



REVIEW OF DIPLOMA THESIS

Review type: Opponent's Review

Author of the diploma thesis: Laura Tofotsi

Title: The Impact of Maternity Protection on Exclusive Breastfeeding: A Case Study of Ghana

Author of the review: Mirna Jusić, M.A., Ph.D.

Evaluate the diploma thesis based on the following considerations (not necessarily in this order):

1) *Factual benefits of work and its added value;*

This thesis examines the impact of maternity protection on exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) among mothers who work in Greater Accra, Ghana. Its author has aimed to 1) identify the prevailing rate of EBF among working mothers; 2) assess the impact of the availability of breastfeeding facilities in the workplace on EBF; and 3) assess how the practice of working from home has impacted mothers' decision to practice EBF for six months.

The thesis has found that the rate of exclusive breastfeeding among employed mothers in Ghana is not high when compared to the WHO / UNICEF recommendations. The availability of breastfeeding facilities at the workplace has been shown to have a positive impact on mothers' decision to practice EBF for six months. Moreover, work from home has positively influenced mothers' decision to practice EBF for six months.

The benefit of the study is not only its policy relevance, given the health and other benefits of exclusive breastfeeding for the mother and the child, but also the fact that the author has explored this issue in a context (Ghana) where research on the subject is scarce, yet available data point to the fact that breastfeeding practices do not conform with the recommendations of international organizations such as the WHO or UNICEF. To that end, the thesis makes a contribution to the literature on EBF in the context of Ghana and Sub-Saharan Africa in pointing to the extent of EBF among working mothers, breastfeeding supports that employed mothers have in the workplace, as well as the challenges that they face. Additional added value of the thesis also lies in its focus on the impact of working from home on breastfeeding in the Ghanaian context, as well as the very concrete recommendations on interventions to promote EBF for the Ghanaian government, based on the research findings.

2) *Setting and answering research questions;*

The specific objectives of the thesis include identifying the prevailing rate of EBF among working mothers; assessing the impact of the availability of breastfeeding facilities at their



workplace on their decision to exclusively breastfeed for six months; as well as assessing the impact of working from home on working mothers' decision to breastfeed. Research questions relate directly to these objectives (“What is the prevailing rate of exclusive breast feeding among corporate mothers?” ; “What is the impact of the availability of breastfeeding facilities at their workplaces (which has been proposed as a solution) on the decision of working mothers to practice six months exclusive breastfeeding?” and “What is the impact of the work from home practice on mothers' choice of breastfeeding practice?”)

Moreover, the author has also included and tested hypotheses in her thesis (“Mothers who have longer maternity leave (at least 6 months) are more likely to engage in the six months exclusive breastfeeding as recommended by WHO”; “Organizations that provide infrastructure to facilitate breastfeeding have more mothers who engage in the recommended 6 months exclusive breastfeeding.”; “Mothers who worked from home due to the covid-19 pandemic practiced longer exclusive breastfeeding.”) All three null hypotheses are accepted based on findings of statistically significant relationships.

The research questions have been answered in a satisfactory manner; the hypotheses have also been tested in a systematic way. The author has concluded that the prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding among employed mothers in Ghana is below the internationally-recommended standards. Moreover, working mothers had insufficient support for exclusive breastfeeding in their workplace. At the same time, the Covid-19 lockdown was an opportunity for mothers to work from home, which had a favorable effect on breastfeeding. The author has also included recommendations for the Ghanaian government on the basis of her research findings.

3) *Structure of work;*

The work is structured in a systematic manner. Chapter 1 (Introduction) includes a background, a problem statement, purpose of study, objective of study, research questions, research hypotheses, study significance, scope of study and its organization. Chapter 2 includes a literature review, which gives an overview of maternity protection, of exclusive breastfeeding, the theoretical framework, the empirical review, gaps in literature and the conceptual framework. Chapter 3 includes the methodology, Chapter 4 the results and discussion, while Chapter 5 provides a summary, a conclusion and recommendations.

The theoretical and conceptual chapters could eventually have been a separate chapter, but the thesis also reads well as structured. In Chapter 4, which includes research results, the challenges to exclusive breastfeeding and suggestions for overcoming these challenges (both open-ended responses) may have been structured by discussing and analyzing the open-ended responses together with the thematically related closed responses.

4) *The factual accuracy and convincing of the argumentation;*

Overall, the argumentation in the author's thesis flows well and claims are supported by evidence. A comprehensive overview of the existing research on the subject of exclusive breastfeeding is provided. The questionnaire that has been developed and applied by the author is in line with the author's research aims and conceptual framework, and the results are presented in a very systematic and convincing manner. Moreover, the results are insightful and clearly contribute to the research to date.



A few smaller issues can be pointed out.

