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The Relationship Between Husband's Emotional Support and Maternal Breastfeeding Self-Efficacy in Exclusive Breastfeeding in the Working Area of Kota Tengah Public Health Center

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ABSTRACT

Background: Exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of life is essential for optimal infant growth, development, and health. Maternal breastfeeding self-efficacy is an important psychological factor that may support the continuation of exclusive breastfeeding. Emotional support from husbands may contribute to maternal confidence by providing empathy, affection, attention, and psychological reassurance. However, evidence concerning the specific relationship between husbands' emotional support and maternal breastfeeding self-efficacy remains limited in the local context.
Objective: This study aimed to determine the relationship between husbands' emotional support and maternal breastfeeding self-efficacy in exclusive breastfeeding in the working area of Kota Tengah Public Health Center, Gorontalo City.
Methods: A quantitative study with a cross-sectional design was conducted from January 10 to February 12, 2026. The study involved 82 breastfeeding mothers selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected using a demographic questionnaire, a 14-item questionnaire assessing husbands' emotional support, and the Breastfeeding Self-Efficacy Scale–Short Form (BSES-SF). Descriptive statistics were used for univariate analysis, while the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was used to assess data normality. The relationship between husbands' emotional support and maternal breastfeeding self-efficacy was analyzed using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation test.
Results: Most respondents reported high levels of emotional support from their husbands, namely 80 respondents (97.6%), while 2 respondents (2.4%) reported low emotional support. Regarding breastfeeding self-efficacy, 63 mothers (76.8%) had high self-efficacy, 18 mothers (22.0%) had moderate self-efficacy, and 1 mother (1.2%) had low self-efficacy. Pearson correlation analysis demonstrated a statistically significant positive relationship between husbands' emotional support and maternal breastfeeding self-efficacy ($p = 0.018$; $r = 0.262$). The correlation was classified as weak but positive.
Conclusion: Husbands' emotional support was significantly associated with maternal breastfeeding self-efficacy. Although the strength of the relationship was weak, the positive direction indicates that better emotional support from husbands tends to be accompanied by higher maternal confidence in breastfeeding.

INTRODUCTION

Exclusive breastfeeding is an important component of infant and maternal health. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that infants be exclusively breastfed during the first six months of life, meaning that infants receive only breast milk without other foods or liquids, including water, except for oral rehydration solutions, vitamins, minerals, or medicines when indicated. After six months, complementary foods should be introduced while breastfeeding is continued up to two years of age or beyond.

Breast milk provides essential nutrients and bioactive components that support infant growth, immune development, and protection against infectious diseases. Human milk also contributes to the maturation of the infant gut microbiome and immune system. In Indonesia, breastfeeding remains an important public health issue. WHO and UNICEF reported that exclusive breastfeeding in Indonesia during the first six months increased from 52% in 2017 to 68% in 2023; however, challenges remain, particularly during the early postpartum period.

The success of exclusive breastfeeding is influenced by biological, psychological, social, cultural, and environmental factors. One psychological factor that is particularly important is breastfeeding self-efficacy, defined as a mother's confidence in her ability to breastfeed successfully. Mothers with higher breastfeeding self-efficacy are generally more confident in managing breastfeeding challenges and maintaining breastfeeding practices. The Breastfeeding Self-Efficacy Scale–Short Form (BSES-SF) was developed by Dennis as a shortened instrument for assessing breastfeeding self-efficacy and has demonstrated strong psychometric properties. Research among Indonesian postpartum women has also demonstrated good construct validity and high internal consistency of the Indonesian BSES-SF, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90.

Social support is another important factor associated with maternal breastfeeding experiences. Among various sources of support, the husband has a particularly important position because he is generally one of the closest people to the mother during the postpartum and breastfeeding periods. Emotional support may include empathy, affection, attention, concern, encouragement, and reassurance. Such support can help mothers feel valued, understood, and psychologically secure during breastfeeding.

Previous studies included in the present research indicate that husband support is associated with breastfeeding outcomes. Yunitasari et al. (2021) reported an association between husband support and mothers' motivation to provide exclusive breastfeeding. Wahyuni (2019) also found a significant relationship between husband support and exclusive breastfeeding among working mothers. Similarly, Salma Qurrata A'yun and Yuliaswati (2024) reported a significant association between husband support and exclusive breastfeeding ($p = 0.002$).

Nevertheless, previous studies have generally examined husband support in relation to exclusive breastfeeding as an outcome, while fewer studies have specifically examined the relationship between **emotional support from husbands and maternal breastfeeding self-efficacy**. This distinction is important because self-efficacy represents a psychological mechanism through which social support may contribute to successful breastfeeding.

The preliminary observation conducted in the working area of Kota Tengah Public Health Center indicated that exclusive breastfeeding coverage had reached 54.37% in 2024. Initial interviews with breastfeeding mothers also suggested that mothers who received attention and emotional comfort from their husbands tended to feel more confident during breastfeeding, whereas limited husband involvement was associated with reduced maternal confidence. Therefore, this study was conducted to determine the relationship between husbands' emotional support and maternal breastfeeding self-efficacy in exclusive breastfeeding in the working area of Kota Tengah Public Health Center.

METHODS

Study Design and Setting

This study employed a **quantitative cross-sectional design**. The research was conducted in the working area of Kota Tengah Public Health Center, Gorontalo City, Indonesia. Data collection was conducted from **January 10 to February 12, 2026**.

Population and Sample

The study population consisted of breastfeeding mothers in the working area of Kota Tengah Public Health Center. The documented population was 103 breastfeeding mothers. A total of **82 respondents** were included in the study using purposive sampling.

The inclusion criteria were mothers who were currently breastfeeding exclusively, had infants aged 2 weeks to 6 months, and lived in the same household as their husbands. Mothers experiencing severe postpartum medical complications that interfered with breastfeeding and mothers with mental disorders were excluded.

Research Instruments

First, a demographic questionnaire was used to obtain information concerning maternal characteristics, including age, educational level, occupation, husband's occupation, number of children, and infant age.

Second, husbands' emotional support was measured using a questionnaire developed from Fitri (2023). The instrument consisted of 14 items covering four dimensions: empathy, affection, concern, and attention. Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale ranging from never to always.

Third, maternal breastfeeding self-efficacy was measured using the **Breastfeeding Self-Efficacy Scale–Short Form (BSES-SF)**. The original BSES-SF was developed by Dennis (2003). The instrument used in the study consisted of 12 items assessing mothers' confidence in breastfeeding skills and their ability to overcome breastfeeding challenges. The study documentation reported that the emotional-support instrument had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.716, while the BSES-SF adaptation used in the research had previously demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using univariate and bivariate analyses. Univariate analysis was used to describe respondent characteristics and the distribution of husbands' emotional support and maternal breastfeeding self-efficacy.

The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was used to assess data normality because the sample consisted of more than 50 respondents. Because the data met the assumptions for parametric analysis, the **Pearson Product-Moment correlation test** was used to determine the relationship between husbands' emotional support and maternal breastfeeding self-efficacy. Statistical significance was established at **$p < 0.05$**.

RESULTS

Emotional Support from Husbands

Among the 82 respondents, **80 mothers (97.6%)** reported receiving high emotional support from their husbands, while **2 mothers (2.4%)** reported low emotional support. Emotional support included husbands' empathy, affection, concern, and attention toward mothers during breastfeeding.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents According to Husbands' Emotional Support

Emotional support	n	%
Low	2	2.4
High	80	97.6
Total	**82**	**100.0**

The findings indicate that almost all mothers in the study perceived their husbands as providing high levels of emotional support during the breastfeeding period.

Maternal Breastfeeding Self-Efficacy

Of the 82 respondents, **63 mothers (76.8%)** had high breastfeeding self-efficacy, **18 mothers (22.0%)** had moderate breastfeeding self-efficacy, and **1 mother (1.2%)** had low breastfeeding self-efficacy.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents According to Maternal Breastfeeding Self-Efficacy

Breastfeeding self-efficacy	n	%
Low	1	1.2
Moderate	18	22.0
High	63	76.8
Total	**82**	**100.0**

These findings demonstrate that most mothers had strong confidence in their ability to breastfeed their infants.

Relationship Between Husbands' Emotional Support and Maternal Breastfeeding Self-Efficacy

Pearson Product-Moment analysis showed a statistically significant relationship between husbands' emotional support and maternal breastfeeding self-efficacy. The correlation coefficient was **$r = 0.262$**, with a significance value of **$p = 0.018$**.

Table 3. Correlation Between Husbands' Emotional Support and Maternal Breastfeeding Self-Efficacy

Variables	Pearson r	p-value	N
Husbands' emotional support – breastfeeding self-efficacy	0.262	0.018	82

Because $p = 0.018$ was lower than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. The positive correlation indicates that higher emotional support from husbands was associated with higher maternal breastfeeding self-efficacy. However, the correlation coefficient of 0.262 indicates that the strength of the relationship was weak.

DISCUSSION

Husbands' Emotional Support

The study found that almost all respondents (97.6%) perceived high emotional support from their husbands. This finding suggests that husbands in the study setting were generally involved in the emotional aspects of breastfeeding by providing attention, affection, empathy, and concern.

Emotional support is important because breastfeeding is not solely a physiological process. Mothers may experience fatigue, uncertainty, anxiety, and difficulties adapting to their new role. A supportive husband may help

create a psychologically comfortable environment in which mothers feel accepted and encouraged to continue breastfeeding.
The finding is consistent with previous research cited in the original study. Yunitasari et al. (2021) reported an association between husband support and maternal motivation to provide exclusive breastfeeding. Wahyuni (2019) similarly found that husband support, including emotional, physical, informational, and appraisal support, was significantly associated with exclusive breastfeeding among working mothers.
Recent evidence also emphasizes the importance of social and family support in breastfeeding self-efficacy. The original study's literature review identifies social support, psychological condition, breastfeeding experience, and maternal knowledge as factors that may influence breastfeeding self-efficacy.

Maternal Breastfeeding Self-Efficacy
The majority of mothers in this study (76.8%) had high breastfeeding self-efficacy. This finding indicates that most respondents believed they were capable of breastfeeding their infants and dealing with challenges associated with breastfeeding.
Breastfeeding self-efficacy is an important psychological construct because confidence may influence how mothers respond to breastfeeding difficulties. Mothers who believe in their ability to breastfeed may be more persistent when facing challenges such as fatigue, infant fussiness, perceived insufficient milk, or difficulties with breastfeeding techniques.
The BSES-SF is a widely used instrument for assessing breastfeeding self-efficacy. Dennis' original psychometric assessment demonstrated the suitability of the short form for measuring maternal breastfeeding self-efficacy. Furthermore, an Indonesian psychometric study found that the Indonesian BSES-SF had a unidimensional structure and excellent internal consistency, supporting its use among Indonesian postpartum mothers.
The high proportion of mothers with high breastfeeding self-efficacy in this study may also reflect the supportive environment experienced by respondents. Most participants reported high emotional support from their husbands, which may provide reassurance and encouragement during breastfeeding.

Relationship Between Husbands' Emotional Support and Maternal Breastfeeding Self-Efficacy
The main finding of this study was a statistically significant positive relationship between husbands' emotional support and maternal breastfeeding self-efficacy (**r = 0.262; p = 0.018**). This means that mothers who perceived better emotional support from their husbands tended to report higher confidence in their breastfeeding abilities.
Although the relationship was statistically significant, its strength was weak. Therefore, husbands' emotional support should not be interpreted as the only factor determining maternal breastfeeding self-efficacy. The original study acknowledges that other factors, including maternal knowledge, breastfeeding experience, culture, support from other family members, health-worker support, and psychological condition, may also contribute to breastfeeding confidence.
This interpretation is important because breastfeeding self-efficacy is multidimensional. Social support can provide encouragement and emotional security, but mothers' confidence may also develop through previous successful breastfeeding experiences, knowledge, professional counselling, and their ability to manage breastfeeding difficulties.
The findings are consistent with previous studies cited in the original research. Yunitasari et al. (2021) found a relationship between husband support and maternal motivation for exclusive breastfeeding, while Wahyuni (2019) reported a significant association between husband support and successful exclusive breastfeeding among working mothers. Salma Qurrata A'yun and Yuliaswati (2024) also found a significant relationship between husband support and exclusive breastfeeding, with p = 0.002.
The present study therefore provides additional evidence by focusing specifically on **emotional support from husbands and maternal breastfeeding self-efficacy**, rather than examining husband support only as a general predictor of exclusive breastfeeding.
From a nursing perspective, the findings suggest that breastfeeding promotion should not focus exclusively on mothers. Husbands can be involved through breastfeeding education, counselling, maternal and child health services, and breastfeeding support activities. WHO and UNICEF likewise emphasize the importance of strengthening support systems for breastfeeding mothers, particularly during the critical early postpartum period.

CONCLUSION
This study demonstrated that most breastfeeding mothers in the working area of Kota Tengah Public Health Center received high emotional support from their husbands (97.6%) and had high breastfeeding self-efficacy (76.8%). Pearson Product-Moment analysis demonstrated a statistically significant positive relationship between husbands' emotional support and maternal breastfeeding self-efficacy (**p = 0.018; r = 0.262**). The relationship was weak but positive, indicating that greater emotional support from husbands tends to be associated with greater maternal confidence in breastfeeding. These findings highlight the importance of involving husbands as part of breastfeeding support interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Kota Tengah Public Health Center is recommended to strengthen husband involvement in breastfeeding promotion through breastfeeding education, family counselling, and maternal and child health activities. Health professionals should provide husbands with practical information about how to provide emotional support, including empathy, reassurance, attention, affection, and encouragement.

Breastfeeding mothers should also be encouraged to actively seek reliable information regarding breastfeeding techniques and strategies for managing breastfeeding challenges in order to strengthen their self-efficacy.

Future researchers should investigate other factors that may influence breastfeeding self-efficacy, including maternal knowledge, breastfeeding experience, cultural factors, family support, health-worker support, and maternal psychological conditions. Longitudinal or qualitative research is also recommended to provide a deeper understanding of changes in breastfeeding self-efficacy and the role of husbands' emotional support over time.

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