

A Comprehensive Examination of Exclusive Breastfeeding Through Quranic and Hadith Perspectives Alongside Scientific Insights

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Abstract

This article delves into the importance and benefits of exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) in Islam, as supported by the Quran and Hadith, while also analyzing its advantages through religious and scientific perspectives. EBF entails feeding infants solely breast milk for the first six months. Research highlights the remarkable advantages of EBF in enhancing the health of both infants and mothers, from both religious and scientific viewpoints. The positive impact of EBF on infant growth is highlighted, emphasizing its crucial role in providing essential nutrients for brain and immune system development. Additionally, EBF provides immunization protection through antibodies in breast milk and fosters a strong emotional bond between mother and infant, potentially enhancing emotional intelligence. Beyond immediate benefits, EBF acts as a preventive measure against chronic diseases in adulthood. Recognized as a crucial strategy for optimal infant growth, EBF yields lasting positive effects on long-term health and well-being. The forthcoming research will adopt a qualitative approach through an extensive literature review to appraise the importance of breastfeeding in infant development and scrutinize scientific revelations on its advantages, conducting comprehensive literature reviews of Islamic and scientific sources to assess breastfeeding's significance and benefits. Data will be extracted from various written sources, including the Quran, Hadith, books, journals, reports, and newspapers. The study's results are vital for offering in-depth insights to the community, promoting awareness of breastfeeding benefits, and encouraging a commitment to adopting breastfeeding practices for the benefit of their

offspring. Furthermore, this article proposes several further research avenues to deepen our understanding of exclusive breastfeeding, including investigations into the influence of social and cultural environments on breastfeeding practices, as well as studies on strategies to enhance community awareness and support for exclusive breastfeeding. Thus, this article integrates religious and scientific perspectives to enrich the understanding of exclusive breastfeeding in Islam.

Keywords: Breast Milk, Infant Nutrition, Childhood Diseases, Islamic Law, Divine Wisdom.

Introduction

Breastfeeding is a crucial aspect of human culture, embodying a natural instinct bestowed by God to every newborn. In the intricate design of biological processes, the Creator Allah has orchestrated a remarkable system where a woman's breasts prepare during pregnancy to produce nourishing milk seamlessly. This divine arrangement embodies profound wisdom from the Almighty, ensuring optimal nutrition for His newly born creations. It underscores the intricate connection between the divine plan and physiological mechanisms supporting breastfeeding, emphasizing divine care in nurturing and sustaining life.

In the early stages of birth, a newborn's digestive system is not fully developed. Acknowledging this, the Creator Allah has ordained a mother's milk to be a comprehensive and well-balanced source of nutrition for the infant. This divine provision highlights the intricate design of the natural order, ensuring the most suitable sustenance for the delicate needs of a growing child. Breastfeeding, whether for one's biological child or as a wet nurse for another baby, has been an enduring practice throughout human civilization, underscoring its fundamental role in nurturing infants and fostering their healthy development.

The longstanding incorporation of breastfeeding into societal norms reflects a collective understanding and appreciation for the profound advantages of a mother's milk. This ancient practice signifies enduring care and awareness within communities about the unmatched benefits it offers to infants, solidifying its place as a timeless and cherished aspect of human nurturing. Shihabuddin (2001) emphasizes the affection developed between the mother and child during breastfeeding, highlighting its significance. Breastfeeding is pivotal in establishing a deep connection, triggering emotional bonds between the mother and child, as elucidated by (Else-Quest et al., 2003). The tactile interaction not only nurtures a physical connection but also cultivates a robust social and psychological bond, fortifying the depth of their relationship.

With His divine grace, every newborn is endowed with the ability to suckle instinctively, a process that can be considered to transcend mere nourishment. This natural inclination serves to fulfill both the spiritual and physical needs of the infant. Recognizing the profound significance of this act, Allah s.w.t has underscored the obligation for every mother to engage in breastfeeding. This imperative is explicitly outlined in the Quran, emphasizing the sacred responsibility placed upon mothers to provide this essential source of nourishment and connection to their newborns. In accordance with this belief, the article will examine the legal provisions of breastfeeding established in Islam by exploring the significant scientific insights in light of the research findings achieved by a cohort of ulama and scientists.

Breastfeeding Symbolizes the Strongest form of Care and Protection

One of the first and earliest things we can learn, breastfeeding stands as a crucial cornerstone in a child's early treatment, a fundamental aspect whose profound importance is vividly illustrated by God in the narrative of Prophet Moses and his mother. In the face of Pharaoh's ominous decree to exterminate all newborn male infants, Allah intervened by inspiring Prophet Moses' mother to place him in the Nile River, thus safeguarding him from Pharaoh's lethal command. This divine intervention underscores the gravity of breastfeeding and its pivotal role in protecting and nurturing the life of an infant. Allah's words resonate, underscoring the significance of maternal instincts guided by divine wisdom in ensuring the survival and well-being of a child.

وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمِّ مُوسَىٰ أَنْ أَرْضِعِيهِ ۖ فَإِذَا خِفْتِ عَلَيْهِ فَأَلْقِيهِ فِي الْيَمِّ وَلَا تَخَافِي وَلَا تَحْزَنِي ۗ إِنَّا رَادُّوهُ إِلَيْكِ وَجَاعِلُوهُ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ

So We sent this inspiration to the mother of Moses: "Suckle (thy child) but when thou hast fears about him cast him into the river but fear not nor grieve: for We shall restore him to thee and We shall make him one of Our apostles. (Surah al-Qhasas 28: 7)

According to Qutub (1983), Prophet Moses was returned to his mother's care in a robust and secure condition, even while under Pharaoh's guardianship. This arrangement was made to facilitate Moses' mother in protecting and directly nursing her beloved child (As-Sobuni, 2001). Implicit in this account and the words of Allah is the concept that, in His Magnificence, Allah returned Prophet Moses to his mother to be breastfed and cared for by her. Thus, in this narrative, Allah illustrates the significance of breastfeeding, orchestrating Prophet Moses' return to his mother to underscore the pivotal role a mother plays in nursing and nurturing her child.

فَرَدَدْنَاهُ إِلَىٰ أُمِّهِ ۖ كَيْ تَقَرَّ عَيْنُهَا وَلَا تَحْزَنَ ۗ وَلِنَعْلَمَ أَنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَلَئِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

Thus did We restore him to his mother that her eye might be comforted that she might not grieve and that she might know that the promise of Allah is true: but most of them do not understand. (Surah al-Qhasas 28 : 13)

Yusuf Ali (1984) correlates this event with the truthfulness of God's promise, although, in his view, many fail to see beyond their thinking. A mother who had been in sorrow due to the separation from her child experienced a shift in atmosphere as Allah brought Prophet Moses back into the loving arms of his mother. Prophet Moses was restored to his mother in a state of well-being and safety, holding a prestigious position under the protection of Pharaoh himself (Qutub, 1983), allowing his mother to personally care for and nurse him (As-Sobuni, 2001). Implicit in this narrative and the words of Allah is the manifestation of His Greatness, as He returned Prophet Moses to his mother, ensuring that he could be nurtured and looked after by his own mother. Thus, Allah conveys through this story the lesson for humanity to recognize the significance of a mother's nursing for her child.

The Superiority of Breast Milk Over Alternative Feeding Options for An Infant

Many countries around the world, along with national and global NGOs in Malaysia, have launched various campaigns to promote breastfeeding, recognizing the benefits of mother's milk. Exclusive breastfeeding entails infants receiving only mother's milk, with no other food,

except for vitamin supplements and medications (Couto et al., 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) (2011) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of an infant's life. Following this recommendation means that infants are exclusively fed with only mother's milk during the initial six months after birth, without the necessity of additional water, supplementary milk, or complementary foods.

In June 1991, the WHO introduced a significant program called the "Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative" (BFHI) in Ankara, Turkey. The primary aim of this initiative is to offer comprehensive support and encouragement for breastfeeding. As a direct response to this initiative, WHO established an annual observance known as World Breastfeeding Week, celebrated from August 1st to 7th each year, beginning in 1991 (Petri, Darnton-Hill & Gonzales 1992). This program is designed to elevate global awareness and support for breastfeeding, emphasizing its importance on a worldwide scale.

The advocacy above is conducted solely because, mother's milk stands out as the most invaluable natural resource and optimal nourishment for an infant. It encompasses all the essential nutrients in the correct proportions. Solely relying on mother's milk through exclusive breastfeeding is adequate to fulfill the entire nutritional requirements of a baby during the initial four to six months of life (Dusa et al., 2002). Naturally, God has imbued mother's milk with comprehensive benefits that contribute to the child's growth. Beyond influencing the physical and mental development of the baby, mother's milk ensures both health and holistic development, offering immunization protection to the infant.

According to Al-Najjar (2007), mother's milk is an incomparable substance, created by Allah specifically to meet the nutritional needs of infants and shield them from infections. Mother's milk offers numerous advantages that are absent in formula or other artificial milks. As per Daud (2012), mother's milk maintains a unique balance of benefits at an appropriate rate, making it suitable for the developing baby's body. The distinctive components in mother's milk act as a protective shield, guarding the baby against diseases.

Understanding the Numerous Benefits of Breast Milk

In the 21st century, formula milk has become a common alternative to breast milk, especially among working mothers. However, it points out that numerous studies have consistently indicated that formula milk falls short in providing the same benefits as breast milk. Despite this well-established evidence, a study conducted in 2021 brought attention to the strategies employed by formula milk manufacturers to increase its usage. The study reveals that these manufacturers employ tactics to influence consumers, with a specific focus on young pregnant and postpartum mothers. They achieve this by incorporating advice and breastfeeding support in their advertisements and product labels (Pomeranz, 2023).

This strategic marketing approach is concerning because it has the potential to mislead consumers. In essence, it suggests that manufacturers may create a perception that formula milk can replicate the advantages of breast milk, despite scientific evidence suggesting otherwise. This raises concerns about the potential impact on consumer choices and the well-being of infants, as mothers might be influenced to choose formula milk over breastfeeding, thinking it provides comparable benefits.

Mother's milk, as a natural nourishment designed for infants, offers a myriad of advantages. It is rich in a diverse range of nutrients, vitamins, and essential elements that play a pivotal role in fostering growth, promoting overall health, fortifying the immune system, and contributing to the comprehensive development of children's bodily systems (Kamarudin et al., 2019). Additionally, the cleanliness of mother's milk, coupled with its absence of bacteria, ensures a pure and uncontaminated source of sustenance. The presence of anti-infection properties further enhances its protective qualities, guarding infants against a spectrum of microbial infections.

In 2016, the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) Hospital issued a statement emphasizing the role of breast milk in safeguarding infants from infections, attributing this protective effect to the presence of various essential elements:

- i. Lactoferrin, which collaborates with iron to hinder the proliferation of intestinal bacteria.
- ii. Immunoglobulin (IgA), shielding infants from respiratory and gastrointestinal infections.
- iii. Proteins, along with vitamins A and E, serve as a defense against bacterial infections and eye diseases in infants.
- iv. Bile salt-stimulated lipase, providing protection against amoebic infections.
- v. Elevated levels of iron minerals prevent the onset of iron deficiency anemia.
- vi. Increased zinc levels act as a preventive measure against necrotizing enterocolitis, a severe inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract.
- vii. The Bifidus factor facilitates the growth of beneficial bacteria while eliminating pathogenic bacteria in the infant's intestines.
- viii. Lymphocytes and macrophages contribute to the defense against invading bacteria.
- ix. Anti-inflammatory agents shield infants from the adverse effects of severe inflammation.
- x. Maternal antibodies, transferred through breastfeeding, offer protection against infections.
- xi. Growth factors, including selenium, natural carotenoids, and nucleotides, play a crucial role in the development and maturation of the infant's immune system, vital for building resistance against diseases.

According to Hermansson et al (2019), human breast milk is a crucial source of essential nutrients and bioactive compounds that play a pivotal role in fostering growth and bolstering immune development in infancy. The variability in milk constituents and bioactive compounds, influenced by demographic and genetic factors, maternal lifestyle, and exposures, can exert both positive and negative effects on infant health.

Comparing the Composition of Breast Milk with Infant Formula

It is widely acknowledged that breast milk possesses unique advantages that set it apart from other formula milks. Daud (2012) highlights the exceptional superiority of breast milk compared to alternative formulas. Several key comparisons underscore this distinction:

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Protein: | Breast milk contains six times more protein than formula milk. |
| Vitamin A: | The vitamin A content in breast milk is five times higher than that in formula milk. |

Carotene: Breast milk boasts 12 times more carotene, a crucial component for vitamin A formation.

Vitamin E: Breast milk contains seven times more vitamin E than formula milk.

Antibodies: The antibody content in breast milk is three to four times higher than in formula milk.

These advantages make breast milk a potent shield, safeguarding the baby from various diseases. This statement underscores the unparalleled superiority of breast milk in supplying essential nutrients and providing protection for the baby's development compared to formula milk.

A research study carried out in the UK has revealed significant distinctions between breast milk and infant formula. Although the infant formula available in the UK adheres to international nutritional standards, its composition deviates significantly from that of breast milk. Variations in ingredients exist among different formula manufacturers. Furthermore, unlike breast milk, formula does not confer immunity or support neurological development. Crucially, it is noteworthy that infant formula does not have a direct impact on the health of the mother (Renfrew, 2012:17).

The most significant difference between breast milk and formula milk lies in the content of colostrum. Colostrum is a component absent in formula milk. It is the initial milk with a characteristic yellowish color produced immediately after the mother gives birth to her child (Talbert et. al., 2020). Colostrum is a unique substance found in breast milk and not present in formula milk. It is naturally produced by the mother's body right after the birthing process and possesses a distinctive yellow hue. Colostrum is rich in essential nutrients and antibodies, providing early protection to the baby against various diseases. It aids in strengthening the baby's immune system during the early stages of life (Hinde & German 2012). Naturally, Allah, the All-Knowing Creator of all things, has provided colostrum to mothers as a natural mechanism to ensure they can contribute to the healthy and perfect development of their children.

