

## THE EXPERIENCE OF TRADITIONAL MASSAGE PRACTITIONERS IN SUPPORTING BREASTFEEDING PRACTICE

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### ABSTRACT

*Strategies that have been successful in promoting breastfeeding practice and to increase breastfeeding education include mother-to-mother support and close contact with breastfeeding support members through home visits. The objective of this study is to explore the experience of traditional massage practitioners in promoting and supporting breastfeeding practice. A qualitative study using semi structured face-to-face interview was conducted among breastfeeding support group members who are working as traditional massage practitioners. The data was transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. Three themes were revealed involving participants real enjoyed the experiences, gaining knowledge on breastfeeding technique and breastfeeding challenges. This study identified that the traditional massage practitioners have shown good support towards breastfeeding practice and recommended the need of massage therapy for continuity of this practice.*

Key words: breastfeeding, breastfeeding practice, support group, massage practitioner.

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### INTRODUCTION

Breastfeeding is the best way to provide complete nutrients for infants in order to achieve healthy growth and development (WHO, 2012; UNICEF, 2015). Despite there are more awareness on the benefits of breastfeeding, the rates of this practice often decreased. This is based on the previous study; almost half of mothers stopped breastfeeding exclusively to their infants at one month postpartum were associated with delayed early initiation of breastfeeding and faced breastfeeding difficulties (Tengku Ismail et al, 2012). It is belief, hand expression play important role in continuation of regular lactation care, particularly in the treatment of breastfeeding problem such as breast engorgement, mastitis, and plugged ducts (Bolman et al, 2013). Having good breastfeeding technique such as proper positioning and complete attachment is the most crucial part for effective breastfeeding practice. However, for some mothers they still need further support and assistance to improve lactation process (Kabir & Tasnim, 2009; Muda et al, 2017).

Oketani breast massage is reported able to boost the expressed breast milk and the entire breast becomes suppler to generate excellent quality breast milk due to enhanced total solids, concentration of lipids and gross energy (Kabir & Tasnim, 2009). Nevertheless, breastfeeding difficulties and lack in milk ejection can be help with the therapeutic massage by the traditional massage practitioner (Bolman et al., 2013). Massages conducted during the early stage of postnatal period can stop breast milk from clogging in the breast so that breast milk can flow freely. Effective outcomes were obtained when distinct massages were used for insufficient breast milk and blocked breasts respectively. Using massage is to enhance the increased pectoral muscle to boost breast milk output and use warm and cold compression and massage as an alternative technique to boost blood flow to the mammary glands (Kabir & Tasnim, 2009). In Malaysia, the practice of body massage at the early of postnatal period is normally performed by the traditional Malay midwife who is act as experienced masseur (Yusoff et al, 2018).

Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore the experience of traditional massage practitioners who are act as breastfeeding support group members in promoting and supporting breastfeeding practice

## METHODOLOGY

### *Participants*

This is a qualitative study was conducted using purposive sampling on five traditional massage practitioners from *Mamacare* that has been registered under LPPKN, Pahang. The participants also had registered with breastfeeding support group Kuantan (KUPPSIK) and actively involved in providing service to postnatal mother in Kuantan area. The Breastfeeding Support Group Kuantan (KUPPSIK) was established to support and empower mothers in Kuantan to breastfeed and to sustain this practice. These support groups provide comprehensive efforts by providing information, encouragement and education to mothers and their spouses. The participants were recruited based on the list of inclusion criteria; Malay, female, registered with breastfeeding support group in Kuantan, work as traditional massage practitioner and has experienced working with postnatal mothers more than 2 years.

### *Research Instruments*

A semi structured interview used in this study was guided by Newcomer, Hatry, & Wholey (2015). Semi-structured interviews are those in-depth interviews where the respondents have to answer pre-set open-ended questions and thus are widely employed by different healthcare professionals in their research (Jamshed, 2014). Data then was analysed using thematic analysis guided using Braun & Clarke (2006).

