

Breast milk donation after perinatal loss: a qualitative exploration of maternal griefand healing among Israeli Arab women and the Islamic legal-ethical perspectives. A qualitative research study

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1. Background & Objective

Perinatal loss, including stillbirth and neonatal death, is associated with profound psychological distress, grief, and social isolation. In many cases, bereaved mothers continue to produce breast milk after the loss and face the difficult decision of whether to suppress lactation or donate their milk. Despite growing international recognition of the emotional and medical benefits of milk donation, limited research has explored this phenomenon within Muslim minority populations and its implications for culturally sensitive healthcare policy in Israel.

2. Aim

This study aimed to explore the experiences of Israeli Arab Muslim women who donated breast milk following perinatal loss and to examine Islamic legal-ethical perspectives regarding milk donation and human milk banking.

3. Methods

A qualitative study using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was conducted. In-depth interviews were carried out with nine bereaved Muslim mothers who donated breast milk after perinatal loss and three Islamic religious scholars, including an Imam, a Mufti, and a Muslim jurist. Thematic analysis was performed to identify recurrent emotional, social, religious, and healthcare-related themes.

4. Results

Participants described breast milk donation as a meaningful coping mechanism that helped maintain a symbolic bond with their deceased infant while transforming grief into an act of giving and healing. Mothers reported emotional relief, spiritual fulfillment, and a renewed sense of maternal identity through donation. Religious scholars generally supported milk donation within Islamic law, provided that rida’a (milk kinship) regulations and accurate donor-recipient documentation were maintained. Participants emphasized the need for culturally and religiously sensitive bereavement support, structured counseling, and compassionate healthcare environments.

4. Recommendations and Conclusion

The findings highlight the importance of integrating culturally adapted bereavement care and religious sensitivity into Israeli public health policy. The Ministry of Health should strengthen milk bank regulations, improve documentation systems, provide structured counseling for bereaved mothers, and encourage collaboration between healthcare professionals and religious leaders. Such policies may improve emotional support, healthcare accessibility, and trust among minority populations in Israel while promoting equitable and compassionate maternal healthcare services.