
SUPPLEMENTARY FILE 1

Semi-Structured In-Depth Interview Guide

*Mothers' Perspectives on Exclusive Breastfeeding During the First Six Months of Life:
A Qualitative Study from Urban and Rural South Andaman, India*

Note on Instrument Development

This semi-structured interview guide was developed de novo for the purposes of this study. It has not been previously published elsewhere. The guide was developed through iterative review of the published qualitative literature on exclusive breastfeeding, consultation with the research team, and alignment with the study objectives. It was pilot-tested with four mothers (two per site — UHTC Haddo and CHC Bambooflat) prior to the commencement of data collection, and minor refinements were made to improve clarity, cultural suitability, and sequencing. Interviews were conducted in the participant's preferred language (Tamil, Hindi, Bengali, or English) by trained female interviewers.

Section A: Interviewer Briefing and Introduction Script

The following introduction should be read verbatim to the participant prior to commencing the interview:

"Good [morning/afternoon]. My name is _____, and I am a researcher from the Department of Community Medicine, Andaman & Nicobar Islands Institute of Medical Sciences (ANIIMS). We are conducting a research study on mothers' experiences and views regarding exclusive breastfeeding. Your child falls within the age group we are studying, and we would very much appreciate your participation. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without any consequence to yourself or the care you receive. Everything you share with us will be kept strictly confidential and will be used only for research purposes. With your permission, I would like to audio-record this interview so that I do not miss anything you say. Do you consent to the recording? [Wait for response.] Thank you. We will now begin. Please feel free to speak openly — there are no right or wrong answers."

Section B: Socio-demographic and Obstetric Profile

Complete the following before or after the interview through brief structured inquiry. Do not interrupt the narrative flow of the interview to collect this information.

Variable	Response / Record
Participant code (anonymised)	
Age of mother (years)	
Age of index infant (months)	

Parity (primiparous / multiparous)	
Mode of delivery (NVD / CS)	
Educational attainment	
Maternal occupation	
Family type (nuclear / joint / extended)	
Primary support person	
Socioeconomic status (BPL / APL / other)	
Site (urban – UHTC Haddo / rural – CHC Bambooflat)	
Interview language	
Interview duration (minutes)	
Date of interview	

Section C: Personal Background and Motherhood Experience

Q1. To begin, could you tell me a little about yourself and your family?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- *Who lives with you at home?*
- *How old is your baby now?*
- *Is this your first child, or do you have other children?*

Q2. How has your journey of becoming a mother been so far? Would you describe it as mostly joyful, mostly challenging, or a mix of both?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- *What has been the most joyful part for you?*
- *What has been the most challenging part?*
- *How is this experience different from any previous pregnancies or deliveries, if applicable?*

Section D: Knowledge and Awareness of Exclusive Breastfeeding

Q3. In your own words, what do you understand by the term 'exclusive breastfeeding'?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- *For how many months do you think a baby should receive only breast milk?*

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- ▶ *Is it acceptable to give the baby water, formula, or other liquids during this period? Why or why not?*
 - ▶ *What about honey or sugar water — have you heard about giving these to newborns?*

Q4. What do you believe are the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding — for the baby, and for yourself as the mother?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- ▶ *How does breast milk help protect the baby from illness?*
- ▶ *Did anyone tell you about the benefits of colostrum — the first yellow milk? What did you do with it?*
- ▶ *Are you aware of any benefits of breastfeeding for the mother's own health?*

Q5. Where did you first learn about breastfeeding and how to feed a newborn? Who was your main source of information?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- ▶ *Did you receive any information during your antenatal check-ups?*
- ▶ *Did any health worker — ANM, ASHA, doctor, or nurse — give you guidance?*
- ▶ *Did you receive advice from family members, neighbours, or friends? What did they tell you?*
- ▶ *Did you use the internet, social media, or television as a source of information?*

Section E: Personal Breastfeeding Experiences

Q6. Can you tell me about your breastfeeding journey from the time your baby was born until now?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- ▶ *How long after birth did you first put the baby to the breast?*
- ▶ *Were you able to give colostrum to your baby? If not, what happened?*
- ▶ *Did anyone at the facility help you with the first feed? Was the support adequate?*
- ▶ *If you had a caesarean delivery — how did that affect your ability to feed?*

Q7. How has your experience of exclusive breastfeeding been over these past weeks or months? What has helped you the most?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- ▶ *Have you been able to give only breast milk since birth?*
- ▶ *Have there been moments when you felt confident about breastfeeding? What contributed to that confidence?*
- ▶ *Has anyone in particular made breastfeeding easier for you — how?*

Q8. What have been the biggest difficulties or challenges you have faced during breastfeeding?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- ▶ *Did you experience nipple pain, cracks, or soreness? How did you manage it?*
- ▶ *Did the baby have difficulty latching on? How was that resolved?*
- ▶ *Did you ever feel that your milk was not enough? What made you feel that way?*
- ▶ *How did fatigue or lack of sleep affect your ability to breastfeed?*

Q9. Are you aware of the option of expressing and storing breast milk? Have you ever used a breast pump?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- ▶ *If yes — how did you find the experience? Was it practical for you?*
- ▶ *If no — have you ever needed to be away from your baby? How did you manage feeding?*

