

TRADITIONAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES IN NEWBORN CARE AMONG MOTHERS: INSIGHTS FROM A TERTIARY HEALTH CARE SETTING IN KADAPA

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Abstract

Background: The arrival of a newborn is a significant event celebrated across cultures with a diverse array of traditional beliefs and practices. These customs often passed down through generations, are deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual fabric of communities worldwide. This study is conducted primarily to understand community practices before planning behavioral changes. **Objectives:** To identify the nature and explore the prevalence of traditional beliefs and practices surrounding newborn care among mothers. **Materials and Methods:** This is a cross-sectional study conducted among postnatal mothers delivered at Government General Hospital, Kadapa using a pre-designed questionnaire through an interview technique. **Results:** Around 77.1% of the mothers initiated breastfeeding within 6 hours and 89.3% of mothers fed colostrum to their babies. Among traditional beliefs, 74.1% of the mothers applied kajal to the eye/face/behind ears, 70.5% used home remedies for digestion, 58% applied oil immediately after birth, 52.6% applied sambrani smoke after birth, and 20.6% applied substances like turmeric, cow dung, oil to the cord. **Conclusion:** The study revealed that certain harmful traditional practices in newborn care remain to persist despite the advancements in neonatology. While some of these practices are beneficial, others can be harmful and should be discouraged through targeted health education provided at the time of discharge and during follow-up visits.

INTRODUCTION

The arrival of a newborn is a significant event celebrated across cultures with a diverse array of traditional beliefs and practices. These customs often passed down through generations, are deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual fabric of communities worldwide. While modern medicine has introduced advanced methodologies for neonatal care, traditional practices continue to play a crucial role in shaping the health of newborns, particularly in rural and indigenous societies. This study is conducted primarily to understand community practices before planning behavioral changes.

Aims and Objectives

To identify common traditional beliefs and practices related to newborn care. To explore the prevalence of traditional beliefs and practices surrounding newborn care among mothers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design: Cross-sectional study

Source of Data: All the mothers in the postnatal ward of Government General Hospital, Kadapa

Inclusion Criteria: Postnatal mothers delivered at Government General Hospital College, Kadapa

Exclusion Criteria: Postnatal mothers who lost their babies or are not willing to cooperate or whose babies are admitted to NICU immediately after birth.

Sample size: 587 mothers

Data Collection: After explaining the purpose of the study and obtaining their consent for participation, all the socio-demographic details of the family and traditional beliefs and cultural practices during the neonatal period were collected from mothers using a pre-designed questionnaire through interview techniques.

RESULTS

In our study, a majority of 48.9% (n=287) of the mothers were within the age group of 19-22 years, 34.9% (n= 205) were between 23-26 years, 10.7% (n= 63) were between 27-30 years, 2.9% (n=17) more than 30 years and the remaining 2.6% (n= 15) less than 18 years as shown in Table 1. Nearly 39.9% (n=234) were primiparous, 57.2 % (n=336) of mothers belonged to joint families, and 63.2% (n=371) were from rural areas. Almost 62.7% (n=368) were Hindu, 20.8% (n=122) were Muslim, and 16.5% (n=97) were Christian. 38.2% (n=224) of the mothers belonged to socio-economic status class 5, 15.8% (n=93) belonged to class 4, 25.6% (n=150) to class 3, and 20.4% (n=120) to class 2 according to modified BG Prasad classification. In our study, 19.1% (n=112) of mothers were illiterate, 14.8% (n=87) of mothers studied up to primary school, 46.7% (274) of mothers studied up to secondary school and 19.4% (n=114) of mothers were graduates. [Table 1]

Of the mothers included in the study group, 62.9% (n=369) had normal vaginal delivery. Around 13.6%

(n=80) initiated breastfeeding within one hour of delivery, 63.5% (n=373) between 1-6 hours, 11.6% (n=68) between 6-12 hours, and nearly 11.3% (n=66) fed their babies after 12 hours of delivery. Pre-lacteal feeds were given in only 11.8% of cases (n=69). 89.3% (n=524) of mothers fed colostrum to their babies as shown in table 2. The first bath was given after 7 days in 72.9% (n=428) of the babies, within 3-7 days in 12.3% (n=72), and in 1-3 days in 14.8% (n=87) of the babies. [Table 2]

Among traditional beliefs and practices, 74.1% (n=435) of the mothers applied kajal to the eye/face/behind ears as a measure to protect the newborn from harm, 70.5% (n= 414) used herbal home remedies for digestion, 58% (n= 341) applied oil immediately after birth, 52.6% (n=309) applied sambrani smoke after bath, 47.2% (n=277) tied black threads to hands/legs to prevent blackeye, 35.1% (n=206) of mothers practiced pouring of oil in ears to keep them open and 20.6% (n=121) applied substances like turmeric, cow dung, or oil to the umbilical cord under the belief of better healing as shown in table 3. [Table 3]

Table 1: Socio-demographic details of post-natal mothers

	SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS	Number (n=587)	%
AGE OF MOTHER AT DELIVERY	<18 years	15	2.6%
	19-22 years	287	48.9%
	23-26years	205	34.9%
	27-30years	63	10.7%
	>30years	17	2.9%
OBSTETRIC FORMULA	Primi	234	39.9%
	Multi	353	60.1%
PLACE	Rural	371	63.2%
	Urban	216	36.8%
SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS	Class 1	0	0%
	Class 2	120	20.4%
	Class 3	150	25.6%
	Class 4	93	15.8%
	Class 5	224	38.2%
TYPE OF FAMILY	Nuclear	251	42.8%
	Joint	336	57.2%
RELIGION	Hindu	368	62.7%
	Muslim	122	20.8%
	Christian	97	16.5%
EDUCATIONAL STATUS	Illiterate	112	19.1%
	Primary	87	14.8%
	Secondary	274	46.7%
	Graduate	114	19.4%

Table 2: Delivery and feeding practices

CATEGORY		Frequency	%
MODE OF DELIVERY	NVD	369	62.9%
	LSCS	218	37.1%
TIME OF INITIATION OF BREASTFEEDING	<1 hr	80	13.6%
	1-6 hrs	373	63.5%
	6-12 hrs	68	11.6%
	>12 hrs	66	11.3%
ANY PRELACTEAL FEEDS GIVEN	Yes	69	11.8%
	No	518	88.2%
IS COLOSTRUM GIVEN	Yes	524	89.3%
	No	63	10.7%
TIME OF FIRST BATH	<1 day	0	0%
	1-3 days	87	14.8%
	3-7 days	72	12.3%
	>7 days	428	72.9%

Table 3: Attitudes and practices of newborn care among mothers

TRADITIONAL PRACTICES	Frequency	%
Applying cow dung/ turmeric to cord	121	20.6%
Has an oil massage been done immediately after birth?	341	58.0%
Has sambrani smoke been applied after bath?	309	52.6%
Have home remedies been used for digestion?	414	70.5%
Pouring oil in the eye/ear	206	35.1%
Application of kajal to eye	435	74.1%
Tying black threads to hands/legs to prevent blackeye	277	47.2%

DISCUSSION

Our study demonstrated that mothers had a positive attitude towards breastfeeding and reduced frequency of using prelacteal feeds by 11.8% which is almost similar to the findings of 12.9% from Udgiri et al study (12.9%).^[1] A study conducted in Karnataka by Banapurmath,^[2] showed that only 0.3% of mothers initiated breastfeeding within an hour as compared to 13.6% in our study.

One of the recent developments against old practices is that 89.3% of mothers are giving colostrum, which was previously discarded. Other studies conducted in various regions of India showed that mothers discarded colostrum ranging from 16% to 85.7%.^[1,3]

Among the various traditional beliefs held by mothers to protect the newborn from evil, applying kajal to the eye/face/behind the ears is the most commonly practiced custom noticed in our study with a prevalence of 74.1% as compared to a study from Aligarh [4] where this practice was noticed by 97% of the mothers. Herbal remedies are used commonly for digestion by mothers. A study conducted by Reshma et al,^[5] showed that 53% of the mothers used herbal remedies for digestion, whereas our study found that 70.5% of mothers used herbal remedies. Sometimes these home remedies may result in neonatal mortality.

In our study, one of the practiced traditions among mothers was pouring oil in the ear (35.1%) done under the belief that it helps keep the ears open after birth. However, a study conducted in Dehradun,^[6] found that 81% of mothers practiced pouring oil into ear.

A study conducted by Nethra N et al,^[7] found that 91% of the mothers practiced exposing their babies to sambrani smoke after birth, whereas our study showed that half of the mothers did so. This smoke is harmful as it may cause respiratory tract infections.

The application of substance on the umbilical cord stump is widely practiced by nearly 94.9% in some tribal communities in Tamilnadu,^[8] and around 51.06% in a study conducted in Meerut,^[9] but our study found it is the least commonly followed traditional practice in only 20.6%

In our study, delayed bathing was practiced by nearly three-fourths of the mothers which was almost similar to a study from Pondicherry.^[10] The usage of oil during bathing is believed to aid in physical growth and better weight gain as suggested

by Shankaranarayanan study.^[11] This practice was observed in 58% in our present study. The practice of applying oil to newborns immediately after birth can remove protective skin covering, which is harmful to the baby. There is a variable difference among communities in the practices observed after birth.^[12]

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that certain harmful traditional practices in newborn care remain to persist despite the advancements in neonatology. While some of these practices are beneficial, others can be harmful and should be discouraged through targeted health education provided at the time of discharge and during follow-up visits. Medical professionals need to be aware of and understand the community's cultural practices to deliver culturally integrated care that is more acceptable and effective within the societal context.

Limitations

This study aims at understanding the KAP of mothers only.

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Declarations

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