

# The Experience of Donor and Recipient Mothers in Milk Sharing via Local Breastfeeding and Breastmilk Donation Communities on Facebook

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## ABSTRACT

Breastmilk provides optimal nutrition for infant growth and development. However, not all mothers are able to successfully breastfeed their infants due to various factors. Thus, use of non-biological mother's milk would be another option for mothers to sustain breastfeeding practice. Due to technology advancement and internet access, the use of non-biological mother's milk has evolved from wet nursing, to breastmilk donation and milk sharing. In this study, milk sharing refers to obtaining and donating expressed breastmilk as well as finding wet nurses and nurslings via local breastfeeding and breastmilk donation community on Facebook. Milk sharing started in 2010 due to high internet access and the growing number of social networks users. However, research on milk sharing was mainly conducted in the Western countries and additionally limited information was available on individual's experience as the entire process occurred in private. This study aims at understanding donor and recipient mother's experience in milk sharing via local breastfeeding and breastmilk donation communities on Facebook. Methodology. This is a qualitative case study on the internet-based phenomenon guided by Robert Stake's view on case study. Mothers were recruited using purposive sampling through; 1) public and closed breastmilk donation communities, and 2) public and closed breastfeeding communities based in Malaysia on Facebook. The recruitment link was also reshared on the lactation consultants' personal Facebook pages. The following selection criteria was adhered to: Malaysian citizens, age of more than 18 years old, have had experience in milk sharing and the breastmilk was given for feeding purposes only. Mothers who were not able to speak Malay or English, and those who had existing relationship before milk sharing took place and were unable to be interviewed via online were excluded. A semi-structured interview guide was used to facilitate the interview process. The interviews were conducted via various online platforms and video calling apps. User-generated contents on breastfeeding and breastmilk donation community Facebook Pages, field notes and reflective journals were used to increase the trustworthiness of study findings. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data. The findings reported in this study are restricted to the Malay participants in Malaysia, thus wider societal perspectives in Malaysia could not be provided. Mothers were categorized into three groups according to their milk sharing experience. Fifteen (15) had experience of donating only, six (6) receiving only, while nine (9) mothers fell into both categories. Mothers involved in milk sharing demonstrated altruistic spirits and passion about breastfeeding. The five themes developed from the data are; (1) the influencing factors involved in milk sharing (2) internal and external challenges (3) scientific and religious methods used in problem-solving (4) psychological espouse and (5) social support. The complete analysis of the themes developed from this study is yet to be detailed. In conclusion, this study provides information for the health care providers with the contemporary issues on infant and child feeding in the local context. Milk sharing is a personal and sociocultural-bounded practice where mothers negotiate their understanding on the implications of milk sharing by adopting strategies to mitigate the risks. From this study, insights can be obtained on formulating an effective action plan for breastfeeding promotion and educational programmes by acknowledging individual experiences and promoting breastmilk donation initiatives to specific target groups.

**Keywords:** breastfeeding, milk sharing, social network

