The Importance of Breast Milk From The Science Aspect: Analysis According To The Islamic Perspectives

Keistimewaan Penyusuan Susu Ibu Menurut Sains: Analisis Menurut Perspektif Islam

Normadiah Daud1, Nadhirah Nordin2, Zurita Mohd Yusof3 & Mohd A’Tarahim Mohd Razali 4

Abstract
Lack of research that analyzes the importance of breastfeeding from science perspective while simultaneously analyzing its importance from the Islamic perspectives is the main issue that drives this research. Based on this matter, the main objective of this research is to study the importance of breastfeeding for both child and mother and analyze it according to the perspectives of Islam. This research is based on literature review method. Data was collected through documents analysis which consists of turath (traditional) and modern books as well as articles related to breastfeeding. It is anticipated that the outcome of this research will be able to explain that the encouragement for breastfeeding is not only due to its significance according to science but also because it fulfils the syarak requirements.

Keywords: Breast Milk . Science . Islamic Perspectives

Introduction
Breast milk is the best food for babies especially right after birth until about 6 months old. It contains all the nutrients in the right amount. Breast milk also contains colostrum which helps to fight infections from numerous diseases such as diarrhea, cold and pneumonia. Furthermore, it acts as the first immunization for newborn babies Syeikh Alaudeen (1996). The benefits of breastfeeding are also in parallel with Allah’s commandment in surah al Baqarah verse 233 which advocates mothers to breastfeed their children up until the age of two. In fact there are numerous hadiths, fuqaha’ (expert in Islamic jurisprudence) and sahabiyat (female companions of Prophet SAW) opinions that discussed the benefits of breast milk.

Therefore the objective of this research is to study the importance of breast milk from the science perspective while at the same time, analyzing it based on the Islamic perspective. Method used is literature research that involves the collection of primary and secondary data. This information was treated in terms of qualitative research. Previous researches especially turath books focused primarily on the significance of breastfeeding based on the Islamic perspectives only. For example, literatures produced by al Mawardi (1996), al Zaydan (2003), Ibn Rushd (t.th.), al-Bahuti (2003), al-Dardir (t.th.), Ibn Qudamah (1983), al-Kasani (1986),

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1 Prof. Madya Dr. Normadiah Daud, Deputy Dean, Faculty of Islamic Contemporaries, UniSZAnormadiah@unisza.edu.my
2 Dr Nadhirah Nordin, Senior lecturer, Faculty of Islamic Contemporaries, UniSZAnadhirah@unisza.edu.my
3 Dr. Zurita Mohd Yusof, Senior lecturer, Faculty of Islamic Contemporaries, UniSZAzurita@unisza.edu.my
4 Dr Mohd A’Tarahim Mohd Razali, Senior lecturer, Faculty of Islamic Contemporaries, UniSZAmtarahim@unisza.edu.my
al-Muṭi’I (t.th.), al-Sharbini (1978), and many others. They only discussed the concept and advantages of breastfeeding from the Islamic perspectives while breastfeeding from the aspect of science was not clearly mentioned.

In Malaysia there are numerous literatures with regards to breastfeeding. Examples include Rita Rahayu Omar, Suriati Ghazali (1998), Abdul Kader Hussain (1986), Abdul Hamid Arshat (1991), Nor Asyikin Mokhtar (2006), Arini H (2013), Syeikh Alaudeen (1996) and others. These literatures present the benefits of breast milk from the aspect of science, and they advocate breastfeeding. Analysis based on the Islamic perspectives on the science aspects was not carried out. Therefore, the authors saw a loophole in the previous researches hence this paper will discuss both aspects; the benefits of breast milk based on science and the analysis based on the Islamic perspectives.

**Benefits of Breast Milk According to Science**

Some of the benefits of breast milk for babies is it can enhance baby’s brain, it is guaranteed clean, it can save lives and avoid obesity problems among babies and many others. Breastfeeding is indeed closely related to children’s mental health. A group of researchers from Adelaide’s Flinders Medical Center, United States of America has conducted an intelligence test on 32 babies. From that test they found that babies who were breastfed were 40% smarter that babies who drink formula milk. This research proves that DHA (a kind of fat acid contained in breast milk that increase baby’s mental development) is really beneficial for baby’s brain development. Meanwhile, babies who consume formula milk do not get enough DHA content as in breast milk. This means the longer a baby consumes breast milk, the higher the mental development at the age level between one to two years after birth Lifshitz (1995).

Scientific studies also show that brain ability for babies who are given breast milk is better than other babies. Comparison studies on babies who were given breast milk with babies who were given formula milk by James W. Anderson, a scientist from the University of Kentucky, proved that IQ in babies who were breastfed is 5 times higher than other babies. Based on this study, it is determined that breast milk given to babies during the first 6 months is highly beneficial for babies intelligence, and babies who were breastfed for less than 8 weeks obtain less benefits for their IQ developments Whitmire (2010). Based on a research carried out by Retina Foundation of the Southwest in Dallas, Texas, babies who obtain DHA together with AA excel higher in terms of memory, more capable of solving problems and more capable of language proficiency as compared to those who obtain DHA or AA alone. These findings were published in the *Development Medicine and Child Neurology* journal. According to Dennis Hoffman, a senior scientist at Retina Foundation, breast milk contains DHA and AA in an amazing portion. Therefore, babies who are given breast milk obtain the best nutrition for their brain and nerve developments Danial (2010).

Other than that, breast milk can save babies lives. This is owing to the fact that most diseases can be avoided with breastfeeding. Breast milk is clean and bacteria-free. Besides, it contains anti-infection agent that can fight numerous infectious diseases. One of the agents is the live white blood cells (*leucocytes*) that kill bacteria. Meanwhile, antibodies (*immunoglobulins*) can fight against the infection of regular diseases until the baby is capable of forming his or her own antibodies. If the mother is infected, antibodies that fight the infection will appear in the breast milk. An infant who cries incessantly for hours may have a
bloated stomach. If a baby is fully breastfed up until 3 months of age, this problem can be avoided. Freir & Eidleman (1980) This is due to an agent called *bifidus factor* that helps some special bacteria called *Lactobacillus bifidus* to breed and fight against bacteria that causes diarrhea. Other than diarrhea, breast milk has successfully fought against normal infections such as eczema, asthma and constipation. Babies who were given breast milk also rarely have ear or respiratory problems as compared to babies who were given formula milk.

Sometimes babies got diarrhea due to disorganized eating system or method. Babies who have diarrhea should not be stopped from being breastfed because breast milk can help prevent any infections on babies. Freier & Eidelman (1980). Scholars from Bristol University had also carried out a study which stated that breast milk may provide a normal blood pressure for babies. This is because breast milk does not contain high natrium which causes high blood pressure and excessive weight increase. Breast milk is also capable of preventing a baby from heart attack. This is due to the fact that breast milk contains sour fat that may prevent hardening of artery veins and it contains balanced nutrients. As a conclusion, babies who are given breast milk have less risk to be infected with these two silent killers. Other than that, a group of researchers led by Dr. Lisa Martin from the Cincinnati’s Medical Center in the United States, has found a high content of protein hormone called *adiponectin* in breast milk. A high *adiponectin* rate in the blood is closely linked to a lower risk of heart attack for babies who were breastfed. Anon (2004).

In addition, the risk of infants and toddlers death in developing countries increases 10 to 15 times higher for those who did not consume breast milk during their first three months of lives. Most deaths are caused by severe diarrhea. Studies have also shown that 40,000 children die every day (28 deaths per minute) in developing countries. They are the victims of nutritional deficiencies. With this regards, the United Nations International Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has identified seven effective methods to save millions of children’s lives. One of the methods is to increase breastfeeding rates among mothers. Even though children’s fatality rate is high in developing and under-developed countries, it does not mean the developed countries are free from children fatalities. In the US and Europe, for instance, there are many cases of *Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (Cot Death)* reported. Research has shown that the death cases mostly involve children who were bottle-fed. United Nation’s International Children’s Fund (2010). A research done by the experts at the University of Munster has found that breastfeeding can prevent sudden death among babies under the age of one. The nutrients in breast milk may also prevent babies from getting allergies. A research done in Finland showed that breastfeeding protects babies from any allergies from small to adulthood. Furthermore, a research that involved 150 children carried out in the course of 17 years showed that babies who were not breastfed by the mothers or breastfed for less than a month commonly have allergy attacks. Vennemann et al (2009).

In Bangladesh, researchers tried to compare breastfeeding rates for 116 babies who were severely infected with cholera as compared to 464 babies who were not seriously infected. They found out that breastfeeding decrease the risk of severe cholera infections by 70 percent. This proved that breastfeeding can protect babies from cholera. Meanwhile, researchers in Arizona conducted studies on newborn babies until they are 12 months old to see the connection between breastfeeding and ear infection (*otitis media*). From 1,013 babies involved, 47 percent have had *otitis media* infection at least once while another 17 percent had more than one infection. Babies who were breastfed exclusively for at least four months rarely got this infection as compared to babies who were not breastfed. Anon (2010). In Mexico, 118 underweight babies were given breast milk or formula milk. This experiment
showed that babies who were given formula milk were 13 times more prone to have bowel inflammation such as necrotizing enterocolitis and five times more prone to urinary tract diseases. In addition, they are also nine times more exposed to diarrhea. Even though weight increase among breastfed babies is slow, they are proven to be healthier and protected from various dangerous diseases. Anon,(2010).

Besides controlling diseases, breastfeeding may reduce the risk for a baby to be severely obese at a young age. Armstrong & Reilly (2002). There are many researches that showed babies who consume formula milk early after birth are more prone to be obese. These babies are usually given solid food even before four months of age. This is due to nutritional contents in formula milk is not sufficient to support a baby’s growth. Consequently, a baby will be given more than 6 meals in one day. They are normally given 4 milk feedings and 2 meal servings. If this habit is continuously practiced, a baby will be obese by the age of 3. This problem does not occur for babies who are given breast milk exclusively for 6 months. During that period, solid food is not needed because breast milk already contains all the necessary nutrients for a baby. Other than that, if they drink formula milk from bottles, they are driven to finish all milk in the bottle even though they are actually already full.

Besides, formula milk fed from a bottle has a fast flow and milk will be consumed quickly. This is different than breast feeding where babies will voluntarily stop when they are full. Li R et al. (2010). The milk flow is also not as fast as formula milk fed from a bottle. As a result, the quantity of milk that enters a baby’s stomach can be properly digested by the baby’s digestive system. Therefore, a baby can grow healthily and obesity can be avoided. Furthermore, breast milk is cleaner and more practical. Breast milk does not need to be sterile and does not turn sour even though it is not sucked from the breast for days. Meanwhile, formula milk requires sterile utensils such as milk bottles and such. If it is not done properly, a baby may get infected with diseases. This situation is made worse in the event of natural disaster such as flood, earthquakes and so on. Water source may be contaminated and may endanger a baby’s life. During this time, breast milk is the cleanest and the safest for babies who are more prone to diseases.

Other than that, in certain areas with lack of basic amenities such as clean water supplies and unsatisfactory level of cleanliness, the needed methods of cleaning cannot be carried out. Therefore, children will be given contaminated milk through feeding utensils that contain dirt and bacteria. This condition will not happen if a baby is given breast milk with guaranteed cleanliness. Furthermore, it is also a pure food that does not cause disease infection. Derrick Jellife from the University of California had estimated that every year, there are over 10 million babies in the third world country who are infected with diseases, who had unbalance diet and who died because of bottled milk or formula milk contamination. The danger that lurks from the use of water that is not truly clean and unsterile bottle is the milk composition may change to be something poisonous. Jellife (1978). This discussion clearly demonstrates that breast milk contains numerous benefits which have been recognized by Science and food expert.

Findings: Analysis on the Superiority of Breast Milk from the Islamic Perspectives

The science world knows that the biggest secret contained in breast milk which makes it so beneficial is the existence of colostrum which forms antibody that preserve baby’s health. This view has actually being dominated by early Islamic scholars. For example, in the Shafi’i
sect it is stated that a mother is obligated to feed her child with al-laba’ or colostrum which is the first milk that comes out after the delivery. This is because a baby normally cannot live without consuming that first milk. Al Sharbini (1978). Similarly, the opinions in Hanbali sect. Ibnu Qudamah (1974) also obliged the feeding of al-laba’ or colostrum for newborn babies because it is extremely important for the babies’ lives and usually a baby cannot live without it. Al Sharbini, (1978). This matter is befitting to qawa’id fiqhiyyah:

\[ \text{الضرار يُزَال} \]

That means: *Harm is eliminated* (al-Suyuti, 2010).

The verity on scientific research which stated breast milk is an agent or catalyst for babies’ intelligence has long been proven in Islamic history (Muhammad Rif’at, 1986). One well-known event in the Islamic history is the story of breastfeeding story of Imam al-Haramayn. Jullundhry 2010. Imam al-Haramayn was the mentor for Imam al-Ghazali and he was a very smart scholar, pious and obedient to Allah. When he was little he was nursed by a stranger because his mother was sick. His father, upon knowing that his son has drunk milk from someone with unknown background, straightaway forced the milk out from Imam al-Haramayn’s stomach. His father refused to have food from unknown sources to become the flesh and blood of his son and later influence his personality. Imam al-Haramayn was only allowed to drink milk from his mother who was a pious and obedient servant to Allah SWT. As a result, Imam al-Haramayn grew up to become a faithful servant of Allah who was brilliant in Islamic knowledge. Imam al-Haramayn would mention this story many times to his audience whenever his speech was interrupted. He said:

\[ \text{هذَا مِنْ بَقَايََ تِلك الرضعة} \]

That means: *This is the leftovers of the milk (from a stranger)*

From what has been uttered by Imam al-Haramayn, it was clear that he acknowledged that all privileges given by Allah SWT to him was the effect of proper breastfeeding from his mother. Muhammad Rif’at (1986). As a lesson, if a mother has no milk then she must find breast milk from another woman with virtuous character and manners. They are not encouraged to straight away resolve to formula milk when obstacles arise to breastfeed because there is no other food better than breast milk. Allah SWT commanded in surah al-Rum for humans to accept whatever Allah SWT has created without transforming them into something else. One of Allah SWT’s creations is breast milk which is created for mothers to feed their children. Humans do not need to replace this creation and bestowment from Allah SWT with other milk because nothing else beats what Allah has created. Allah SWT commanded:

\[ \text{فَطَرَتْ أَنْتَ إِلَى فَطَرَ آدَمَ عَلَيْهِ ﺯَلَٰٓإِنَّا نَعۡلَمُ} \]

That means: *Therefore, stand firm in your devotion to the upright faith – the nature made by Allah, the one on which mankind is created – and the laws of Nature ordained by Allah cannot be changed. That is the standard of true faith, but most among mankind do not know.*

(al-Rum: 30)

\(^{5}\text{al-laba’ or colostrum is the first milk that comes out after a woman gave birth (al-Sharbini, 1978).} \)
According to al-Mazhari (2007), the religion of Allah here means Islam and its teaching. He added, every child born is clean and pure. It is the parents who decide whether the child is a Christian or a Jew. According to Mujahid what is meant with (لا تبدي لخلق الله) is we should never change our tawheed (oneness of God) into something astray. Similarly to parents, they must not change children’s nature into something detrimental. Maria Hussain (2009), a Muslim breastfeeding expert from America, had written in her article titled The Importance of Breastfeeding to the Muslim Child that breastfeeding will produce babies with higher IQ and more stable emotion. This finding is supported by a child specialist in Turkey in his article Breast-feeding in Islam. His 10 years research in child study had proven that breast milk nutrients can increase a baby’s IQ. According to him, breast milk contains a very high taurine. Taurine is one of the amino acid which is extremely crucial for brain development. This fact is more interesting to be studied because taurine content in human’s milk is 30 to 40 times higher than cow’s milk. Therefore, Muslims should be vying to feed their babies with breast milk because it will produce great and brilliant Muslim children. Dogramasi, Ihsan (2013).

Even though there are many studies that stated breast feeding provides extra advantage for baby’s brain development, it must be reminded that in order to get that intelligence, the milk must be obtained from an intelligent woman or mother too. The reason being is a baby who breastfeed will inherit all characters and intelligence of the nursing mother. Therefore, in order to produce a smart baby, breastfeeding must be carried out by a smart mother. Mothers should always increase Qur'an recitations and other ibadah when breastfeeding. This will help the child to absorb all virtues done by the mother during the nursing period. If a mother is incapable of breastfeeding, then she must give the child to a pious, noble and smart woman as a wet nurse. She should never give her child to be breastfed by someone with unknown lineage or religion. It is afraid that the feeding may distort brain development and manners of the baby. This statement is enforced by a mursal hadith:

وعنْ زِيََادِ السَّهْمْيِ قَالَ : نَََى رَسُولُ اللهِ (ص) أَنْ تُستََْضَعَ الحَمْقَى


Verily all diseases and disasters come from Allah SWT to test humans’ faith and to cleanse their sins. Nevertheless, as a servant of Allah SWT with a sound mind, one must make an effort to avoid diseases and find a cure when he falls sick from any diseases. One of the treatments recommended in Islam is by performing injunctions in the Quran and hadith nabawiyyah. This is befitting to Allah SWT decree:

وَنَزَّلَ مِنْ الْقُرْآنِ مَا هَوَىٰ شَفَافُ وَرَحْمَةً لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

That means: And we send down (in stages) of the Qur’an that which is healing and mercy for the believers.

(al-Isra’: 82)
The above verse was supported by Syeikh Muhammad Ahmad ‘Isa in his book ‘Alij Nafsaka bi al-Qur’an wa A’shab which stated that the Qur’an is one of the best cure to all diseases whether physical or internal such as pride and others. All verses in the Qur’an and its teachings are cures to all human diseases. Muhammad Ahmad ‘Isa (2005). One of the methods advocated in Islam to avoid diseases is through the habit of eating for babies - through breastfeeding until the age of two. This ruling is stated in Surah al-Baqarah verse 233. According to Mohamad ‘Abduh, breastfeeding affect all aspects including in terms of diseases prevention. He stated that, breast milk gives an impact towards a child whether in terms of morals or manners. Therefore, mothers should always be careful in the event of milk unavailability; they should never give their babies to be breastfed by women with diseases or ill-mannered women. Rida (2005).

From the statement of Syeikh Muhammad ‘Abduh, it is obvious that a child will be affected by the nursing mother’s health and manner. Thus mothers should always take due care of their health when they breastfeed. If a mother suffers from a chronic and dangerous disease then she must give her child to be breastfed by a healthy wet nurse to ensure the child grows healthily and protected from diseases. Similarly, if a mother disobeys Allah SWT and perform vile acts, then such vile acts will somewhat be inherited to the breastfed child. The lesson here is, Islam advocates breastfeeding not only because it provides an extra advantage for physical health as studied by scientist but also because it contributes towards children’s mental and characters. Even during pregnancy parents are encouraged to increase their ibadah be it obligatory ones or supererogatory ones. This is to ensure that a baby is born in a good environment and with piety. As soon as a baby is born, adzan and iqamah are recited to the ears. Next, parents are advised to give halal and the best food to the child. Amongst them is through breastfeeding as a source of the best food. A child is the most precious gift from Allah SWT to a mother. For every child born, Allah has set his provisions. Allah SWT decreed:

\[
\text{وَلَا تَفْتَرُوا عَلَى أَوَّلَ دُرَّةٍ كَمْ خَسَّسَهُ إِلَيْكُمْ مِن قَرَآنٍ مُّبَارَكَ}
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That means: And do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We provide for them and for you.

(al-Isra’: 31)

Based on the above verse, the National Fatwa Committee of Malaysia in 1987 has decided that contraception to reduce the number of children is haram except for a few allowable reasons and it has to be done not on permanent basis and not spayed or neutered. Some of the reasons which allow the use of contraceptive include weak or sick wife, partner inherited some diseases, wife gets pregnant too often or still breastfeeding a baby and a new pregnancy may disturb the mother mentally. Temporary family planning is also allowed for mothers who suffer from cancer which need treatment, risky pregnancy, marriage at an age too young or too old and having too many children with close age gap. Other than that, family planning is also allowed for health considerations, education and general family happiness. The Conference for the Fatwa Committee National Council (1987). Based on this fatwa, mothers are allowed to make efforts to extend birth gaps for the benefits of both mothers and children. In fact, Allah SWT’s instruction in Surah al-Ba'qarah verse 233 which advocates breastfeeding for two years is a proof that extending birth intervals is allowed in Islam. Nonetheless, the method must be in parallel with Islamic guidelines. One of them is through exclusive breastfeeding.
According to Hamid (1991), medical studies show that a mother who fully breastfeed for the first six months will not have their menstruation for almost 10 months after delivery as compared to three months for a mother who feed their babies with formula milk or who does not fully breastfeed her child. This condition occurs because during the nursing period, the body’s hormone excretion is almost similar as in during pregnancy. This causes eggs unable to be fertilized hence menstruation is delayed and pregnancy does not occur during this period. Other than that, there are a lot of studies carried out by researchers that recognized the effectiveness of breastfeeding as a family planning method. Nevertheless, breastfeeding is just an effort by human, if Allah wills it, pregnancy will still occur. This is befitting to His commandment in surah Yasin:

إِنَّمَا أَمْرِي أَنْ يَقُولَ نَٰٓزلَ كُنْ فِي كُونٍ

That means: Verily when He intends a thing His command is “Be” and it is.