قُلْ أَنْزَلَهُ الَّذِي يَعْلَمُ السِّرَّ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ إِنَّهُ كَانَ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

Say: "The (Qur'an) was sent down by Him Who knows the Mystery (that is) in the heavens and the earth: verily He is Oft-Forgiving Most Merciful. (Surah al-Furqan 25 : 6)

According to Ali (1984), the Quran teaches spiritual knowledge of what is ordinarily hidden from men's sight, and such knowledge can only come from Allah, to Whom alone is known the secret of the whole Creation. In spite of man's sin and shortcomings, He forgives, and He sends His most precious gift, i.e., the revelation of His Will.

Allah, the All-Knowing, possesses complete knowledge about what is most beneficial for the beings He has created. In His compassionate and wise guidance, Allah has bestowed colostrum upon mothers during childbirth, recognizing it as the optimal provision for the growth, health, and overall well-being of their children. This divine act reflects the intricate understanding and care that the Creator has for the nurturing and development of each individual life.

Unveiling the Advantages of Colostrum from a Biochemical Perspective

Colostrum, an alkaline substance, is produced in the first 5 days after a baby is born. It serves as the baby's initial natural vaccine to combat bacteria and viruses. Colostrum contains three times more protein than regular breast milk. Hence, it's important for newborns to get as much colostrum as possible in their early days since it acts as their first immunization. According to Abie & Goshu (2019), Colostrum has high levels of leukocytes and immunoglobulins (IgA) that prevent neonates from harmful bacteria and viruses. Infants who started breastfeeding after 1 hour had a 33% risk of neonatal mortality. Meanwhile, research from Zimbabwe showed that delayed breastfeeding increases the risk of developing neonatal sepsis in the first week of life. Colostrum aids in expelling meconium from the baby's intestines, ensuring the immediate cleanliness of the newborn's intestinal mucosa and preparing it to absorb breast milk rich in nutrients, especially protein (Astuti & Rahfiludin, 2022).

Rich in immunoglobulins, lactoferrin, ions (Na, Ca, K, Zn, Fe), low-fat lactose, and fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E, and K), colostrum, when received by babies within the first 30 minutes of birth, aids in preventing digestive issues, intestinal infections, respiratory tract infections, and diarrhea problems (Sova & Hasni, 2022). As outlined by Jackson and Nazar (2006), colostrum boasts elevated levels of antibodies and white blood cells, instrumental in the fight against diseases. Its effectiveness extends to various infectious diseases such as diarrhea, colds, and pneumonia. Conversely, Mata and Wayatt (1971) advocate for mothers to engage in regular breastfeeding in the initial days after birth, ensuring a sufficient supply of colostrum for the baby.

A Mother's Shield: Countering Various Diseases with the Power of Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding significantly influences the development of a robust immune system in early infancy. A lack of breastfeeding may increase a child's susceptibility to diseases (Amna Alotiby et al., 2021). The divine wisdom in breast milk lies in its comprehensive benefits, aiding the infant's immune system against various diseases during growth. Breastfeeding provides tailored nutrition throughout the day, actively boosting immunity based on each baby's needs (Hanson, 2004). It benefits both the child and the mother, reducing the risk of breast cancer. Mothers who do not breastfeed have a higher incidence of breast cancer (Renfrew, 2012). Al-Nuaimi et. al. (2017) affirms that breastfeeding not only benefits the baby but also shields the mother from postpartum issues, ovarian and breast cancers, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes.

Breast milk contains antibodies (IgA) beneficial for infants in combating viruses and bacteria. Moreover, breast milk plays a vital role in developing the baby's intestinal immune system (Plaza-Díaz et al., 2018). According to Vieira et al (2018), breast milk not only shields infants from microbial infections but also strengthens their immune system against allergens, reducing susceptibility to immune-related conditions such as asthma, celiac disease, and multiple sclerosis.

Diarrhea is a common and potentially life-threatening issue in infants. However, those who are breastfed typically experience fewer symptoms of diarrhea, intestinal, and

respiratory infections compared to formula-fed infants. A study from the Child Malnutrition Prevention Center in Brazil reveals that breastfeeding can significantly reduce the risk of death and harm from diarrhea in infants. Infants not breastfed have a 25 times higher risk of death from diarrhea than exclusively breastfed infants (Musa, 2015). Another study by Ruuska (1992) found a lower incidence of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) among breastfed infants

Optimal breastfeeding significantly contributes to the health of newborns as they grow, and exclusive breastfeeding has proven to lower the risk of allergic diseases like asthma and eczema. Hence, the recommendation for exclusive breastfeeding should be embraced across all societal strata, regardless of social status or heritage. This is reinforced by research conducted by Romieu et al (2000) involving 5,182 child respondents in Brazil, which indicates that children who receive breast milk are less prone to developing asthma or allergies compared to those who do not.

The WHO (2011) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for six months. What if exclusive breastfeeding is discontinued before this six-month period? Oddy (2002) addressed this question in a study involving 2,604 children in Australia. The results indicated that children are more prone to asthma if exclusive breastfeeding is stopped before the baby reaches four months. This corresponds with the WHO's advice that every newborn should receive exclusive breastfeeding for six months.

Dell (2001) conducted a study involving 2,184 children aged 12-24 months in Canada, revealing that children who were breastfed had a lower risk of developing asthma compared to those who were not breastfed. This implies that breastfeeding can either protect against or at least diminish the risk of asthma in children. A similar pattern was observed in a study by Obaid et al (2022) in Yemen, where infants given formula before six months were more susceptible to asthma attacks than those who were breastfed.

Furthermore, breastfeeding contributes to enhanced intelligence in children. Research by Zhang (2022) and colleagues shows that breastfed infants have a larger regional gray matter volume in various brain areas, such as bilateral frontal lobes (BA11, BA46), right temporal lobe (BA37), and left caudate nucleus, as observed in MRI scans. Compared to formula-fed infants, breastfed infants exhibit increased brain activation in the right superior temporal gyrus (BA41) during fMRI. The study also highlights that infants receiving breast milk have larger and more functionally active regional gray matter development compared to formula-fed infants at a similar age. Therefore, early breastfeeding after birth significantly influences the early brain development of infants.

Babies not receiving breast milk face increased risks of various diseases, particularly gastrointestinal (GI) infections. In the first months after birth, infants are highly vulnerable to illnesses, making passive immunization and probiotics in breast milk crucial for their well-being. Breast milk's passive immunization temporarily provides the baby with immunity from the mother, helping combat infections like *Escherichia coli* and *Shigella* (Kamarudin et al., 2019).

Furthermore, infants deprived of breast milk are at a higher risk of mortality compared to their breastfed counterparts. Mathur & Dhingra (2013) emphasized breast milk's role in passive immunization against viruses and bacteria, making breastfeeding a crucial factor in reducing newborn mortality. Exclusive breastfeeding is estimated to have lowered the risk of child deaths under five by 13% in low-income countries.

Despite global scientific studies promoting breastfeeding benefits, the unfortunate reality in Malaysia, especially among working mothers, is the low prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding. Mahdizam and Yew (2018) revealed Malaysia has the highest formula milk usage in Asia, indicating a low breastfeeding rate. Alarmingly, only two out of seven infants in Malaysia exclusively receive breast milk in the first four months after birth, with the percentage of mothers exclusively breastfeeding at a mere 18 percent.

Quranic and Hadith Perspectives on Breastfeeding

Islam underscores the importance of breastfeeding, evident in a dedicated chapter within the Islamic family system known as *al-rada'ah*. Unique to Islam is its detailed emphasis on breastfeeding globally. This emphasis extends to the extensive coverage of breastfeeding in the hadiths of Prophet Muhammad. The Quran and hadiths promote breastfeeding from birth until the age of two, particularly for mothers who aim to complete the breastfeeding period. Prophet Muhammad's teachings, found in both the Quran and hadiths, align with the modern global advocacy for exclusive breastfeeding.

وَأُولَٰئِكَ يُرْضِعْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ حَوْلَيْنِ كَامِلَيْنِ لِمَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُبَيِّمَ الرِّضَاعَةَ ۚ وَعَلَى الْمَوْلُودِ لَهُ رِزْقُهُنَّ وَكِسْوَتُهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ۚ لَا تُكَلَّفُ نَفْسٌ إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا ۚ لَا تُضَارَّ وَالِدَةٌ بِوَلَدِهَا وَلَا مَوْلُودٌ لَهُ بِوَالِدِهِ ۚ وَعَلَى الْوَارِثِ مِثْلُ ذَلِكَ ۗ فَإِنْ أَرَادَا فِصَالًا عَنْ تَرَاضٍ مِّنْهُمَا وَتَشَاوُرٍ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا ۗ وَإِنْ أَرَدْتُمْ أَنْ تُسْرِضُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا سَلَّمْتُمْ مَا آتَيْتُم بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ۗ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