While this is provided to an extent, the literature review could have included some further insights into research on the impact of specific maternity protection mechanisms (e.g. maternity / parental leaves; breastfeeding support at the workplace; or flexible working hours). Empirical literature that relates to these mechanisms is referred to in the concluding chapter when discussing the findings in relation to the research aims, but could also have been presented earlier.

The background section mentions a study by Abekah-Nkrumah et al. (2020) on exclusive breastfeeding among working mothers in Ghana. It would have been interesting to know how this study builds upon or uses insights from this previous research.

The conceptual framework, included in Chapter 2, could have elaborated a bit more on the specific segments on maternity protection mentioned.

Moreover, the part on maternity leave in Chapter 4 (pp. 46-47) was somewhat unclear, as respondents are asked whether their companies have provided them with maternity leave and in what duration. However, isn't maternity leave guaranteed by the Labor law, as mentioned in the introduction, and not up to the discretion of the companies? Or were some of the respondents working in the informal sector? Do some companies offer longer leaves than what is prescribed by law? It would be good to clarify this during the defense.

Section 4.5.1. on how working from home during COVID-19 lockdown impacted mothers' breastfeeding practice doesn't offer insight into how many of the respondents actually had infants that were of breastfeeding age during the lockdown (as the respondents had children of different ages). This should have been clarified, as it may influence the author's conclusion relating to how much working from home had impacted mothers' decision to breastfeed.

5) *Sophistication and application of theoretical approaches;*

The author refers to and presents the Gendered Organizational Theory (GOT) by Acker (1990) in her theoretical framework, which argues that gendered norms at the workplace favor males and disempower women, and furthermore argues for the inclusion of gender in analyses to understand workplace culture and operations.

The theoretical framework is appropriate for this study as the author seeks to analyze organizational practices and procedures in relation to opportunities for exclusive breastfeeding, and thus can point to gendered norms that could disadvantage the working mother. However, while GOT was presented in the theoretical framework, it was not explicitly referred to in the results section or conclusion. The manner or extent of its application in the study is thus unclear. It would be good if the author could clarify during the defense why GOT was not explicitly included in the later sections.

6) *Methodological approach and application of particular methods and approaches;*

The author has used both secondary and primary data in her analysis. She has administered a



survey questionnaire with closed- and open-ended questions on a sample of 53 working mothers. The data was subsequently analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics and thematic analysis, looking for relationships between variables. Secondary data was obtained from articles, journals, and policy documents.

Overall, the methodological section is quite detailed, including a part on validity and reliability, data collection and sampling, data analysis and ethical considerations. The reasons for the sampling method (convenience sampling and snowball sampling) are explained in a systematic way. The data collection method is also explained well, as well as the reliability of the data collected. The author has also pointed out the limitations of the methodological approach taken in the conclusion of the thesis. In the results section, the presentation of data is done in a systematic way, as is the testing of hypotheses, using logistic regression models.

7) *Use of literature and data;*

The author has used appropriate and extensive empirical sources and secondary data. She has made use of both international literature and literature pertaining to Ghana. She has generated own primary data through a questionnaire. In a few instances, it is unclear which sources are used to support some of the arguments made: for instance, in the literature review, paragraphs on pp.13-14 relating to maternity protection policies; or statistical and other information on the Greater Accra Region (p. 33). However, these are only minor instances.

Turnitin's overall similarity score is 29%. There are a few minor instances of some sentence fragments where text from the original source seems not to have been adequately paraphrased (e.g. p. 7) or where the same/similar formulations are used as in other works (e.g. 62). Turnitin suggests that the author's Questionnaire in the Annex (pp. 74-78) has, in many of the closed-ended questions, relied on formulations of questions that appear to be from two other sources, yet these sources are not cited in the Annex. It is important to explicitly refer to other authors' research instruments if they have been used as a basis for the questionnaire applied in this research. This could also have been mentioned in the Methodological section.

8) *Stylistic and text editing (quote, text layout, etc.).*

This is a well-written academic work, and the style and layout are appropriate. The author has included, in addition to a table of contents, a list of figures and a list of tables. The questionnaire that has been administered is included in the Appendix. There are a few minor issues in terms of text editing, such as a few sentence fragments, or a couple of paragraphs that are somewhat repetitive (e.g. when referring to Quesada et al study, pp. 2-3, or when discussing factors that affect the adoption of exclusive breastfeeding, p. 23).

9) *Question for defense (not obligatory)*

I have raised a couple of points/questions above which the author may respond to.

For the above reasons, I recommend the diploma thesis for the defense.



Given the comprehensive and systematic nature of the thesis and the quality of analysis, my grading is "A" – if the comments / questions above are addressed in a satisfactory manner during the defense. If they are not, I would suggest a "B".

Date: 6/6/2023

Signature: