

Milk Donation Following A Perinatal Loss: A Phenomenological Study

- Fernández-Medina I.M.^a
- Jiménez-Lasserrotte M.D.M.^a,
- Ruíz-Fernández M.D.^a,
- Granero-Molina J.^{a, b},
- Fernández-Sola C.^{a, b},
- Hernández-Padilla J.M.^{a, c}

Abstract

Introduction: Perinatal loss is a traumatic event for women with negative consequences for their well-being and mental health. After perinatal loss, some women choose to not suppress lactation and to donate their breast milk. Donating milk can be a grief ritual to cope with the loss. The aim of this study was to explore women's experiences of donating their breast milk following a perinatal loss. **Methods:** A hermeneutic phenomenology was carried out. Thirteen semistructured interviews were conducted. Data was recorded, transcribed, and categorized into themes and subthemes. **Results:** Two main themes emerged from the data: (1) lactation after loss: a forgotten aspect of the care, with the subthemes “the silence surrounding grieving lactation” and “experiencing lactation amidst a sea of tears”; and (2) milk donation: a resource to alleviate pain and offer hope, with the subthemes “expressing and donating breast milk: a healing ritual” and “breaking the taboo of the grieving lactation.”. **Discussion:** Information about lactation options is not typically included in participants’ care plan. Women's experiences highlight the need for the support of health care professionals. Donating milk helps some women to cope with the loss and accept and integrate it into their daily lives. Milk donation is also an opportunity to educate society about options following a perinatal loss. © 2022 by the American College of Nurse-Midwives.

Author keywords

grief; milk donation; perinatal loss; phenomenology; qualitative research