The mothers shall give such to their offspring for two whole years, if the father desires to complete the term. But he shall bear the cost of their food and clothing on equitable terms. No soul shall have a burden laid on it greater than it can bear. No mother shall be Treated unfairly on account of her child. Nor father on account of his child, an heir shall be chargeable in the same way. If they both decide on weaning, by mutual consent, and after due consultation, there is no blame on them. If ye decide on a foster-mother for your offspring, there is no blame on you, provided ye pay (the mother) what ye offered, on equitable terms. But fear Allah and know that Allah sees well what ye do. (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:233)

This verse instructs parents to responsibly oversee the breastfeeding of their newborns for a minimum duration of two years. The responsibility for breastfeeding during the two-year period should be shared by both the mother and father to ensure the child's rights are adequately addressed (Ya'qub, 1995). According to as-Sayuti & al-Mahalli (n.d), mothers are advised to breastfeed their children for a complete two years for those who wish to fulfill the entire nursing period. No one should be burdened beyond their capacity. A mother should not be compelled to endure hardship in breastfeeding a baby if she finds it challenging. If both parents willingly agree to wean the baby before the two-year period or for the benefit of the baby, they are not considered sinful. As per Az-Zuhaili (2018), if both parents agree to wean willingly and for the benefit of the baby before two years, they are not deemed sinful.

However, if one parent wishes to wean while the other disagrees, or if it is not in the baby's best interest, weaning cannot be carried out.

The above evidence indicates that Islam promotes breastfeeding, viewing it as the mother's duty to breastfeed her baby and fulfill the right to enjoy and benefit from mother's milk if she is able. Fathers should support breastfeeding mothers by providing necessary assistance. This underscores that Islam sees breastfeeding as a fundamental obligation for mothers. The ideal breastfeeding period is two years, although, according to Musa (2015), early weaning is permissible before the completion of the two-year period under certain conditions. This decision is made through mutual agreement between both parents, considering the advantages and disadvantages, and planning for the proper care of their child. Another Quranic verse also mentions the two-year breastfeeding period:

وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهْنًا عَلَىٰ وَهْنٍ وَفِصَالُهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنِ اشْكُرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ إِلَيَّ الْمَصِيرُ

And We have enjoined on man (to be good) to his parents: in travail upon travail did his mother bear him and in years twain was his weaning: (hear the command) "Show gratitude to Me and to thy parents: to Me is (thy final) Goal. (Surah Luqman 31:14)

According to As-Sobuni (2001), this verse instructs humanity to express kindness and gratitude to both parents. The mother, enduring successive challenges, faces vulnerability throughout-during pregnancy, while caring for her child, and over the two years of breastfeeding. As emphasized by Az-Zuhaili (2018), the verse explicitly affirms that weaning a child from breastfeeding and the establishment of non-marital relations due to breastfeeding continue until the age of two. According to Ali (1984), The set of milk teeth in a human child is completed at the age of two years, which is therefore the natural extreme limit for breastfeeding. In our artificial life the duration is much less.

A mother unable to breastfeed her child, perhaps due to conditions like Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), is encouraged to engage someone else for breastfeeding. Islam directs fathers to compensate mothers for breastfeeding, ensuring the child's needs are met during this period. However, the prevalence of processed formula milks, such as cow's milk, has diminished the significance of a breastfeeding mother's role in today's context (Musa, 2015).

Likewise, according to As-Sayuti (n.d.), if a baby is to be entrusted to another person for breastfeeding as a wet nurse - meaning, not by its biological mother - it is deemed permissible and carries no offense, with no sin attached. Nevertheless, the guardian (wali) is expected to compensate appropriately and willingly, as indicated in the following verse from the Quran:

فَإِنْ أَرْضَعْنَ لَكُمْ فَآتُوهُنَّ أَجُورَهُنَّ وَأَتَمِرُوا بِبَيْتِكُمْ بِمَعْرُوفٍ وَإِنْ تَعَاَسَرْتُمُ فَسَتَرْضِعْ لَهُ الْآخَرَىٰ

And if they suckle your (offspring) give them their recompense: and take mutual counsel together according to what is just and reasonable. And if ye find yourselves in difficulties let another woman suckle (the child) on the (father's) behalf. (Surah at-Talaq 65:6)

This verse underscores Islam's emphasis on the significance of breastfeeding. As per Ali (1984), should challenges arise, such as insufficient maternal milk, maternal health complications, or circumstances hindering the natural course of the mother nursing her own child, the father is advised to procure the services of a wet nurse for breastfeeding the infant. In such instances, the father is obligated to cover all associated expenses.