### *Ethical*

The approvals of the study were obtained from Kulliyah of Nursing Research Committee (KNRC), IIUM Research Ethics Committee (IREC) and *Lembaga Penduduk dan Pembangunan Keluarga Negara* (LPPKN) Kuantan, Pahang.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Socio-demographic profile*

Five female staff from *Mamacare* were recruited to participate in the study. All participants were Malay and the age ranges from 49 to 55 years old. All of them has working experience as traditional massage practitioners under *Mamacare* more than 1 a year and also registered with breastfeeding support group Kuantan.

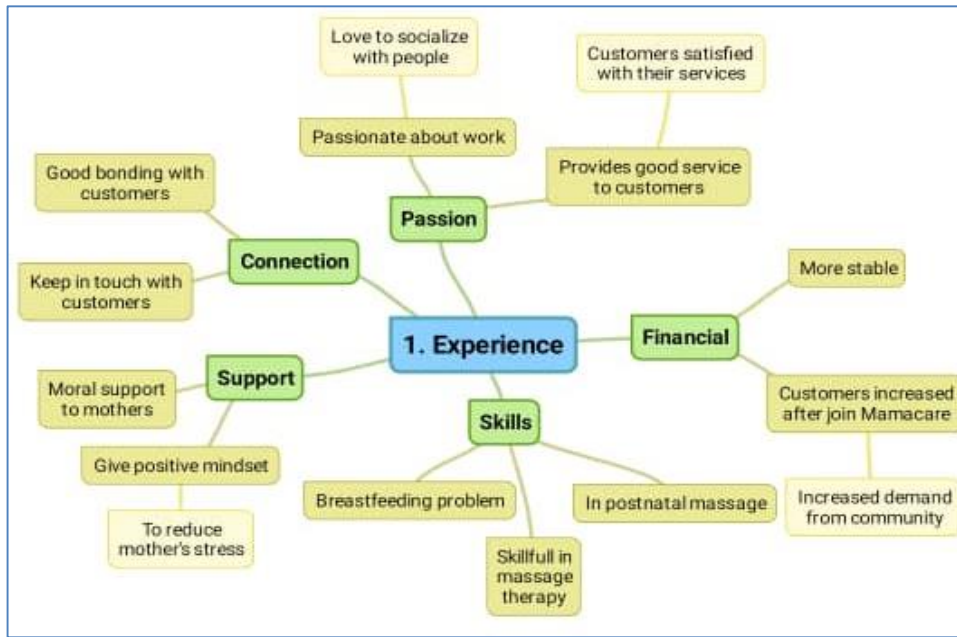
### *Results*

There are three themes emerged from the study based on the research questions and research objectives. These themes illustrate the experience of traditional massage practitioner in supporting breastfeeding practice. They themes involved practitioners' experiences, knowledge and challenges by traditional massage practitioners in supporting breastfeeding practice.

#### **Theme 1: The Experience in Supporting Breastfeeding Practice.**

Few sub themes are emerged and these reflect the experience of traditional massage practitioner in supporting breastfeeding practice. The experience of traditional massage practitioner can be classified under several sub-themes such as their passion towards their profession, financial stability, motivation, skill, connection and support.

Figure 1: The Experience



Most of the participants portrayed that they enjoyed with profession as massage practitioners due to passion as well as belief can provide the best service to their customer.

*"I really interested in massage since I was a kid and love to socialize with people... I really love my job as I have my regular customer..."* (Respondent 1).

They also claimed that their customer satisfied with their service as they are skilful and talented in giving massage therapy.

*"I have the talent and skill to massage people... I have one case where my customer warded in hospital and she has problem with milk ejection, so I massage her at her back to initiate the breast milk. Alhamdulillah, after that, her milk ejection is normal."* (Respondent 1)

A literature claimed that job passion is a valuable attribute that organizations should seek to develop among employees, and that it is ultimately vital to the performance of an employee's job.<sup>7</sup>

*"I am interested in massage since it is my passion... I feel happy as I love baby so much. If we happy, we also can give good service to customer."* (Respondent 2)

Mostly the participants have experience in giving massage therapy for at least 5 years before joining and registered under Mamacare which give extra knowledge, technique and skilful in massage therapy, hence, increases their job performance and client satisfaction. The participants were expressed their income more stable and many customers came for them to get their service after joining Mamacare program.

