

**A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY TO ASSESS THE CULTURAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES RELATED TO PREGNANCY, CHILDBIRTH, AND NEWBORN CARE AMONG THE WOMEN OF THE KHASI TRIBE WHO EXPERIENCED HOME DELIVERIES IN MEGHALAYA**

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**ABSTRACT**

A descriptive study was conducted among Khasi women who had home births in Meghalaya to examine their cultural beliefs and practices related to pregnancy, childbirth, and newborn care. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect data from 100 women. The study found that Khasi women have both positive and negative beliefs about pregnancy and childbirth. For example, they believe that cutting hair during pregnancy can cause birthmarks or cleft lip/palate, and that certain actions by the husband can cause abortion. They also have unhealthy beliefs, such as drinking ash water to help with placenta delivery and applying wood ash or burned cow dung to the cord stump to prevent bleeding after birth. Common tribal practices like (50%) women took fresh blood of cocks to increase blood in the body, during pregnancy, hair was pushed into the mouth for the expulsion of the placenta etc. Unhealthy practices like (85%) cut the umbilical cord with a bamboo stick during delivery and (20%) applied burned cow dung to stop cord stump bleeding etc. The study revealed that women of the Khasi tribe still have common cultural beliefs and practices and need to reinforce healthy cultural beliefs and practices.

**KEYWORDS:** Pregnancy, child birth, newborn care, cultural beliefs, cultural practices.

**INTRODUCTION**

Pregnancy is a significant cultural transition, with various beliefs and customs influencing behavior. Many cultures have specific practices during pregnancy, childbirth, and newborn care. Socio-cultural beliefs can also impact maternal and child health. Women often adhere to these beliefs during pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum care.<sup>[1]</sup>

Some mothers follow superstitious practices passed down from their ancestors. Home delivery was common in the past, but risk factors like illiteracy and age increased the likelihood of complications.<sup>[2]</sup>

Many cultural practices are still performed without knowing their benefits or harm. The postpartum period greatly affects the health of mothers and children. Postpartum care typically lasts six weeks after childbirth to prevent complications.<sup>[3]</sup>

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Research approach: Quantitative Approach  
Research design: Descriptive survey.

Research setting: Study was conducted in four selected villages Mawlieh, Nong Umiang, Pohlong and Jaidoh villages in West Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya.

Study population: The women of Khasi tribe who had home delivery in West Khasi Hills District.

Sample size: 100 women of Khasi tribes who had home deliveries and have a child up to 2 years of age from Meghalaya.

Data collection: Demographic characteristics of the study participants. semi structured interview schedule to assess the cultural beliefs regarding pregnancy, childbirth and newborn care among the women of Khasi tribe.

**RESULTS**

**Section I- Description of demographic variables**

34% of women were between 20-24 years old, followed

by 26% between 25-29 years old. The majority, 99%, were Christians, 56% were housewives and 53(53%) had primary education. Education-wise, 53% had primary education, 36% had secondary education, and 2% had graduation. Family-wise, 83% were from nuclear families and 17% from joint families.

Children-wise, 32% had 1-2 children, 29% had 3-4 children, and 22% had 5-6 children.

Regarding the age of the last child, 36% had children under 6 months old and 33% had children aged 7-12 months. The majority, 78%, were married and only 22% were unmarried.

**Section 2: Table 1(a): Semi-structured interview schedule to assess the cultural beliefs related to pregnancy. N=100**

S. No	Statements related to common cultural beliefs	(f)	%
1	An antenatal mother should not eat yam during pregnancy because the baby will be covered with thick vernix caseosa.	50	50%
2	During pregnancy whatever she wants to eat she should get so that baby will not drool.	95	95%
3	An antenatal mother shouldn't, stitch a dress she is wearing on her body because she will find difficulty during delivery.	85	85%
4	The pregnant woman should not cut her hair during pregnancy because the baby might have marks or cleft lip, Cleft palate.	53	53%
5	During pregnancy, while building a pukka house the husband should not take part in making the pillars as it will give birthmark /scar to the baby.	42	42%
6	Drinking fresh cock's blood increases blood in the body.	46	46%
7	During pregnancy women need to eat more green leafy vegetables to increase blood.	97	97%
8	During pregnancy sharpening, the metals like a rod will give scar to the baby.	73	73%
9	During pregnancy, the husband should not go for fishing as it will lead to cleft lip, cleft palate.	35	35%
10	During pregnancy, the husband should not kill a snake as it will harm the child in the womb.	72	72%
11	During pregnancy husband should not sharpen the instruments as it will cause abortion.	43	43%
12	Antenatal mother should not visit the place when there is any delivery of another woman as they may not be able to deliver herself when her due time comes.	86	86%
13	During the solar eclipse, pregnant women should not see/look outside the house as her baby may get cleft lip or cleft palate.	41	41%
14	The pregnant woman should not cut a piece of cloth with scissors because the baby might have marks or cleft lip, Cleft palate.	41	41%

Out of 100 women, 50% of women believe pregnant women should not eat yam due to vernix caseosa concerns. 95% think pregnant women should eat whatever they want for baby's benefit. 85% believe pregnant women should not stitch dresses for delivery ease. 53% think cutting hair during pregnancy can lead to baby marks or defects. 42% believe the husband should not help build a house during pregnancy for birthmark concerns. 46% believe drinking fresh cock's blood increases blood in the body. 97% think green leafy

vegetables increase blood during pregnancy. 73% believe sharpening metals during pregnancy can cause scars on the baby. 35% think husbands should not fish during pregnancy due to cleft lip/palate concerns. 72% believe husbands should not kill snakes during pregnancy for child safety. 41% think pregnant women should not cut cloth with scissors for potential marks or defects. 43% believe husbands should not sharpen instruments during pregnancy for risk of abortion.

**Table 1(b): Frequency and Percentage distribution of women related to common cultural beliefs related to child birth. N=100**

S. No.	Statements related to cultural beliefs	(f)	%
1	Massaging the abdomen during labour helps to increase contractions.	89	89%
2	Pushing the mother's hair in her mouth helps the expulsion of the placenta.	79	79%
3	Warm liquids have to be given to the mother soon after the delivery to refresh her.	94	94%
4	Hot fomentation to the whole body helps in reducing after pains.	98	98%
5	Placenta after delivery has to be kept in a container tightly closed and placed on the tree.	46	46%

Majority of the women 89% believe that massaging the abdomen during labour helps to increase contractions. Most of the women 79% believe that pushing the mother's hair in her mouth helps the expulsion of the

placenta. A highest number of women 94% believe that warm liquids have to be given to the mother soon after the delivery to refresh her. Majority of the women 98% believe that hot fomentation to the whole body helps in

reducing after pains. A significant number of women 46% believe placenta after delivery has to be kept in a container tightly closed and placed on a tree.

**Table 1(c): Frequency and Percentage distribution of women related to common cultural beliefs regarding newborn care. N=100**

S. No.	Statements related to cultural beliefs	(f)	%
1	The colostrum is good for the baby.	94	94%
2	In-laws of mother need to give tying baby clothes to the mother to increase the family bond.	65	65%
3	Wearing red clothes is very lucky for the baby after birth.	60	60%
4	Eating raw ginger increases the production of milk.	43	43%

Maximum number of women 94% believe that the colostrum is good for the baby.

65% believe that in-laws of mother need to give tying

baby clothes to the mother to increase the family bond. The belief that wearing red clothes is very lucky for the baby after birth 60%. Another belief is that eating raw ginger increases the production of milk 43%.

**Table 2(a): Frequency and Percentage distribution of women related to their unhealthy cultural beliefs related to pregnancy and child birth. N=100**

S. No	Statements related to unhealthy cultural beliefs	(f)	%
1	One can chew beetle leaf with tobacco during pregnancy	27	27%
2	One can smoke any tobacco products during pregnancy.	37	37%
3	Antenatal mothers should not eat sprouted beans as it will lead to diarrhea.	35	35%
4	During delivery, a woman should drink ash water so that the placenta will come out spontaneously.	84	84%
5	During delivery, the cord is cut without the cord tie.	24	24%

27% of women has the unhealthy belief that one can chew beetle leaf with tobacco during pregnancy. Among the respondents 37% believe that one can smoke any tobacco products during pregnancy. Another belief that antenatal mothers should not eat sprouted beans as it will

lead to diarrhea 35%. Majority of the women 84% believe that during delivery, a woman should drink ash water so that the placenta will come out spontaneously. A significant number 24% of women believe that during delivery, the cord is cut without the cord tie.

**Table 2(b) Frequency and Percentage distribution of women related to their unhealthy cultural beliefs related to newborn care. N=100**

S. No.	Statements related to unhealthy cultural beliefs	(f)	%
1	Applying burned cow dung on the cord stump prevents bleeding.	23	23%
2	Applying wood ash on the cord stump prevents bleeding.	1	1%
3	Applying jaiaw plant leaves on the cord stump prevents bleeding.	28	28%
4	Applying black stone powder on the cord stump prevents bleeding.	1	1%
5	Applying bamboo ash on the cord stump prevents bleeding.	1	1%
6	When the cord falls off, the dried cord has to be kept properly on the wooden/bamboo ceiling.	91	91%
7	Taking green leafy vegetables by mother cause diarrhea in the baby.	61	61%
8	Need to give prelacteal feeds soon after birth like sugar water to clear the gut.	55	55%

23% of women believe applying burned cow dung on the cord stump prevents bleeding. 28% believe applying jaiaw plant leaves on the cord stump prevents bleeding. 91% believe dried cord should be kept properly on a

wooden/bamboo ceiling when it falls off. 61% believe green leafy vegetables cause diarrhea in babies. 55% believe giving pro-lateral feeds (like sugar water) soon after birth helps clear the gut.

**Table 3 (a): Frequency and Percentage distribution of women related to common cultural practices related to pregnancy and child birth. N=100**

S. No.	Statements related to common cultural practices	(f)	%
1	Took cocks blood, to increase blood in the body during pregnancy.	50	50%
2	During pregnancy did not cut clothes with scissors.	61	61%
3	Ate all that craved for during pregnancy.	94	94%
4	Did not eat yam during pregnancy.	61	61%
5	Hair was pushed into the mouth for the expulsion of the placenta.	80	80%

6	Cut the umbilical cord with blade.	9	9%
7	After delivery kept the placenta in a container tightly closed and placed on the tree.	47	47%

Among the respondent's half of the women 50% took cocks blood to increase blood in the body during pregnancy. Maximum number of women 61% did not cut clothes with scissors during pregnancy. A highest percentage 94% of the women ate all that craved for during pregnancy. Majority of the women 80% said that

hair was pushed into the mouth for the expulsion of the placenta. Only 9% of the women cut the umbilical cord with blade. A significant number 47% of women said after delivery kept the placenta in a container tightly closed and placed on the tree.

**Table 3 (b): Frequency and Percentage distribution of women related to common cultural practices related to newborn care. N=100**

S. No.	Statements related to common cultural practices	(f)	%
1	When the cord fell off, the dried cord was kept in the box and placed in the house	2	2%
2	When the cord fell off, the dried cord was kept properly on the wooden/bamboo ceiling.	89	89%
3	Gave sugar water to baby as prelacteal feed to clear the gut	52	52%
4	Took row ginger to increase the production of milk.	48	48%
5	Gave oil massage before baby bath.	53	53%
6	In laws gave baby tying clothes to the mother to increase the family bond.	68	68%
7	Wore red colour clothes for the newborn baby soon after birth.	38	38%

Majority of the women 89% when the cord fell off, the dried cord was kept properly on the wooden/bamboo ceiling. 48% of the women gave sugar water to baby as prelacteal feed to clear the gut and took row ginger to

increase the production of milk. Most of the women 53% gave oil massage before baby bath. The in-laws giving baby tying clothes to the mother to increase the family bond was present in 68% of women.

**Table 4 (a): Frequency and percentage distribution of women related to unhealthy Cultural practices related to pregnancy and child birth. N=100**

S.no.	Statements related to un healthy cultural practices	(f)	%
1	Smoked tobacco products during pregnancy	16	16%
2	Consumed alcohol during pregnancy.	11	11%
3	Took beetle leaf with tobacco during pregnancy.	49	49%
4	Cut the umbilical cord with a bamboo stick during delivery.	85	85%
5	Cut the umbilical cord without applying the tie.	10	10%
6	Drank ash water for the easy expulsion of the placenta.	77	77%

The table depicts that some of the women 16% smoked tobacco products and 11% consumed alcohol during pregnancy. Among the women 49% took beetle leaf with tobacco during pregnancy. Majority of the women 85%

cut the umbilical cord with a bamboo stick during delivery. Cut the umbilical cord without applying the tie were 10%. Maximum 77% of women drank ash water for the easy expulsion of the placenta.

