

# **Challenges of Exclusive Breast Feeding for Mother and Child**

**A Systematic Literature review**

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### **Abstract/Summary**

Breastfeeding is recognized as the most effective public health intervention to reduce infant malnutrition, morbidity, and mortality, with the World Health Organization advocating for exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) for the first six months of life. This systematic literature review investigates the challenges faced by mothers and infants in practicing EBF, highlighting the disparity in breastfeeding practices across different socioeconomic and cultural contexts.

The Nola Pander Health promotion (HPM) theory and Theory of Maternal Role Attainment developed by Ramona Mercer motivated this study. A qualitative systematic literature review was performed on 7 articles that were identified from scientific electronic databases like CINAHL, EBSCO, PUBMED, BioMed Central Journal, Google Scholar, and Novia FINNA E-book

Two themes and sixteen sub-themes emerged. Key challenges identified include maternal employment constraints, cultural beliefs regarding prolaternal feeding, inadequate maternal education and awareness, maternal health issues, and societal pressures that influence breastfeeding decisions. Findings indicate that many mothers struggle to initiate and sustain EBF, exacerbated by factors such as insufficient breast milk production and child refusal to breastfeed. The review underscores the need for comprehensive awareness campaigns and supportive policies to address these barriers, particularly in rural and low-income settings. Ultimately, addressing these challenges is crucial for improving breastfeeding rates and enhancing maternal and child health outcomes globally.

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# 1 Introduction

Breastfeeding remains the most cost-effective public health intervention to decrease infant malnutrition, morbidity, and mortality according to the World Health Organization (WHO). WHO recommends exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) for infants up to 6 months of age and breastfeeding is additionally encouraged as a supplement to food from 6 months until two years. Breastfeeding ought to be started within an hour of birth, known as "early initiation." Colostrum which is the first breast milk produced by a mother, is considered the ideal food for newborns. A child's first two years of life are especially crucial because during this time, they should receive optimal nutrition, which lowers morbidity and mortality, decreases the likelihood of chronic disease, and promotes better overall development. Adequate breastfeeding is so important that it has the potential to save the lives of more than 800 000 children under five every year (WHO, 2023).

According to WHO, several babies and kids don't get the best nutrition possible. For instance, from 2015 to 2020, only roughly 44% of infants globally between the ages of and 6months received only breast milk. The recommendations have been updated to consider the needs of babies born to mothers living with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). With a significantly lower risk of HIV transmission, these children can now exclusively breast feed until they are 6 months old and continue to breastfeed until they are at least 12 months old thanks to antiretroviral medications (WHO, 2023)

EBF is not only good for the baby as it has several advantages for the mother too. Because EBF produces higher levels of oxytocin, it also promotes weight loss, speeds up uterine involution, lessens postpartum haemorrhage, lowers the risk of ovarian and breast cancer, postmenopausal hip fractures and osteoporosis, and may even decrease fertility during menstruation. In addition to saving time and energy, exclusive breastfeeding lessens workload and concerns about milk (Noella, 2017).

In addition to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the WHO, professional associations like the American Academy of Paediatrics, Canadian Paediatric Society, and British Medical Association, Finnish Food Authority and many others all advocate for breastfeeding (Nduna et al 2015). Even with these authorities advocating for Breastfeeding, It is still challenging for many women and children especially those whose babies are physically ill and whose mothers face social and physical obstacles. Many countries with

high incomes still have relatively low rates of early initiation, particularly among women from lower-income backgrounds. Many women do not follow the World Health Organization's recommendation to begin breastfeeding within the first hour of giving birth in low- and middle-income countries (Balogun et al. 2016).

When a child is only fed breast milk and does not consume any other food aside from vitamin supplements and prescription drugs breastfeeding becomes exclusive (Couto et al 2020). Every mammalian species goes through the lactation process. The optimal food delivery system that ensures mothers provide their young with the necessary amounts of all critical nutrients is the product of evolutionary forces.

This study seeks to provide knowledge on the challenges which the mother and child encounter while breast feeding especially in middle to lower-income communities through a systematic literature review.

## **2 Background**

The background of this study is focused on exploring already existing literature on exclusive breastfeeding. It highlights the benefits of EBF, gives the social, psychological and emotional aspects of breastfeeding, Its sociocultural influences, the global health disparities in EBF, and finally on the public health initiatives on EBF.

### **2.1 Benefits of Exclusive Breastfeeding**

In addition to providing the nutrition that children need for healthy growth and development, breast milk shields infants against endocrine disorders, obesity, gastrointestinal and respiratory infections, allergies, and other conditions while also fostering mental and psychomotor development. Gholampour, Riem, and van (2020) assert that a mother's ability to build a strong attachment with her child is greatly aided by the postpartum phase. It's possible that changes in the mother's brain are essential for all mothers to prepare them for accepting their new position as moms and forging close bonds with their children. Breastfeeding guards against unintended pregnancy and lowers the mother's risk of developing breast and ovarian cancer.

Schwarz & Nothnagle (2015) claim that nursing reduces the chance of cardiovascular illnesses. According to them, women who breastfeed their babies exclusively lower their chance of developing heart disease by 25%. The reason for this is because nursing burns fats and calories, which can contribute to the development of heart disease. High blood pressure is one of the primary cardiovascular disorders that breastfeeding prevents because it balances blood sugar levels and lessens the effects of excess fat. Additionally, there is a 50% reduction in the risk of rheumatoid arthritis with exclusive breastfeeding. This occurs particularly when a mother breastfeeds her baby for the first two months of life, and when the baby is exclusively breastfed for the first six months, the risk is reduced by 20%. Finally, by increasing the availability of insulin to all cells, it shields the nursing mother from type-2 diabetes. In the postpartum phase, breastfeeding also promotes bone density, which reduces the risk of osteoporosis.