*"The reason I join Mamacare because of financial stability... My costumer also increases when I join Mamacare."* (Respondent 1)

The participants were fully support in promoting exclusive breastfeeding practice. It is important for the practitioner to assist and encourage the mother to continue breastfeeding. In the literature had explained social support provided by close relations and professionals plays a protective role and modulates the impact of stress on physical health and psychological well-being of the mother (Muda et al, 2017; Jamil et al, 2017). The participants described they provide moral support and give positive mind set to mother in order to reduce anxiety.

*"...if customer said they do not have enough milk due to stress, I will advise them and give moral support and be a good listener."* (Respondent 1)

For instance, this study revealed how the massage practitioners provide emotional support and assist mothers to breastfeed their baby by giving good moral support to postnatal mothers.

*"We also give positive mindset for the mothers to breastfeed the child. We also want the mother to feel they have a shoulder to cry on."* (Respondent 2)

Some of the participants verbalized that they have a good connection and bonding with their customer which make it one of the best experiences in their service. The respondents were identified:

*“The best part is I feel the relationship and bonding with my customer ... We also still contact in whatsapp just to keep in touch.”* (Respondent 2)

Social support provided by health professionals or support group members had positive effects on mothers’ well-being during the postpartum period.<sup>8</sup>

**Theme 2: Participants Knowledge on Massage Therapy Practice.**

In this theme, the traditional massage practitioners’ knowledge on massage therapy practice can be classified under several sub themes such as the understanding of massage practitioner on the importance of massage therapy, benefits of the breastfeeding, breastfeeding problem, massage technique and nutrition.

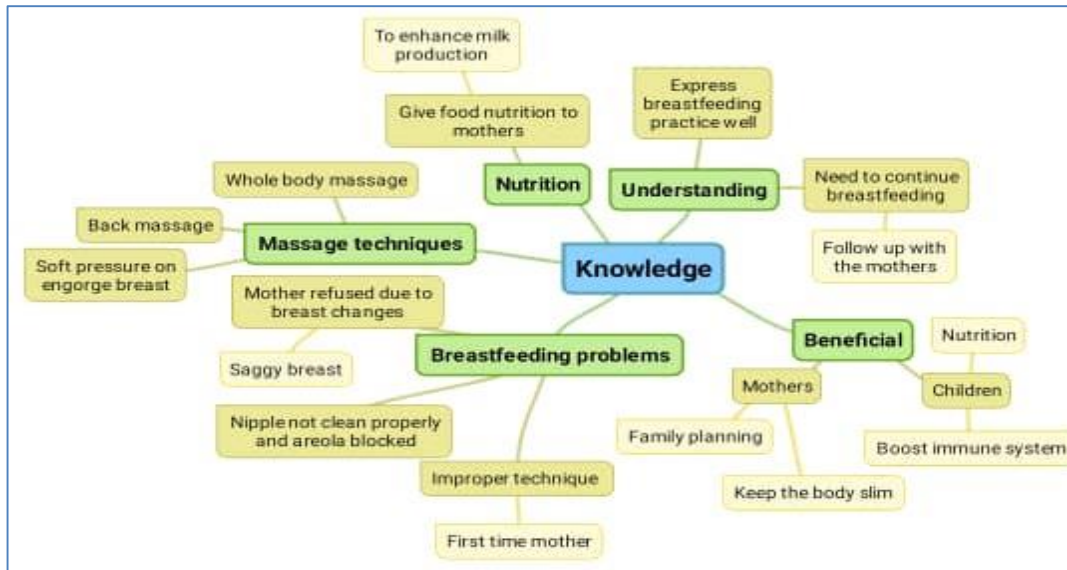


Figure 2: The Knowledge

The participants highlighted breastfeeding problem or cessation were derived from improper technique especially for first time mother.

*“Usually the first-time mother has difficulty in breastfeeding. They not familiar with the technique and awkward with the baby. The baby also does not suck the areola completely. That’s why the milk cannot come out properly.”* (Respondent 2)

The baby also does not suck the areola completely which caused nipple to crack and breast milk not flow and come out properly. Sore nipples associated with breast-feeding are a common problem and may lead to premature weaning. Frequently occurs from suction trauma to the nipple secondary to incorrect positioning at the breast (Thabet et al, 2013).

*“Some people usually have breast engorgement few days after delivery as the milk is blocked and not come out. The thing is, we already educate the mother before the delivery to clean the nipple every day to avoid duct blockage, but they don’t do it.”* (Respondent 4)

The participants identify some mothers refused to breastfeed as they afraid of changes in breast tissue which makes the breasts look saggy. Thus, mothers refused to breastfeed due to worried of physical changes to their breast tissue.

*“... they decide they do not want to give the breastmilk because they scared to have a saggy breast.”* (Respondent 1)

This is similar that an adverse change in breast shape following pregnancy was described by some mothers (Muda et al, 2016; Ho et al, 2011). Expectant mothers should be reassured that breastfeeding does not appear to have an adverse effect upon breast appearance.

In addition, the study had discovered the good technique to increase breastmilk production.

*“I will follow up with them, asking whether they have milk or not directly or through whatsapp... I also frequently told the mother to directly breastfeed the child as it enhances the milk production.”* (Respondent 1)

The participants explained their recommend postnatal mothers to have good nutrition to enhance milk production.

“... advice mother to eat high nutrient food such as honey and dates. We encourage to follow the prophet’s Sunnah.” (Respondent 2)

The point for breast massage is at the back between the scapula and the spine. Post feed weight gain was statistically significantly higher for mothers involved in one study indicates that back massage has a positive effect on lactation (Patel & Gedam, 2013).

“We will focus at the back between spinal bone and scapula is the place to massage. That is the place for milk production.” (Respondent 1)

The participants claimed that the pressure for breast massage for breast engorgement is soft massage and avoid from give strong massage to the customer as it is painful.

“We rarely massage the breast area since it is painful for the mothers. We would only give soft massage to the breast tissue and focus the other part.” (Respondent 1)

The participants were also understood that breastmilk is benefits for baby in providing nutrients and antibody for the growth (Mahasan et al, 2019). It is one way for family planning and keeps the body slim.

“There are many benefits, first we have the colostrum that yellow in color that helped as antibody for the baby. There are also many vitamin and mineral for the baby.” (Respondent 1)

“For the mother, breastfeeding prevents the next pregnancy and body become slimmer.” (Respondent 3)

### Theme 3: The Challenges in Supporting Breastfeeding practice

There are a few obstacles that the participants confront throughout their service in supporting breastfeeding practice such as booking, social stigma and knowledge.

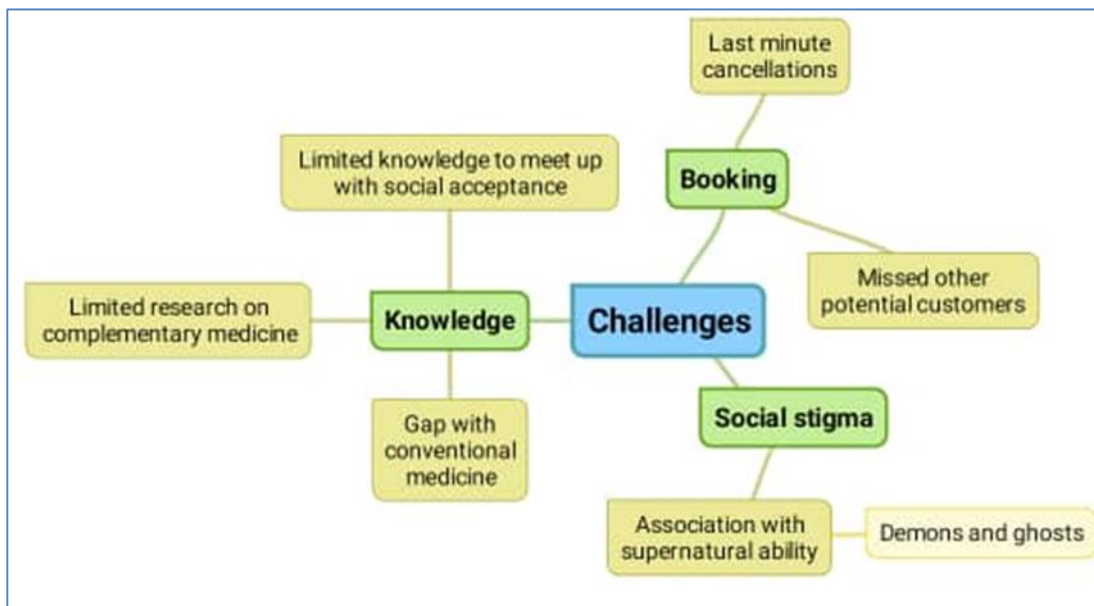


Figure 3: The Challenges

The main challenge is stigma towards traditional massage practitioners itself. The participants described that that the social norm perceives the traditional massage practitioners are associated with supernatural ability like demon and ghost.

“...they afraid we left a negative element to them such as demon and ghost.” (Respondent 4)

The participants described that that the social norm perceive the traditional massage practitioners are associated with supernatural ability.

“...the society believe that traditional massage relates to spiritual thing like demon and ghost. Some of the things that they said to me was my hand is ‘hot’ so I might associate with spiritual thing like demon. I denied any of those thing as it is not true.” (Respondent 1)

This social stigma and cultural belief affect the decision making of the mother to accept traditional massage practitioner in supporting breastfeeding practice whereby the mother might afraid the massage practitioner can transfer the supernatural things to them.

*“One more thing, people believe that negative touch can transfer into one’s body such as demon or negative aura.”* (Respondent 3)

*“There is one case where one customer said that her body got all bruises after she had done massage. She correlated that with demon and so on.”* (Respondent 5)

It is an inevitable that Asian countries have variety of traditional belief in prenatal, labor and postnatal that might affect their decision making and overall health. Other prevalent beliefs and practices across Asian countries included massage, the use of traditional healers and traditional medicine and herbs, beliefs relating to hot/cold imbalance, behavioural taboos, magic, and superstition (Withers et al, 2018). This is a proven that traditional beliefs and practices in pregnancy and childbirth are prevalent in Asia and it is a challenge for the participants as traditional massage practitioner to provide their massage service to postnatal mother.

*“We must have strong mental, physical and increase knowledge...”* (Respondent 4)

Lastly, knowledge is one of the challenges for the traditional massage practitioners. The participants explained that their knowledge is quite limited to meet up with the social acceptance and medical personnel. The key informants also emphasized that they are lack in terms of research on complementary medicine which cause a knowledge barrier between conventional medicine and complementary medicine.

The participants explained that their knowledge is quite limited to meet up with the social acceptance.

*“We as practitioners need to increase our knowledge, do our research. Find the connection between traditional medicine and complementary medicine...”* (Respondent 5)

The use and acceptance of complementary and alternative medicine among the general population and medical personnel, the debate about the clinical effectiveness of these therapies remains controversial among many medical professionals (Frass et al, 2012). Medical personnel view the traditional scientific forms of evidence as necessary before accepting the therapy and conclude that the key informants limited research and evidence on complementary medicine is a challenge to meet up with the social acceptance (Frass et al, 2012).

The participants explained that they have problem with their customer booking and cancel at the last minute which caused them to miss their other potential customer.

*“... one of the challenges is when a customer book with me then she cancelled it. I have missed my other potential customer.”* (Respondent 1)

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of traditional massage practitioner in supporting breastfeeding practice. Literally, the traditional massage practitioners in this study have shown good perceptions towards breastfeeding practice and the need of massage therapy in supporting breastfeeding practice. This study identified the breast milk insufficiency can be solved with massage therapy for postnatal mother and being supportive is additionally imperative. The participants were fully gave moral support and listen to the mother’s problem. As traditional massage practitioners they did a follow up and having good connection with postnatal mothers in order to ensure the sustainable of breastfeeding practice.

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