According to as-Sobuni (2001), if the biological mother is unable to breastfeed for any reason, a wet nurse may undertake the task. The exclusive directive for breastfeeding from the mother serves as Allah's guidance to ensure that mothers breastfeed their children adequately for the recommended two-year period. Islamic law does not prohibit the continuation of breastfeeding beyond the age of two. However, breastfeeding after the child reaches two years old does not establish kinship, as underscored by the saying of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh);

لَا رِضَاعَ إِلَّا مَا كَانَ فِي الْحَوْلَيْنِ

Kinship through breastfeeding is only acknowledged within the initial two complete years. (Narrated ad-Daraqutni)

In accordance with this hadith, the kinship established through breastfeeding is acknowledged for a span of two years. Beyond this timeframe, breastfeeding no longer creates a kinship. This perspective is universally agreed upon by the majority of jurists, encompassing Imam Malik, Imam Shafi'i, and Imam Ahmad. Nonetheless, Imam Abu Hanifah asserts that the period required for breastfeeding to establish kinship is two years and six months (As-Sobuni, n.d.). Imam Abu Hanifah's stance is rooted in a Quranic verse.

وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ إِحْسَانًا ۚ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ كُرْهًا وَوَضَعَتْهُ كُرْهًا ۚ وَحَمْلُهُ وَفِصَالُهُ ثَلَاثُونَ شَهْرًا ۗ

We have enjoined on man Kindness to his parents: in pain did his mother bear him and in pain did she give him birth. The carrying of the (child) to his weaning is (a period of) thirty months. (Surah al-Ahqaf 46:15)

As per as-Sobuni (n.d.), this verse in the Quran suggests a combined period of pregnancy and breastfeeding from the mother lasting for 30 months, equivalent to 2 years and 6 months. Consequently, some interpretations of this verse propose a minimum pregnancy duration of 6 months and a breastfeeding limit of 2 years. Additionally, the perspective of Imam Abu Hanifah relies on this verse to assert that the breastfeeding period extends to 30 months, corresponding to 2 years and 6 months.

However, according to Ali (1984), the weaning period is specified to be at the age of two years, equivalent to 24 months. This leaves six months as the minimum recognized duration of human gestation, after which the child is considered viable, aligning with the latest established scientific knowledge. The average gestation period is 280 days, or ten times the inter-menstrual period. It's noteworthy that the average weaning period is significantly less than 24 months.

The maximum breastfeeding duration of two years is also in line with the time when a human child typically completes their first set of milk teeth. The lower milk incisors emerge

between the 6th and 9th months, followed by the milk teeth at intervals until the canines appear. The second molars usually come in around 24 months, providing the child with a complete set of milk teeth. At this stage, nature anticipates the child to start chewing and masticating, becoming independent of their mother's milk. Conversely, continuing breastfeeding after the child has a full set of milk teeth may cause discomfort to the mother. The development of permanent teeth begins at the age of six, with the second molars emerging at 12 years. The third molars, known as wisdom teeth, may appear at 18 to 20 years (Johar & Tan, 2023).

Although the Quran mentions the possibility of breastfeeding from the mother for a period of two years or more, it does not prescribe exclusive breastfeeding as a requirement during this time. According to the guidelines set by the WHO (2011), exclusive breastfeeding is actively promoted for at least the initial six months of an infant's life. After the completion of the sixth month, it is advisable to introduce other complementary foods alongside breastfeeding until the child reaches the age of two years or beyond. This approach ensures that the child receives a balanced and varied diet to support healthy growth and development.

Certainly, the directive on breastfeeding in Islamic law exemplifies the excellence of Islamic teachings originating from Allah (swt). Allah (swt), the Creator of humanity, possesses the utmost knowledge about all human needs. Consequently, one of the laws bestowed by Allah (swt) upon Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) encourages breastfeeding, as its advantages have been demonstrated to outweigh those of all artificial foods or formula milk.

Islam assigns significance to breastfeeding relationships, going to the extent that in Islamic law, these ties are considered comparable to blood relations, leading to the prohibition of marriage between individuals connected through breastfeeding.

حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمْ أُمَّهَاتُكُمْ وَبَنَاتُكُمْ وَأَخْوَاتُكُمْ وَعَمَّاتُكُمْ وَخَالَاتُكُمْ وَبَنَاتُ الْأَخِ وَبَنَاتُ الْأُخْتِ وَأُمَّهَاتُكُمُ اللَّاتِي أَرْضَعْنَكُمْ وَأَخْوَاتُكُمْ مِّنَ الرَّضْعَةِ

Prohibited to you (for marriage) are: your mother daughters sisters father's sisters mother's sisters; brother's daughters sister's daughters foster-mothers (who gave you suck) foster-sisters. (Surah al-Nisa' 4:23)

As per Ali (1984), this Table of Prohibited Degrees agrees in the main with what is usually accepted among all nations, except in minor details. The scheme is drawn up on the assumption that the person who proposes to marry is a man: if it is a woman, the same scheme will apply, mutatis mutandis. Alternatively, it can always be interpreted from the perspective of the husband's relationship, as there is always a husband in a marriage. Notably, "fosterage" or milk-relationships play a crucial role in Muslim Law and are considered equivalent to blood relationships. Consequently, it appears that the prohibited degrees encompass not only foster mothers and foster sisters but also individuals like foster-mother's sister, and so forth.

The Quran not only establishes a link between breastfeeding and blood relations but also underscores the same equilibrium in the guidance from the hadith of Prophet

Muhammad pbuh. This highlights the elevated status of breastfeeding in Islamic law. According to a hadith narrated by Ibn Abbas ra, Prophet Muhammad pbuh stated:

يَحْرُمُ مِنَ الرَّضَاعِ مَا يَحْرُمُ مِنَ النَّسَبِ

Those who are prohibited by lineage are also prohibited by suckling. (Narreted by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Aisha raha narrated that Prophet Muhammad pbuh said;

إِنَّ الرَّضَاعَةَ تُحَرِّمُ مَا يَحْرُمُ مِنَ الْوِلَادَةِ

Breastfeeding renders the child forbidden for marriage, just like a naturally born child. (Reported by Bukhari and Muslim)

Ibn Abbas ra conveyed that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) addressed the daughters of Hamzah, his foster sisters, saying;

لَا تَجُلُّ لِي، يَحْرُمُ مِنَ الرَّضَاعِ مَا يَحْرُمُ مِنَ النَّسَبِ، هِيَ بِنْتُ أَخِي مِنَ الرَّضَاعَةِ

She is not permissible for me because what is prohibited by lineage is also prohibited by suckling. She is the daughter of my foster brother. (Reported by Bukhari and Muslim)

Nevertheless, fosterage is only acknowledged if an individual is breastfed by their foster mother before reaching the age of two years. According to Umm Salamah raha Prophet Muhammad pbuh stated,

لَا يُحْرَمُ مِنَ الرَّضَاعَةِ إِلَّا مَا فَتَقَ الْأَمْعَاءَ فِي النَّدَى وَكَانَ قَبْلَ الْفِطَامِ

Fosterage only makes unlawful what is in the intestines and is given before weaning. (Narreted by Tirmidhi)

Prophet Muhammad pbuh elucidated that breastfeeding contributes to the strengthening of the infant's bones and aids in their growth. As narrated by Ibn Mas'ud ra, he said;

لَا رَضَاعَ إِلَّا مَا أَنْشَرَ الْعَظْمَ، وَأَنْبَتَ اللَّحْمَ

There is no breastfeeding except that which strengthens the bones and grows flesh. (Narreted by Abu Dawud)

The Quran explicitly promotes breastfeeding, suggesting that if a mother is unable to nurse her own baby, she should enlist someone else to meet the infant's needs. Breastfeeding comes with both explicit and implicit benefits and is a vital aspect of a child's early education (Rasip, 2022).

The responsibility of educating a child through breastfeeding is exclusively entrusted to women. Allah has selected women because of their inherent maternal qualities. Additionally, breastfeeding can address all the spiritual and physical needs of an infant. While most mothers grasp the concept of breastfeeding, many still struggle to implement it perfectly within the recommended two-year timeframe, particularly those who are working (Musa, ed., 2015).

Conclusion

The All-Knowing Allah, the Creator of humanity, has endowed infants with the most optimal nourishment right from the inception of their existence in the womb. Following birth, a mother's milk, containing colostrum, serves to enhance the baby's immune system during its crucial developmental phase. In alignment with this, the WHO (n.d.) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the initial six months, followed by the gradual introduction of suitable complementary foods while continuing breastfeeding.

Islamic Sharia, as clarified through the Quran and hadith, has been a proponent of breastfeeding for over 1400 years. In situations where a mother cannot breastfeed her baby, the engagement of a wet nurse ensures that the infant thrives with the nourishment of mother's milk. Additionally, the mother and her family members gain mahram status concerning the fostered child under specific conditions. Beyond the physical advantages, breastfeeding also plays a pivotal role in fostering positive emotional development in growing infants.

A plethora of scientific studies substantiates that breast milk stands as the optimal nourishment for the holistic growth of infants. These studies also pinpoint potential issues that may arise if infants are deprived of the supply of breast milk. This exposition aspires to motivate mothers to fully commit to exclusive breastfeeding, thereby contributing to the overall well-being of their infants.

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