



The place of breastfeeding in food ethics

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I am a registered hospital nurse, master in moral sciences and preparing a Phd on Breastfeeding and ethics in a global world. I work as a part-time teacher of ethics at a secondary school and for the other part-time as assistant at Ghent University.

Abstract

The study of human milk belongs to several disciplines, such as biology, politics, natural sciences, social sciences and ethics. In my opinion human milk should be regarded as a valuable resource in our global world, because of its nutritional, contraceptive and economic value. Human milk is a very special kind of food; a living fluid produced by one body to serve another human being, and that almost without supplementary cost. There were centuries of casuistry and dietetics before the introduction of 'food ethics' as a branch of applied ethics in 1996 with the work of Ben Mepham. He developed a framework for the ethical analysis of novel foods (like genetic modified food): the ethical matrix. He adapted the principles described by Beauchamp and Childress. His ethical framework permits us to make an analysis of the ethical impacts of any production system. The three principles may be considered to correspond to three major theories of ethics: utilitarianism (wellbeing), Kantianism (autonomy) and Rawlsian theory (Justice). Breastmilk perfectly fits in this analytical tool. In food ethics and according to Dawson, we can detect three focuses: removing or reducing harm, positively promoting health and wider environmental, social and economic issues. Breastmilk helps to reduce the risk of infections, positively promotes health and plays an important role in environmental, social and economic issues. If we make an analysis according to the theories and tools of food ethics, we can conclude breastfeeding is a positive choice.