(Yasin: 82)

Al-Qurtubi suggested, when Allah SWT wills for something to happen, it happens without the need for any help or without any difficulties. al-Qurtubi (1988). From the above elaborations, various benefits of breastfeeding from science aspect can be observed. Apparently it provides extensive benefits for a mother’s health. Why Allah SWT commanded mothers to breastfeed their children? There must be hidden wisdoms because there is nothing that Allah SWT has commanded to His slaves that is useless and pointless. This is clearly stated in His commandment:

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا لَعَبْرَةٌ

That means: We did not idly create the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them.

(al-Dukhan: 38)

Al-Zuhayli in Tafseer al-Munir, translated this verse as everything the Allah created has its own wisdom and purpose. There is not a creation by Allah which is useless. What is more important is a decree or creation serves as an evidence of Allah SWT’s mightiness and oneness. al-Zuhayli (1991). Therefore one of the creation and instruction of Allah SWT is the instruction to breastfeed. Among the biggest wisdom is it contributes to the mother’s health. However, when mothers avoided breastfeeding their children, numerous harms will inflict on mothers themselves. Numerous diseases due to failure in breastfeeding may inflict upon the mothers whereas Islam forbids its people from getting involved in things that may inflict harm upon themselves. Islam truly forbids such act as stated in fiqh method previously. Breast milk is the best food; it is clean, halal, nutritious and costless. Nevertheless, those are not the only things desired by breastfeeding mothers. What is more important is breastfeeding is an instruction by Allah SWT which is clearly written in the Qur’an. Therefore, surely mothers who breastfeed their children are not only providing the best food the children but also getting multiple rewards from Allah SWT.
Conclusions

From the above discussions, it is prevalent that breastfeeding truly gives a huge impact towards the health of a mother and and child. Breast milk contains nutrients which are highly beneficial for an infant’s health and growth. Among other benefits for a baby is it helps to develop the baby’s intelligence, it is very clean and it can save a baby from various diseases such as diarrhea, allergies, otitis media, obesity and others. Concurrently, Islam advocates breastfeeding because not only it gives an added advantage towards the children and the mothers’ physical health as studied by scientists; it also contributes to children’s mental health characters. The opinions suggested by early scholars and hadiths stated the importance of good manners and righteous aqidah among nursing mothers or wet nurse. The reason is, this aspect will more or less influence the appearance and personality of the nursling.

Looking at the aspect of the importance of breast milk for a baby’s health, apparently the opinions of scientists are in parallel with the opinions of fuqaha. In fact, fuqaha from Shafi’i and Hambali sects obliged the feeding of al laba’ which is colostrum to newborn babies. This is owing to the importance of colostrum for a baby’s growth and development. This superiority has been greatly emphasized by scientists today that most hospitals even ban the use of milk bottles and formula milk early after birth. The same thing is practiced in almost all government hospital in Malaysia. Other than that, Allah’s commandment in surah al-Baqarah verse 322 that instructed mothers to breastfeed their children until the age of two is the perfect solution. It is befitting to many science researches which show the longer a baby is fed with breast milk, the better the physical and mental growth as compared a baby who is not breastfed. Similarly, in terms of disease prevention, children who are breastfed for two years are more resistant towards diseases.

Conclusively, as Muslims, we must believe that breast milk is just an effort to prevent a child and a mother from being inflicted with any diseases. This is because breast milk is an Allah’s creation which is amazing and perfect. On the other hand, if a child caught a disease even when breastfed, then it is a fate from Him. Mothers should not trust one hundred percent on the effectiveness of breast milk as stated by scientist. This may lead to an astray in aqidah for a Muslim. We must not believe that with breast milk, a child will not get sick, a mother will not get sick, a child will be smart and so on. In the end, breast milk will be blamed when calamity falls on the mother or the child. When indeed, if Allah wills for something to happen, then it will happen regardless of what kind of milk is consumed.

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