Q10. As a breastfeeding mother, how have you taken care of your own health and nutrition?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- ▶ *Have you made any changes to your diet since delivery?*
- ▶ *Has anyone advised you to avoid certain foods while breastfeeding? What foods, and why?*
- ▶ *Have you been able to get adequate rest? If not, what has prevented this?*

Section F: Family, Social, and Cultural Influences

Q11. How have the people around you — your husband, mother, mother-in-law, or other family members — influenced your feeding decisions?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- ▶ *Have they been supportive of exclusive breastfeeding, or have they suggested giving the baby other feeds?*
- ▶ *Has anyone pressured you to give formula, water, or other liquids? How did you respond?*
- ▶ *Who has the most influence on feeding decisions in your household?*

Q12. Are there any family traditions or cultural practices regarding what should or should not be given to a newborn?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- ▶ *Is there any practice of giving honey, sugar water, or other substances at birth in your community?*
- ▶ *Are there any beliefs about colostrum in your family or community — was it considered safe or harmful?*
- ▶ *Are there dietary restrictions placed on you as a breastfeeding mother? What are they, and who enforces them?*

Q13. How common is exclusive breastfeeding among mothers in your neighbourhood or community? What do people around you generally do?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- ▶ *Do most mothers you know give only breast milk, or do they combine it with formula or other foods?*
- ▶ *Is there any stigma or pressure around breastfeeding in public in your community?*
- ▶ *Have the experiences of other mothers influenced your own feeding decisions?*

Section G: Health-System Interactions

Q14. How did the health-care system support your breastfeeding journey — during your antenatal visits, at the time of delivery, and after you returned home?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- ▶ *Did the health staff at the facility help you initiate breastfeeding soon after birth?*
- ▶ *Was skin-to-skin contact facilitated immediately after delivery?*
- ▶ *Did you receive counselling on breastfeeding technique, positioning, or latch?*
- ▶ *Were the messages from different health workers consistent, or did you receive conflicting advice?*
- ▶ *After discharge, did any health worker visit you at home to follow up on breastfeeding?*

Q15. Was there anything the health system could have done better to support you with breastfeeding?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- ▶ *Was there a dedicated lactation counsellor or nurse available when you needed help?*
- ▶ *What gaps in support did you experience during the first two weeks after delivery?*
- ▶ *What support would have made the biggest difference for you?*

Section H: Structural Factors and Future Plans

Q16. If you are employed or plan to return to work, how do you plan to continue breastfeeding?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- ▶ *When do you plan to return to work or resume regular activities?*
- ▶ *Does your workplace have facilities or policies that support breastfeeding mothers — such as private spaces or lactation breaks?*
- ▶ *Have you thought about expressing and storing milk for when you are away from the baby?*

Q17. What are your plans regarding breastfeeding going forward — when do you plan to introduce complementary foods, and when do you plan to stop breastfeeding altogether?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- ▶ *At what age do you plan to introduce water, soft foods, or other feeds?*
- ▶ *Until what age do you plan to continue breastfeeding?*
- ▶ *Has your experience with a previous child influenced these plans?*

Q18. Have you noticed any changes in your menstrual cycle since you started breastfeeding? Are you aware of lactational amenorrhoea?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- ▶ *Has your period returned since delivery? When?*
- ▶ *Have you been advised about natural family planning during breastfeeding?*

Section I: Reflections, Advice, and Closing

Q19. Looking back at your breastfeeding experience — whether this is your first child or a subsequent one — what similarities or differences have you noticed compared to any previous experience?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- ▶ *Was the second experience easier or harder? Why?*
- ▶ *Did you feel more confident the second time? What contributed to that?*

Q20. If you were to give one piece of advice to a new mother who is about to begin her breastfeeding journey, what would it be?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- ▶ *What do you wish someone had told you before you started?*
- ▶ *What would you tell her about managing pain or difficulties in the early days?*

Q21. What support — from family, the community, or the health system — do you think would make exclusive breastfeeding easier for mothers in your area?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- ▶ *What role should husbands and family members play?*
- ▶ *What more could health workers, ASHAs, or ANMs do?*
- ▶ *Are there any government schemes or workplace policies that would help?*

Q22. Is there anything else you would like to share about your breastfeeding experience that we have not covered today?

Probes / Follow-up prompts:

- ▶ *Is there a question you feel we should have asked but did not?*
- ▶ *Is there anything you experienced that you feel other mothers or health workers should know?*

Interviewer Closing Script

"Thank you very much for your time and for sharing your experiences with us so openly. Your insights are extremely valuable and will help us better understand how to support mothers in our community. All information you have shared will remain strictly confidential. If you have any further questions about the study, you may contact Dr. Aanchal Anand at the Department of Community Medicine, ANIIMS. Thank you once again."

Interviewer Field Notes Template

To be completed by the interviewer immediately following each interview:

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- Date, time, and location of interview:
 - Duration of interview (minutes):
 - Language of interview:
 - Overall quality of the interview (rapport, depth of responses, interruptions):
 - Key non-verbal cues or emotional responses observed:
 - Topics that generated particularly rich responses:
 - Topics where the participant appeared reluctant or uncomfortable:
 - Any deviations from the interview guide and reasons:
 - Preliminary impressions / emerging analytic notes:
 - Any issues requiring follow-up or clarification: