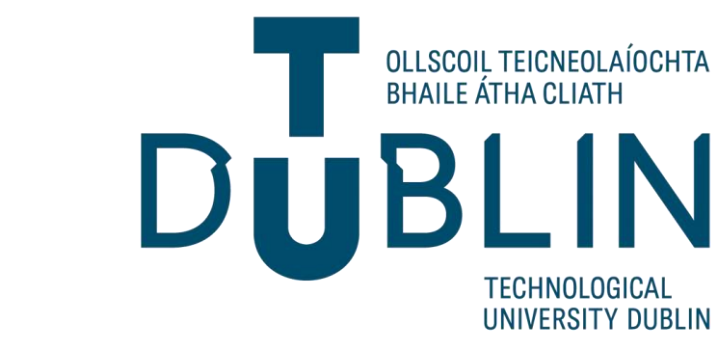


A Qualitative Analysis of Experiences of Healthcare Professionals and Breastfeeding Group Volunteers of Milk Banking on the Island of Ireland



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Introduction

- If mother's own milk is unavailable, pasteurized donor human milk (DHM) is recommended as the next best alternative for infant nutrition.¹
- Human milk banks (HMBs) play a pivotal role in safeguarding DHM supply, prioritized for extremely premature or very low birth weight infants, due to the limited supply.²
- Located in county Fermanagh, the Milk Bank (MB) remains to be the only HMB on the island, providing DHM across 27 neonatal units in Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (ROI).
- In addition to sufficient guidance and support, the awareness and promotion of the Milk Bank from Healthcare professionals (HCPs) and Breastfeeding Group Volunteers (BGVs) to lactating mothers is essential in the successful functioning of the milk donation service.³

Aim

To explore the experiences of milk banking amongst HCPs and BGVs on the island of Ireland and to analyse the capacity of the Milk Bank (MB) to support infant feeding in normal times and in an emergency.

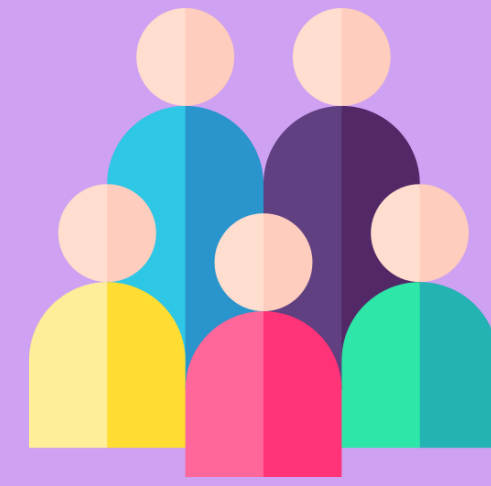
Methods

Study Design



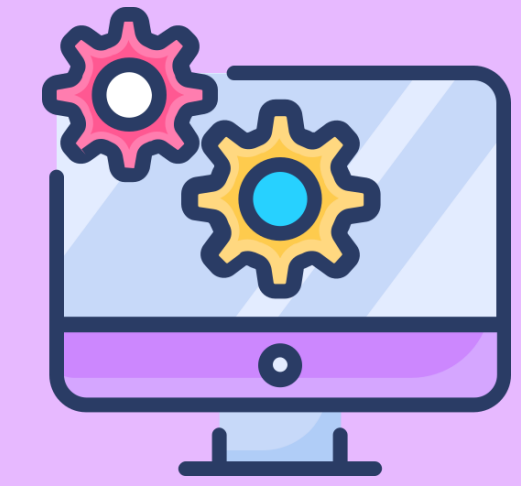
- A qualitative analysis
- Total of 44 semi-structured interviews, open-ended questions
- Questions based on milk banking, milk donation and milk sharing

Study Population



- HCPs involved in infant feeding including midwives and paediatric dietitians
- Breastfeeding Group Volunteers
- Participants across NI and the ROI

Data Analysis



- Performed using Braun and Clarke's 'six step Thematic Analysis'
- Themes and subthemes developed using Nvivo (version 14)
- Irish female student dietitian

Results

'And even recently, we've ordered donor milk... and there **hasn't been enough** so we've had to make decisions...' - Neonatologist & Lactation Consultant (ROI)

'As it stands just now you know we are in a nice position where we can **meet the demand.**' - Milk Bank Representative (NI)

'At the minute, it's my understanding that we have **sufficient donation** and **sufficient supply** from the milk bank in Fermanagh to meet the requirement for preterm babies...' - Paediatrician (NI)

'In terms of emergency preparedness...a central aspect is to ensure that the milk bank is **functioning at its full potential.** And you know it serves the island of Ireland'. - BGV (NI)

'In an emergency, all sorts of women who didn't donate before would probably **jump on the bandwagon.**' - Speech and Language Therapist & BGV (NI)

'We have here, just the one base in Fermanagh, which means that if something happens as it did...about four years ago, I think it was where they did have to get the milk from the UK, you know that **there isn't a backup.**' - BGV (NI)

Theme 1: How supply-demand dynamics shape donor human milk accessibility

- 1.1: Perception of supply meeting demand disparities
- 1.2: Strategies for expanding DHM supply

'We continuously hear moms saying, "No, I've never even heard of the milk bank", you know so it's just about that, I do think that **continuous conversation..**' - Milk Bank Representative (NI)

'Anybody that comes in contact with anybody breastfeeding, I would want them equipped with the **knowledge of the milk bank** so that they could mention it.' - Milk Bank Representative (NI)

'I would love to see **more human milk banks** setup...mothers who have been separated from their babies or babies who simply cannot latch for one reason or another.' - Lactation Consultant Private & BGV (ROI)

'No, we no probably **don't have it [a backup plan].** It's probably something that we need to consider. Well, it's not something that I know we have.' - MBR (NI)

'I think when we're talking about infant feeding informal milk, sharing it... what you want is a **screening process** that facilitate infant milk sharing on a safe level.' - Social Worker & BGV (ROI)

'If we have the information and the relevant training or even just resources to refer to, I think **we will be able to support it [milk sharing]** if it was needed.' - MBR (NI)

Theme 2: The role of human milk in supporting infant feeding in emergencies

- 2.1: Modifying MB's service in emergencies
- 2.2: Advising safe human milk sharing (HMS) in a crisis

Discussion & Conclusion

- Our findings highlighted the importance of increasing and safeguarding **DHM supply** within the MB, in normal times and in an emergency.
- The central role that HCPs and BGVs play in **promoting breastfeeding and DHM**, in the interest of increasing milk donations was apparent.
- Furthermore, where the idea of an additional MB on the island was presented, the need to **strengthen** and **support** the current MB and incorporate the DHM service into **national infant care policies** was emphasised as a priority.⁴
- Further research is needed on how we can increase the supply of DHM across the island, to safeguard the provision of human milk for all infants in need.

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