitt et al, 2012). Other than that, the breastfeeding practice is conveniently accepted by the participants. In this case, 80% of the parents reported to perceive the breastfeeding practice as convenient and economical (Lee et al, 2007).

All of the participants in this study recognized the meaning of exclusive breastfeeding practice. This may suggest that the knowledge and level of understanding of the husband influenced them to choose breastfeeding practice. The attitude and thoughts perceived by the fathers affect the initiation and duration for exclusive breastfeeding practice in the family (Mueffelman et al, 2014). Nevertheless, there are also western studies depict that the men are

unfamiliar with the exclusive breastfeeding practice as they are lacking of teaching and knowledge (Engebresten, 2010).

#### **4.2 The Experience of Married Men during Breastfeeding Practice**

Figure 2 reveals the experience of the husband. One of the participants perceived that it is difficult to cope with breastfeeding challenges, while others were able to express their excitement. As a husband, the preference of breastfeeding over formula feeding depends on the household commitment as well. This means that the breastfeeding can be continued with no hurdles if the wife is a fulltime housewife. The participants found that the breastfeeding practice comes in handy when their wives are not working or no longer attached with job, so the housewife can give good commitment and full attention to breastfeed the children until up to 2 years. Non-working mothers are able to give full and exclusive breastfeeding towards the children because of full commitment and no stressful events from workplace (Tan, 2011).

It is important for the husband to assist the wife and subsequently be the good supporter in the family. A study in Turkey illustrates that the husband is voluntary to help doing the house chores and other motherly tasks so that the wife can breastfeed the children comfortably (Taspinar, Coban, Kucuk & Sirin, 2013). So, the involvement of a husband can strengthen up the bonds; therefore improve the decision of the whole family to breastfeed. In this study the participants feel that they are being motivated during the observation and how they experiencing the breastfeeding practice. The mother-child relationship can lead the husband to be more focused on providing good care and support towards the breastfeeding practice.

#### **4.3 Challenges of Married Men during Breastfeeding Practice**

There are few obstacles that the participants confront throughout the breastfeeding practice such as being independent, breast milk insufficiency and difficulties for the wife shown in the figure 3. Usually the participants and the spouses are more likely to initiate the breastfeeding practice for the sake of their children, but due to the certain circumstances, they find out that the practice becomes quite challenging (Engebresten et al, 2010). The commonest sub theme that can be adhered is breast milk insufficiency.

In this study, the low production of breast milk somehow made the couples decide to go for formula milk. But, to a certain extent, there are some other causes that lead to this matter. First is working mother. Working mothers tend to discontinue the breastfeeding practice due to the inconveniences like poor policy of the practice at the workplace (Chen, Wu & Chie, 2006; Muda et al, 2016). The participant who had previous experience with his working wife elaborates that the breastfeeding practices can only be given to his first child until 1 year old, and then additionally takes bottle feeding. In accordance to this matter, the mothers choose to give bottle-feeding because they have to go to work and more favourable (Wagenen, 2015).

#### **4.4 The Responsibility of Married Men during Breastfeeding Practice**

In figure 4, the married men are tolerance in making decision, being supportive and caring for their spouses. During the breastfeeding practice, it is well-known that the practices reflect the mother's expression of love and the divine role of the wife (Muda et al, 2014).

Correspondingly, the husband also needs to play the role and responsibility towards the wife during the breastfeeding practice, which eventually affects the decision to breastfeed.

Tolerance: The participants entertain their wives during the breastfeeding practice by giving them anything that they want to eat regardless the price. Caring: Somehow the spouse experienced low back pain and stress over the period for sitting too long throughout the breastfeeding. Thus, the participants performed massage at the back just to lure out the pain. A study notes how the father has given the mother positive encouragement and letting her expertise how he feels about breastfeeding (Harwood, 2013). Supportive: Furthermore, it shows that the supportive husband makes the mother to prolong breastfeed the children. In that capacity, when the husband's support is great, the decision to give exclusive breastfeeding is moved forward. Meanwhile, the fathers claimed themselves as a man who can give backing and consolation to the breastfeeding mother (Harwood, 2013). One of the participants involved also has cultivated the Islamic approach in giving support for the spouse. He played the Quranic verses recordings when the breastfeeding practice takes place in order to give tranquillity.

#### **4.5 Beliefs of Married Men on Breastfeeding Practice**

Figure 5 illustrates the beliefs. The participants believe that good diet and good practices embedded in daily routines can give the mothers benefit. Fundamentally, the good diet like Sunnah ways of eating can help to improve the milk production, thus ease the breastfeeding practices. All of the participants are highly acquainted with the public breastfeeding and positive attitudes are shown, as the husbands really help the wife to give breastfeeding even at the public. Likewise, breastfeeding rooms are now provided at the shopping complexes around the country and this actually makes the practice easy. The exposure to the breastfeeding in public can boost positive attitudes towards the practice itself although previous study shows that the men feel embarrassed and uncomfortable with the public breastfeeding (Vaaler et al, 2011; Marrone, Vogelstanz & Holm, 2008).

## **5.0 Conclusion and recommendation**

Literally, the married men in this study have shown some positive perceptions towards breastfeeding practice as attributed to their understanding, their experiences during the practice, the challenges and hurdles they faced, their responsibilities for the household and the beliefs they had. They agreed that the breastfeeding practice is important in accordance to provide basic necessities and good nourishment for the children's growth. The clinics or healthcare workers should educate the accomplices with correct techniques, strategies and advices on breastfeeding practice during the appointments.

This research is recommended to be conducted on different cultures. It is intriguing to determine the husband's experience with different cultures, challenges that occur and the system of adapting may vary as impacted by their social qualities for the breastfeeding practices.

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## Ethical

Ethical approvals were obtained from Kulliyah of Nursing Postgraduate and Research Committee (KNPGRC) and IIUM Research Ethics Committee (IREC) (Reference number: IIUM/504/14/11/3/IREC 477).

## Declaration

These authors of the article declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding publication of this article.

## Authors contribution

Author 1 and author 2: Design the outline of the manuscript, prepare and edit the manuscript

Author 3 and author 4: Design the outline of the manuscript and prepare the manuscript

Author 5: Review the final manuscript

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