## **2.2 Social, Psychological, and Emotional Aspects of breastfeeding**

Breastfeeding has been found to impact children's cognitive, brain, social, and emotional development. Breastfeeding experience is associated with differences in infant temperament, such as negative affect and fussiness, and a negative association with aggressive behaviour (Krol & Grossmann, 2018). However, there is also evidence suggesting that the absence or short duration of exclusive breastfeeding might be associated with the development of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by social impairments. A recent meta-analysis of over 2000 children found that those diagnosed with ASD were significantly less likely to have been breastfed than neurotypical children (Krol & Grossmann, 2018). Additionally, children with over 6 months of exclusive breastfeeding or formula supplemented with DHA exhibit the lowest probability of subsequently being diagnosed with ASD (Krol & Grossmann, 2018). Only lately have empirical studies examined the effects of nursing experience on infants' reactions to social information processing. Increased attention to pleasant eyes and a stronger attentional bias towards positive emotions are linked to longer periods of exclusive breastfeeding (Krol & Grossmann, 2018). The effect of breastfeeding depends on genetic variation within the endogenous oxytocin system, with infants with the genotype linked to decreased levels of oxytocin and increased risk for ASD most strongly impacted by the duration of exclusive breastfeeding experience (Husk & Keim, 2015). These findings suggest that individual variability in responding to emotional information is systematically linked to breastfeeding and might depend on endogenous and exogenous factors influencing the developing oxytocin system (Al-Farsi et al 2012), (Krol & Grossmann, 2018).

Breastfeeding positively impacts mothers' mood, affect, and stress, and facilitates responses to positive emotions in others. It also increases endogenous oxytocin levels in mothers, aligning with the known role of oxytocin during breastfeeding. A recent study by Krol & Grossmann, (2018) found that mothers with a non-risk genotype, associated with higher oxytocin levels, showed a steeper reduction in cortisol, which was also found in their infants.

Enhancing maternal sensitivity and securing attachment between mother and child is also a benefit of breastfeeding where mothers tend to touch their infants more, be more responsive, and spend more time in mutual gaze during feedings. Brain imaging work also suggests a positive influence of breastfeeding on the mother-child relationship. Exclusive breastfeeding mothers show greater brain activation when listening to their infant's cries compared to exclusive formula feeders. However, breastfeeding has not always been directly linked to

attachment quality. The immediate effects of breastfeeding on mother sensitivity may contribute to the relationship between nursing and attachment quality. (Krol & Grossmann, 2018), Krol et al 2014).

Breastfeeding behaviour is linked to postpartum depression in mothers, with lower scores on the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale at 2 and 4 months postpartum and a lower likelihood of being diagnosed at 4 months postpartum. Depression scores during the third trimester of pregnancy are linked to decreased exclusive breastfeeding duration postpartum, suggesting that maternal mood and affect predict breastfeeding behaviour (Figueiredo et al 2014). The complex relationship between breastfeeding and maternal mood and affect makes it difficult to determine whether it is breastfeeding or maternal mood or affect that causes the effects. However, the observed association between breastfeeding and depression is broadly in line with the effects of breastfeeding on maternal affect, mood, and stress (Arifunhera et al 2016, Adedinsewo et al 2014)

### **2.3 Sociocultural Influences**

Cultural beliefs and myths significantly impact human nutrition and breastfeeding practices. Understanding and incorporating these beliefs in health and nutrition interventions is crucial, as emphasized by the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding (Wanjohi et al 2016). Most of the characteristics that influence both middle- and long-term breastfeeding are sociocultural in nature, such as education level and attitudes towards public breastfeeding, as well as breastfeeding-related behaviors, particularly in the early postpartum period (such as using pacifiers and adding infant formula supplements). Additionally, bedsharing plays a significant role in the incidence of BF and appears to have a good impact on BF rates throughout life. However, using a teat or dummy during the first week has a significant detrimental impact and is linked to lower birth weight rates overall (Gutierrezde-Terán-Moreno et al 2022)

The primary findings of Nsiah-Asamoah et al. (2020) included the belief held by mothers and grandmothers that health workers do not engage in EBF. Mothers believed that although grandmothers did not follow EBF, their children developed normally, and their infants' actions indicated that they were ready to begin eating. Among the misconceptions that were exposed were the ideas that breastmilk is insufficient for babies and is watery in nature. Another myth was that newborns who are fed infant formulae instead of just breast milk gain

weight more quickly. It was also mentioned that a tradition existed to welcome infants by offering them light porridge or maize flour combined with water in the early postpartum days.

## **2.4 Global Health Disparities in EBF**

The prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding varies greatly among populations and geographical areas globally. Because developed and developing countries differ in terms of healthcare systems, maternal education, and societal support for breastfeeding, the rates in developed nations are frequently lower (Victoria et al 2016). The rates of exclusive breastfeeding are also influenced by socioeconomic differences; women from lower-income households tend to breastfeed at lower rates because they have less access to healthcare, don't have paid maternity leave, and don't receive enough support from their employers (Bengough et al 2022). Higher-educated mothers are more likely to start and maintain exclusive breastfeeding, which is a key factor in breastfeeding practices. Urban-rural disparities are more prevalent, with rural residents encountering additional obstacles because of their lower socioeconomic level, cultural views, and restricted access to healthcare facilities. Breastfeeding practices are also influenced by cultural norms and public attitudes toward breastfeeding; certain cultures promote formula feeding or the early introduction of complementary foods. Disparities in the healthcare system that affect exclusive breastfeeding include access to lactation assistance, availability of qualified healthcare professionals, and compliance with international breastfeeding norms (Scarpa et al 2022). These differences are influenced by support and policy; nations with robust healthcare systems and supportive policies tend to have greater rates of exclusive breastfeeding. A multimodal strategy involving healthcare practitioners, legislators, communities, and families is needed to address these inequities (Scarpa et al 2022).

## **2.5 Public Health Initiatives on EBF**

Public health initiatives promoting exclusive breastfeeding are crucial for improving maternal and child health outcomes. These initiatives focus on several key strategies, including education and awareness campaigns, training healthcare providers, policy development and implementation, community support programs, healthcare system integration, research and monitoring, and international collaboration and advocacy (Pérez-Escamilla et al 2023). Education campaigns educate expectant mothers, families, and

communities about the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, emphasizing its nutritional, immunological, and developmental advantages for infants and long-term health benefits for mothers. Healthcare providers are trained in evidence-based breastfeeding practices, counselling techniques, and management of breastfeeding difficulties. Policies developed and implemented by governments and health agencies support breastfeeding mothers, creating supportive environments and enabling them to initiate and sustain breastfeeding (Marshall et al 2022) Community support programs provide emotional support, practical guidance, and breastfeeding education to mothers within their local communities, helping overcome cultural barriers and provide a supportive environment. Healthcare system integration ensures consistent guidance and support for all mothers, including incorporating breastfeeding education into antenatal classes, well-baby visits, and postpartum care visits. Research and monitoring support public health initiatives, helping health authorities tailor strategies to address specific challenges and improve outcomes (Reis-Reilly et al 2018)

Comprehensive public health initiatives can improve exclusive breastfeeding rates, enhance maternal and child health, reduce healthcare costs, and contribute to long-term population health and well-being (Holla-Bhar et al 2015)

### **3 Aim of the study**

This study seeks to provide knowledge on challenges which the mother and child encounter while practicing exclusive breast feeding.

#### **3.1 Research Question**

What are the challenges of exclusive breastfeeding for mother and the child?

### **4 Theoretical frameworks**

Two theories motivated this thesis. The Nola Pander Health Promotion (HPM) theory and Theory of Maternal Role Attainment developed by Ramona Mercer. Nurses can better

understand why people choose to act in a particular way, what factors influence their behavior toward specific behaviors, such as breastfeeding, and how to influence these factors to promote healthy behaviors by using the health promotion model. Ramona's theory aids nurses in understanding how social, situational, and personal factors affect mothers' ability to fulfil their roles as mothers. The woman's sense of her own motherhood, confidence, and self-worth are examples of personal factors. The woman's encounters during her pregnancy and childbirth are considered situational factors, whereas her partner, family, and medical professionals' support are considered social factors which all may affect her child care including breastfeeding (Alligood 2018)

#### **4.1 The Nola Pander Health promotion theory**

Nola Pender's Health Promotion Model is a nursing theory that places a strong emphasis on personal engagement in healthy behaviors. It is composed of four parts: personal traits and experiences, behavior-specific thoughts and emotions, behavioral results, adherence to a plan of action, competing demands and preferences that arise right away, and situational factors. The HPM, which emphasizes understanding individual perceptions, motivation, and socio-cultural context, is widely used in nursing and healthcare to guide interventions for health promotion and disease prevention (Alligood 2018)

#### **4.2 Ramona Mercer's Theory of Maternal Role Attainment**

Ramona Mercer's Theory of Maternal Role Attainment outlines stages of maternal role attainment, focusing on the anticipation, formal, and informal stages of motherhood. It acknowledges that personal, situational, and social factors influence the process. Personal factors include self-esteem, confidence, and perception of motherhood, while situational factors involve pregnancy and childbirth experiences. Social factors include support from partners, family, and healthcare professionals. Mercer's theory is widely applied by health professionals including nurses to guide expectant and breastfeeding mothers (Alligood 2018)

## **5 Methodological framework**

To gather the required data for this qualitative study, carried out through a systematic literature review, both an inclusive and an exclusive method was used. The research questions were addressed through analysing the content of the selected peer-reviewed

articles. Qualitative research is an approach of social evaluation that aims to comprehend, analyse, and explain the societal trends of people's interactions, behaviors, and emotions (Holloway & Galvin, 2023).

## **5.1 A Systematic Literature Review**

A systematic literature review is a methodical process that aims to provide an exhaustive and objective account of the present state of knowledge on a given topic by analysing and synthesizing existing research. With the goal of reducing subjectivity and bias, it is a crucial instrument for evidence-based practice. Finding all pertinent studies, evaluating them according to preset standards, and compiling the results are all part of the review process. Researchers examine and contrast the study results to find patterns, trends, and contradictions. Following an interpretation of the results within the context of the research topic, a thorough summary of the evidence and the implications for clinical practice round out the evaluation. A systematic review seeks to fill in knowledge gaps by compiling and analyzing primary research, identifying insufficient research, and applying findings to further investigations (Coughlan & Cronin, 2017).

### **5.1 Data collection**

The databases used as access and primary sources for the necessary articles are CINAHL, EBSCO, PUBMED, BioMed Central Journal, Google Scholar, and Novia FINNA E-book. Some of the search engine's keywords were, exclusive, breast feeding, challenges, mother, child.

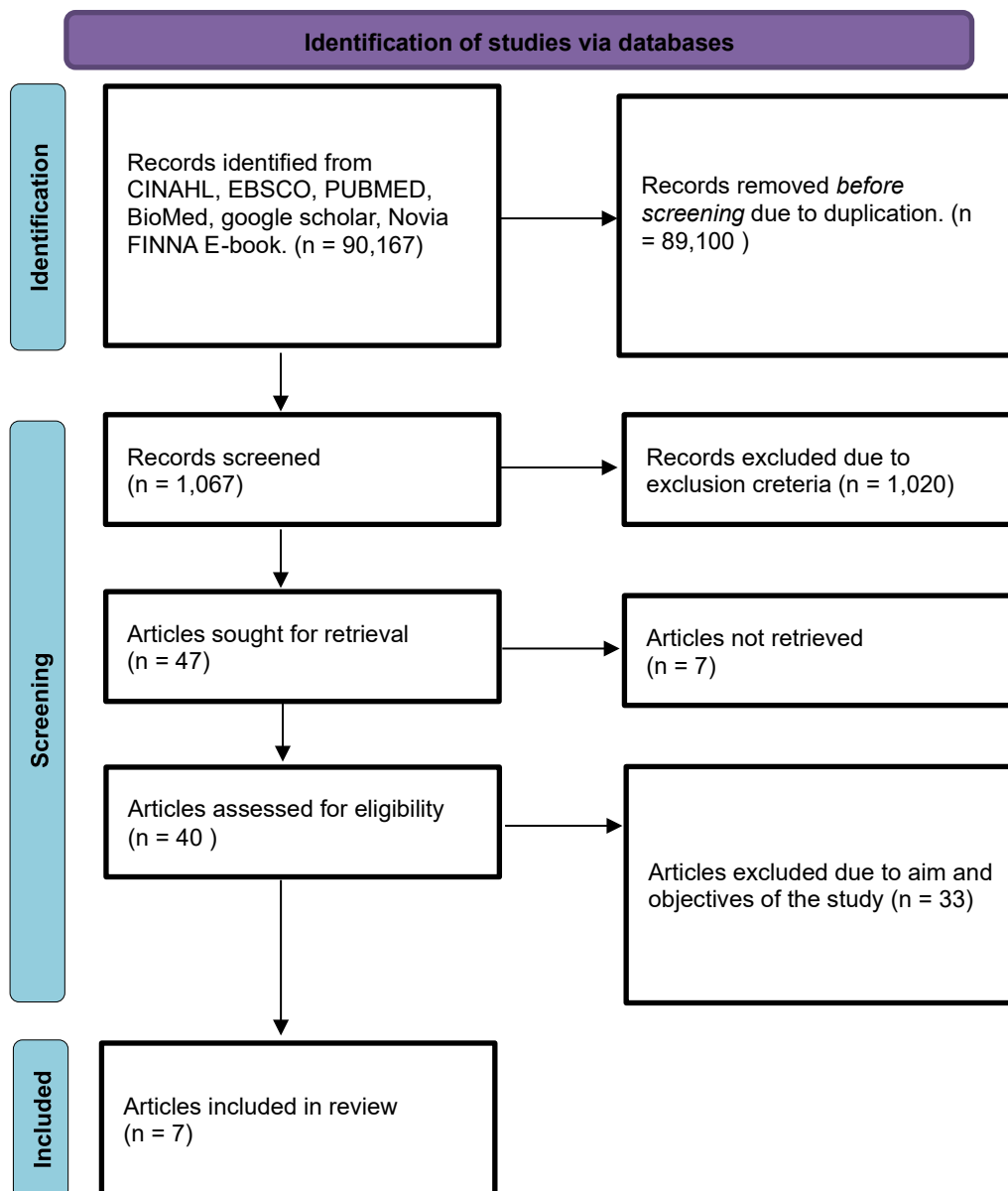


Fig 1: PRISMA flow chart showing selection of reviewed articles. (Page et al 2021)

## 5.2 Inclusion-Exclusion criteria for review articles

It is beneficial to have precise inclusion and exclusion criteria while planning a study. This makes it easier to make sure that all the data is acquired and that the study stays within the confines of the research question. The selection criteria should function as a roadmap for focusing on articles relevant to the research questions and topic area (Coughlan & Cronin, 2017).

Table 1: Showing the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

<b>Inclusion criteria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer reviewed Scientific article Full text article written in English language</li> <li>•</li> <li>• Published from 2013 and above</li> <li>• Applicable to Nursing and breastfeeding context</li> </ul>
<b>Exclusion criteria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-Scientific article</li> <li>• Not in full text article</li> <li>• Language other than English</li> <li>• Published before 2013</li> <li>• Not applicable to Nursing and health care</li> <li>• Not related to exclusive breastfeeding</li> </ul>

## 5.2 Data analysis

The study's data analysis approach was predicated on an inductive content analysis technique. A qualitative data analysis technique called inductive content analysis relies heavily on the data's explicit drawing of codes, categories, or themes, and is best applied when there is little to no prior understanding of the research issue. The three main stages of the content review process are planning, coordinating, and presenting the results. Gathering, detecting, and classifying pertinent data for the purpose of material interpretation comprise the preparatory stage. Logical creation, integration, and clear scripting are some of the organizational techniques. Using inductive methodologies, the data are interpreted during the reporting period and presented in the form of condition-specific portions.

In the meantime, terms and phrases like growth and development, wellbeing, early initiation, exclusive breastfeeding, baby nutrition, nursing technique, and health advantages for both mother and child were either written in the paper or underlined as it was read. Information comprising words and terms was coded and then gathered as a distinct subcategory. A general heading that was chosen to be a part of generic categories was assigned to the linked subcategories. After then, every generic category had a relationship to the primary category, which was the topic of our study (Elo et al 2014).

### **5.3 Ethical considerations**

The phrases "ethics" and "ethical" refer to a set of moral standards, norms, and guidelines that direct moral action and judgement. Finding out whether a certain course of action or range of possibilities is ethically acceptable or unacceptable considering prevailing societal norms is the task at hand. A framework provided by ethics helps people and communities to cope with difficult circumstances, make moral choices, and maintain integrity in their interactions with others (Manuel, et al 2021).

Ethics is important in the disciplines of health and social care because it ensures that patients' dignity and well-being are respected and maintained. The rules that are in place to protect the research process may preserve a delicate balance when ethical issues are considered. Examining and understanding the standards, aspirations, values, and principles that guide research is the aim of ethics (Holloway & Kathleen, 2016).

Guidelines for research conducted by academics at universities and applied science institutions have been released by the Finnish advisory board on Research and Integrity (TENK). The most recent criteria published by the Advisory Board on Research, which include both non-medical and medically relevant research in two distinct sectors, are adhered to while following these regulations. This covers studies done on the relationship between science and human conduct, while another focuses on the standards for moral research or evaluation in the human sciences. In the Finnish research community, studies involving human subjects are required to adhere to ethical guidelines to prevent biases, hurt, and compromise the integrity of the study. To get the intended research results, this study took many measures in accordance with the TENK principles for integrity and research. After the study proposal was submitted, the supervising mentor at Novia University of Applied Science gave the go-ahead for the research project to begin. To prevent plagiarism, sources, publications, authors, and references were referenced throughout the research process in accordance with Novia writing requirements. No one has been harmed in the process of gathering the data required for this study. Since there was no human participant, informed permission was not required; thus, the rights to secrecy, privacy, and human dignity were upheld in accordance with Finnish Constitution section 6-23 (TENK, 2019).

## 6 Results

The findings are presented in themes and sub themes according to the research question. The first theme covered the challenges of exclusive breast feeding affecting the mother had 10 sub themes of Women's Employment, cultural practices of prelacteal feeds and myths (Evil eyes during public feeding) with Household chores, Education level and Low awareness, undernutrition of mothers, less birth spacing, Maternal sickness and HIV, Inverted nipples, influence of in-laws to start top-up feeds, Fear for breast sagging, Maternal age, Mastitis and sour nipples. The second theme covered the challenges of exclusive breast feeding affecting the child had 6 subthemes of Insufficient breast milk, Children do not like breast milk child thirst, Child sickness, Quality of breast milk, Newborns' fussing or refusal to suckle and Inadequate latch as shown in the table below.

**Table 2: Showing the themes and subthemes**

Themes	Sub themes
Challenges of EBF affecting mother	Women's Employment  cultural practices of prelacteal feeds and myths (Evil eyes during public feeding) with Household chores  Education level and Low awareness  undernutrition of mothers  Maternal sickness and HIV Inverted nipples influence of in-laws to start top-up feeds  Fear for breast sagging  Maternal age  Mastitis and sour nipples  Delay of breastfeeding initiation at birth.  Substance abuse
Challenges of EBF affecting child	Insufficient breast milk

	<p>Children do not like breast milk and child thirst.</p> <p>Child sickness</p> <p>Quality of breast milk</p> <p>Newborns' fussing or refusal to suckle</p> <p>Child positioning and inadequate latch</p>
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## 6.1 Challenges of EBF affecting mother

Women employment is a factor that was discovered in several settings. There is a growing trend of women working and it is not possible for working women to breast feed while at work due to lack of nursing spaces and long distances between workplaces and homes of mothers. Working moms tend to begin bottle-feeding their children at a young age Because their moms are away, the carers feed them milk in a bottle (Asim et al 2020, Fu et al 2022, Riaz et al 2022) as expressed by mothers below.

*“I give breast milk to my child before going to the fields, but I cannot take my child along as it is too hot outside. If I return late, my mother-in-law feeds my child with yogurt, khichri (wet rice), or a goat’s milk”* (Riaz et al 2022)

The research found that the housekeeping tasks of cooking and getting water were the ones that interfered with exclusive breastfeeding the most. Because mothers had to dedicate time daily to prepare their meals especially the stable foods that consume time, they end up compromising time to settle down and breastfeed. Some mothers face difficulties in obtaining water from public service points due to distance, making it difficult to take their children with them. Some water sources are far away, making it inappropriate to nurse their infants, even when necessary. This makes it difficult for mothers to access essential resources easily. Coupled with cultural beliefs and myths like public evil eyes that prohibit mothers from breastfeeding their babies in public, these factors make EBF hard (TampahNaah et al 2019, Mgongo et al 2019) as some mothers stated below.

*“If you are cooking and the child is crying, you may find it very difficult to stop and breastfeed her. You would have to still leave her with someone until you finish.”* (TampahNaah et al 2019)

*“Fetching of water poses some challenges. You can’t carry water while the baby is breastfeeding. Most at times, you must back the child until you pour the water. Sometimes too, you would have to leave the child at home and go to the borehole to fetch water”* (Tampah-Naah et al 2019)

Low educational levels and low awareness of EBF by the mothers tends to impact their decision making when nursing a child. Because breast milk is so nutritious, it is essential for children's development both physically and nutritionally. Few mothers did, however, discuss the advantages of early breastfeeding (EBF). Prolateral feedings are used by certain moms and mothers-in-law in place of early breast milk start. After giving birth, most moms offer their kids tea (without milk), molasses, jaggery, and honey; the most often reported prolateral feed is honey. Elders and mothers-in-law influence this custom. During the first six months, mixed feeding is employed. According to mothers-in-law, babies' digestive systems benefit from the consumption of honey and jaggery, which should be administered as soon as possible after delivery. Honey also helps remove mucous from a newborn's body and shields kids against fever, cough, and respiratory conditions (Riaz et al 2022, Nduna et al 2015).

Under nutrition of mothers was observed in several settings. Mothers claim that while breastfeeding is a natural activity, doing so on an empty stomach makes it uncomfortable. This was especially noticeable while nursing boys, whose moms said tended to be more demanding and found it difficult to satiate their desire by nursing alone (Tampah-Naah et al 2019, Nduna et al 2015, Riaz et al 2022) as one mother states.

