

## **BREAST MILK SHARING THROUGH THE MALAYSIANS LENS: HOW MUCH IS KNOWN AND WHAT ARE THE PEOPLE'S REACTION?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*INTRODUCTION: Breast milk sharing (BMS) is becoming a common alternative in the absence of a mother's milk in infant feeding. Nevertheless, informal milk sharing is not risk-free. Before advocating safe BMS and establishing a human milk bank (HMB), it's vital to explore the public's understanding of BMS as well as the motivators and barriers towards its acceptance among Malaysians. OBJECTIVE: To explore the public's understanding of BMS as well as the motivators and barriers towards its acceptance among Malaysians. METHODOLOGY: This study employed qualitative in-depth-interview based on a topic guide with eleven relevant stakeholders enrolled via purposive sampling from December 2021 till May 2022 to identify the motivators and explore the perceived barrier to the acceptability of BMS. The interview results were analyzed and categorized into themes. RESULTS: A total of fifteen subthemes and four main themes emerged from the analysis. Majority of the participants have adequate knowledge on BMS and HMB. They strongly believe that awareness and altruistic motivation were a major influencing factor but support from the husbands was deemed important. A novel finding was the need for a proper donor-recipient monitoring system to address the religious reservation specially to protect the lineage with the approval from the local religious leaders can improve the community's acceptance to BMS. Lack of healthcare workers (HCW) involvement combined with absence of political will and fear of disease transmission may lead to hesitancy among the mothers and were the few concerns voiced out by the participants. Surprisingly, most of the participants were positive with the establishment of HMB and strongly believe that it can be lifesaving. CONCLUSION: Fundamentally, the motivators and perceived barriers to the acceptability of BMS are multifactorial. Individual factors such as knowledge, awareness, motivation of BMS, religious reservation and safety concerns were strongly associated with their acceptance. Additionally, social factors that guided stakeholders' responses included family consent while systemic factors namely leadership, HCW involvement and collaboration efforts contributed to their decision regarding BMS practices in Malaysia.*

Keywords: Breast Milk Sharing, Human Milk Bank, Knowledge, Barriers, Acceptance

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