*“But when I am hungry, the baby will pull my breast to a point that I feel like my heart is sinking in me, I feel the pain in my heart, I feel like I am so cold and feel like I am shivering because I will be hungry and on top of that someone is pulling my breast and that does not feel good.”* (Nduna et al 2015).

Maternal sickness and HIV was reported by some mothers in several settings. Mothers claimed that health professionals provided them conflicting and erratic advice on breastfeeding and HIV. HIV-positive moms are apprehensive about the safety of breastfeeding because of these conflicting messages. Some mothers develop breast sores and mastitis and find it hard to breast feed their infants more, so some nipples are inverted in nature (Nduna et al 2015, Tampah-Naah et al 2019, Riaz et al 2022)

*“I see nowadays, this disease disturbs breastfeeding because we are told that if you have the disease you are not supposed to breastfeed “ (Nduna et al 2015)*

*“Assuming you have a boil or sore on your nipples it becomes a serious challenge to exclusively breastfeed” (Tampah-Naah et al 2019)*

The participants also said that women are unable to maintain nursing when there is a short time between pregnancies since it leads in decreased milk supply. A few moms also believed that nursing a kid while pregnant was not a smart idea (Riaz et al 2022)

*“Sometimes, the mother gets another pregnancy. The first baby is younger than one year. Then she leaves breastfeeding, that is also one reason”. (Riaz et al 2022)*

The community influence especially from family, in-laws and neighbors’ forces mothers to stop EBF during nursing It was discovered that moms were sometimes questioned about the practice of exclusive nursing b these people. Among them, it was often reported that grandparents presented difficulties for moms making choices on exclusive nursing (TampahNaah et al 2019, Riaz et al 2022) as some mothers narrate.

*“When she [mother-in-law or grandmother] was bathing the baby, she used to fetch some of the bucket water into her [child] mouth. I told her [mother-in-law or grandmother] not to be doing that. She told me that, the nurses are doing that and killing people’s children. She said that some children come to earth because of food and must be given the food” (TampahNaah et al 2019)*

Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative, a worldwide initiative to encourage breastfeeding, and several established advantages for mother and newborn health but breastfeeding practices are still not at their best everywhere. Early initiation of breast feeding is important in the production of breast milk and the consequent comfort of EBF (Makela et al 2023)

Breast sagging is caused by breastfeeding. The groups' young moms spoke about how nursing makes their breasts droop. They were worried that they wouldn't seem attractive enough for males. Also, some mothers claimed that the Oduor of Breast Milk Is Off. Some women reported that there is an unpleasant stench in breast milk that is detectable by others. Additionally, the smell of breast milk makes moms hesitant to express it. They also spoke about the challenges the child's mother had indicated while giving him or her milk (Mgongo et al 2019). This was more common in young mothers.

*“In our community young girls like me (aged 18- 25 years) do not like to breastfeed. They are afraid that the breasts will sag, and their body shapes can change...my friends ask me: why are you breastfeeding? My child is four months now”* (Mgongo et al 2019)

Substance abuse by mothers was encountered in one of the settings. The grandmothers expressed concern of some of the mothers using addictive substances like betels and tobacco that subsequently make them weak and affect breast feeding schedules (Riaz et al 2022)

## **6.2 Challenges of EBF affecting child**

Most mothers identified inadequate breast milk production as a significant obstacle to achieving the best possible exclusive breastfeeding outcomes. Desperate mothers were those who could not satisfy their children's needs for breast milk. In some cases, mothers who were unable to make enough breast milk were forced to supplement the inadequate breast milk with other nutrients for their children. Mothers have identified crying babies during or after nursing as a key sign that their child is not receiving enough breast milk (Tampah-Naah et al 2019, Asim et al 2020, Fu et al 2022, Riaz et al 2022)

*“Breast milk is important for a child’s health and growth. It is also important to protect the baby from illnesses. But my milk is not sufficient, and the baby’s tummy does not get filled, and I give goat’s milk in addition to breast milk”* (Riaz et al 2022)

Kids dislike breast milk. It was observed that some women were unable to continue nursing because they believed their kids dislike breast milk because of its harsh taste. For kids who are not breastfed, there was formula milk and cow/goat milk as an alternative (Asim et al 2020)

*"Some women claim that their milk is bitter, and the baby cannot digest it properly. Then they start bottle feeding to the baby. Mothers who do not breastfeed their children initiate cow milk and other complementary feedings in at early age."* (Asim et al 2020)

Child sickness can affect breastfeeding in many ways depending on the ailment. Both parents discussed how breastfeeding could sometimes be temporarily stopped when the mother or the infant is ill or when the mother is receiving medical attention for any condition. Some moms also stated that when their kids were unwell, they couldn't suck effectively hence are

forced to start other foods. Mothers and mothers-in-law also spoke on how the weather impacts nursing (Riaz et al 2022).

*“In the winter season, if I put my hand in cold water, then breast milk gets cold, and the baby’s chest gets affected. In such situations, we avoid breastfeeding.”* (Riaz et al 2022)

Breast Milk being extremely light. Concerns over the quality of breast milk were prevalent among most mothers. They said that since breast milk is so light, a child's stomach cannot be filled with it. The early introduction of other foods was justified by this (Mgongo et al 2019)

*“I cannot practice EBF because the breast milk is very light and the child won’t be full. The child feels hunger easily. I have two kids; I had never done exclusive breastfeeding for my kids”* (Mgongo et al 2019)

Newborns’ fussing or refusal to suckle that leads to stress levels raising for both the mother and the newborn was mentioned by some mothers as a hinderance to EBF. Sometimes delay to initiate breastfeeding could cause this but often there is an underlying reason not noticed by the mother, (Fu et al 2022, Makela et al., 2023)

Child positioning and inadequate latch. The fact that new moms were ignorant of the methods for positioning their kids so they could breastfeed was another issue brought up by the participants. When a child is properly positioned on the breast, they may not latch on very well hence don’t take up adequate breast milk and the mother could be convinced to introduce other foods (Riaz et al 2022).

*“When it is first child, mothers do not know about the position where the baby can easily suck breast. If the position of a baby was right, the baby would breastfeed properly. Girls at our community usually wed in young age, and they need proper training. We often brief them about breastfeeding, and tell them that now you are a mother, you must breastfeed your child.”* (Riaz et al 2022) as one of the participants in the study narrated.

These results are inline with The Nola Pander Health promotion (HPM) theory and Theory of Maternal Role Attainment developed by Ramona Mercer that highlight the importance of understanding the factors that lead to individuals behaving in certain ways and the implications to their health.

## **7 Discussion**

An in-depth discussion of the key findings is presented here from the systematic literature review conducted on the 7 articles analysed. The discussion revolves on two parts. The discussion of method that describes the suitability of the method used to accomplish the aim of the study and the discussion of results that compares the results obtained with existing

findings. All the themes and subthemes are discussed to ensure that the research questions are properly answered

## **7.1 Discussion of method**

To address the research question, the study's qualitative approach was built on a content analysis of the literature that was organized into themes and subthemes. Understanding, analyzing, and explaining societal patterns in people's interactions, behaviors, and emotions is the goal of qualitative research, a social assessment method (Holloway & Galvin, 2023). By gathering and evaluating primary literature, identifying areas with inadequate study, and applying results for more studies, this systematic review aimed to close knowledge gaps (Coughlan & Cronin, 2017). Having specific inclusion and exclusion criteria helped in research preparation. This made it simpler to ensure that the study remained within the parameters of the research topic and that all the data was collected. According to Coughlan and Cronin (2017), the selection criteria served as a guide for concentrating on papers that were pertinent to the study question and issue area. To describe the process of gathering data and determining eligibility, a PRISMA flow chart was used where 1067 articles were screened by the inclusion and exclusion criteria to obtain 47 articles that were eligible for retrieval. 7 articles were not accessible, 33 were eliminated due aim and specific objectives and only 7 articles were analyzed in this study.

## **7.2 Discussion of results**

This study showed that many mothers are still struggling with putting into practice the global recommended EBF practice due to the several challenges that have been highlighted. Looking closely at the challenges of EBF affecting both mother and child, one can categorize them into those that require intensive awareness campaigns and those that are far beyond awareness. The results indicate that EBF is seen to be crucial for a child's development and health, but rural communities are less aware of the advantages of EBF. Similar results in other circumstances where there was a lack of understanding about the necessity of EBF have also been observed by previous investigations (Thet et al 2016). Other studies have also reported on inappropriate behaviors, including the use of prolaternal meals, the influence of in-laws for top-up feeds, and a lack of mother awareness on breastfeeding approaches (Thet et al 2016, Khatun et al 2018). Intensive raising awareness and implementing breastfeeding support programs in remote areas are two ways to overcome these obstacles. But increasing

awareness only around moms may not be sufficient. Rather, in addition to nursing moms, the target audience should also include mothers-in-law and other prominent family members and the community (Kim 2015).

The challenges to EBF noted in this study that can be addressed by awareness are quantity and quality of breast milk. This finding is like what Nasrullah et al 2018 found in Pakistan. The less interesting bit is that not many studies have assessed quality of breast milk production of lactating mothers in this part of Pakistan (Riaz et al 2022). Maternal nutrition which too can be tackled together in awareness and improved standards of living of communities has been noted to affect the quality of the breast milk as Frota et al 2016 put it. Employment of mothers and unfavourable nursing conditions at workplaces with short maternity leave is one of the challenges to EBF. In contrast to metropolitan regions, where working moms often have paid time off for childcare, rural women must labor in the fields and sometimes struggle to bring their children outdoors during inclement weather. These socio-cultural aspects should be considered in interventions aimed at facilitating EBF, since this finding has not been sufficiently acknowledged and addressed in the past. Additional non-modifiable hurdles mentioned in this research and other places include illnesses affecting mothers and infants, malformed breasts or nipples, and children's troubles sucking as noted by Wambach et al 2016 and Mse et al 2016.

### **7.3 Limitation of the study**

The studies used in this literature review are not a good representation of the global picture of the challenges of EBF to both mother and child and therefore the findings might not be generalizable.

## **8 Conclusions**

There are several challenges to EBF for the mother and child. These challenges of Women's Employment, cultural practices of prolaternal feeds and myths (Evil eyes during public feeding) with Household chores, Education level and Low awareness, undernutrition of mothers, less birth spacing, Maternal sickness and HIV, Inverted nipples, influence of in-laws to start top-up feeds, Fear for breast sagging, Maternal age, Mastitis and sour nipples together with challenges of Insufficient breast milk, Children do not like breast milk child

thirst, Child sickness, Quality of breast milk, Newborns' fussing or refusal to suckle and Inadequate latch can be addressed by intensive awareness of EBF to lactating mothers, families and communities and coming up with supportive policies that promote EBF for the working mothers. Further research should be done to address the challenge of inadequate breast milk and effects of maternal nutrition on the quality and quantity of breast milk.

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## Appendix 1

### Overview table of articles included in the analysis

Bibliography data	Aim	Methodology	Result
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<p>Tampah-Naah, A. M., Kumi-Kyereme, A., &amp; Amo-Adjei, J. (2019). Maternal challenges of exclusive breastfeeding and complementary feeding in Ghana. <i>PloS one</i>, 14(5), e0215285.</p>	<p>This study looked at maternal, societal, and geographic factors in Ghana in order to investigate barriers to breastfeeding practices.</p>	<p>Through unstructured in-depth interviews and thematic content analysis, the research used an interpretative case study methodology to examine the social meanings and difficulties associated with exclusive breastfeeding and supplemental feeding practices among women in Ghana.</p>	<p>Obstacles to exclusive breastfeeding and complementary feeding include location, social context, maternal traits, swollen breasts, work schedules, family influence, food access, and food preparation.</p>
<p>Nduna, T., Marais, D., &amp; van Wyk, B. (2015). An explorative qualitative study of experiences and challenges to exclusive breastfeeding among mothers in rural Zimbabwe. <i>ICAN: Infant, Child, &amp; Adolescent Nutrition</i>, 7(2), 69-76.</p>	<p>This study explored factors that enable and hindered exclusive breastfeeding in a rural district of Zimbabwe.</p>	<p>Mothers and key informants participated in in-depth, unstructured interviews as part of a qualitative phenomenology research. After that, a thematic content analysis was conducted.</p>	<p>Limited knowledge about exclusive breastfeeding among mothers, influenced by hunger, misconceptions, and traditional beliefs, necessitates consistent messaging about HIV/AIDS and breastfeeding, addressing men and tradition-keepers.</p>
<p>Mäkelä, H., Axelin, A., Kolari, T., &amp; Niela-Vilén, H. (2023). Exclusive breastfeeding, breastfeeding problems, and maternal breastfeeding attitudes before and after the baby-friendly hospital initiative: A quasiexperimental study. <i>Sexual &amp;</i></p>	<p>The goal of the study was to assess how the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative had affected breastfeeding issues and attitudes among mothers who exclusively breastfed for six months.</p>	<p>Utilising textmessage questions and the Iowa Infant Feeding Attitude Scale, the research evaluated the attitudes</p>	<p>The Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative did not significantly impact exclusive breastfeeding among mothers at 6 months, nor did it affect reported breastfeeding problems or maternal attitudes. However, more</p>

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<i>Reproductive Healthcare, 35, 100806.</i>		women throughout their hospital stay as well as two weeks, one month, two months, and six months after givingbirth.	favorable breastfeeding attitudes were associated with exclusive breastfeeding.
Fu, C. Y., Tang, X. J., Pan, L. P., Jin, H. Y., Yao, J. F., & Wang, L. Z. (2022). Exclusive breastfeeding rate and related factors among mothers within maternal health WeChat groups in Jiaxing, Zhejiang province, China: a cross-sectional survey. <i>International Breastfeeding Journal, 17</i> (1), 80.	The purpose of this study was to look into the exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) status among mothers of infants aged 7 to 12 months in the WeChat groups, as well as the factors that are associated with it up to six months.	A 2021 survey of healthy mothers with children aged seven to twelve months in Jiaxing, China, focussing on exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) for the first six months, used multivariable logistic regression analysis, sociodemographic and obstetric data, and an online survey.	The study found that older maternal age and perceived insufficient breast milk were associated with lower odds of early breast feeding (EBF) up to six months.

<p>Mgongo, M., Hussein, T. H., Stray-Pedersen, B., Vangen, S., Msuya, S. E., &amp; Wandel, M. (2019). Facilitators and barriers to breastfeeding and exclusive breastfeeding in Kilimanjaro region, Tanzania: a qualitative study. <i>International journal of pediatrics</i>, 2019.</p>	<p>The study's objective was to investigate potential social and cultural influences on breastfeeding practices, particularly exclusive breastfeeding in the Kilimanjaro region.</p>	<p>Three focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in each of the three Kilimanjaro region tree districts—Same, Moshi Municipal Council, and Rombo—with mothers of babies ranging in age from 0 to 12 months. The design used was qualitative.</p>	<p>78 mothers participated in focus group discussions, expressing positive attitudes towards breastfeeding but expressing perceptions of light milk, bad odor, appearance issues, abdominal pain, fear of evil eye, and burping pauses.</p>
<p>Riaz, A., Bhamani, S., Ahmed, S., Umrani, F., Jakhro, S., Qureshi, A. K., &amp; Ali, S. A. (2022). Barriers and facilitators to exclusive breastfeeding in rural Pakistan: a qualitative</p>	<p>The purpose of this study was to investigate obstacles to EBF in Pakistan's rural areas.</p>	<p>36 focus groups with chosen moms, husbands, mothers-in-law, and lady health professionals were conducted as</p>	<p>Obstacles to EBF include inadequate breast milk production, undernutrition, breastfeeding</p>
<p>exploratory study. <i>International breastfeeding journal</i>, 17(1), 59.</p>		<p>part of the study's qualitative exploratory design, and the material was analysed thematically.</p>	<p>profession, low knowledge, abnormal breasts, ailments, cultural practices, and in-law influence, while facilitators include support, healthy diet, and maternal awareness.</p>
<p>Asim, M., &amp; Nawaz, Y. (2020). Factors affecting exclusively breastfeeding in Punjab: A qualitative study. <i>Rawal Medical Journal</i>, 45(2), 466-466.</p>	<p>The study's objective was to investigate the variables linked to a lack of exclusive breastfeeding.</p>	<p>This research was conducted in Punjab's three districts. The information was gathered via extensive interviews with mothers and health care providers. The data was analysed using thematic analysis.</p>	<p>The study found that exclusive breastfeeding is influenced by children's dislike of breast milk, women's employment, children's thirst, and women's avoidance of breastfeeding in public places.</p>