**Table 4 (b): Frequency and percentage distribution of women related to unhealthy Cultural practices related to new born care. N=100**

S. no.	Statements related to unhealthy cultural practices	(f)	%
1	Gave sugar water to baby as prelacteal feed to clear the gut.	52	52%
2	Gave warm water to baby as prelacteal feed to clear the gut.	25	25%
3	Did not take green leafy vegetables to prevent diarrhea in the baby.	64	64%
4	Applied burned cow dung to stop cord stump bleeding.	20	20%
5	Applied wood ash on the cord stump to prevent bleeding.	11	11%
6	Applied jaiaw plant leaves on the cord stump prevents bleeding.	31	31%
7	Applied black stone powder on the cord stump prevents bleeding	2	2%

Most of the women 52% gave sugar water to baby as prelacteal feed to clear the gut. Also 25% of women gave warm water to baby as prelacteal feed to clear the gut. Maximum number of women 64% did not take green leafy vegetables to prevent diarrhea in the baby. Among

the women 20% applied burned cow dung to stop cord stump bleeding. 11% applied wood ash on the cord stump to prevent bleeding. A significant number of women 31% applied jaiaw plant leaves on the cord stump to prevent bleeding.

**Table 5: Chi – square showing association between age of the women and unhealthy cultural practices related to pregnancy, child birth and new born care. N=100**

Selected variable	Unhealthy cultural Practices	Df	Chi- Square	Level of significance
Age	1 Smoked tobacco products during Pregnancy	4	6.026 **	Not Significant
	2 Consumed alcohol during pregnancy	4	33.54*	Significant
	3 Took beetle leaf with tobacco during pregnancy.	4	20.008	Significant
	4 Cut the umbilical cord with a bamboostick during delivery	4	6.713**	Not Significant
	5 Cut the umbilical cord without applyingthe tie.	4	11.911	Significant
	6 Drank ash water for the easy expulsion ofthe placenta.	4	1.917 **	Not Significant
	7 Gave sugar water to baby as prelactealfeed to clear the gut.	4	6.711 **	Not significant
	8 Gave warm water to baby as prelactealfeed to clear the gut	4	15.21*	Significant
	9 Applied wood ash on the cord stump toprevent bleeding.	4	1.961**	Not significant
	10 Did not take green leafy vegetables which cause diarrhea in the baby	4	22.725	Significant
	11 Applied burned cow dung to stop cordstump bleeding	4	7.258 **	Not significant
	12 Applied jaiaw plant leaves on the cordstump prevents bleeding.	4	9.603 *	Significant
	13 Applied black stone powder on the cord stump prevents bleeding	4	1.422 **	Not Significant
	14 Applied bamboo ash on the cord stump prevents bleeding	4	1.961**	Not significant

\*p<0.05 significant at 0.05 level of significance

\*\*p> 0.05 non –significant at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 5 shows that there is significant association between age of women and unhealthy cultural practices related to pregnancy, child birth and new born care, such as consumption of alcohol during pregnancy, taking beetle leaf with tobacco during pregnancy.

Cutting the umbilical cord without applying the tie. Gave warm water to baby as prelacteal feed to clear the gut. Did not take green leafy vegetables which cause

diarrhoea in the baby. Applied jaiaw plant leaves on the cord stump prevents bleeding also there is no significant association between age of the women and other unhealthy cultural practices related to pregnancy, child birth and new born care, which are listed in the table. Hence research hypothesis is partially accepted and partially rejected and null hypothesis is partially accepted and partially rejected.

**Table 6: Chi–square showing association between education of the women and unhealthy cultural practices related to pregnancy, child birth and new born care. N=100**

Selected Variable	Unhealthy Practices	Df	Chi-square	Level of significance
Education	1 Smoked tobacco products during pregnancy	3	5.130**	Not significant
	2 Consumed alcohol during pregnancy	3	7.534**	Not significant
	3 Took beetle leaf with tobacco during pregnancy.	3	1.441**	Not significant
	4 Cut the umbilical cord with a bamboo stick during delivery	3	2.495**	Not significant
	5 Cut the umbilical cord without applying the tie.	3	5.282*	* Not significant
	6 Drank ash water for the easy expulsion of the placenta.	3	1.958**	Not significant
	7 Gave sugar water to baby as prelacteal feed to clear the gut.	3	5.933**	Not significant
	8 Gave warm water to baby as prelacteal feed to clear the gut	3	2.502**	Not significant
	9 Did not take green leafy Vegetables which cause diarrhea in the baby	3	9.521*	Significant
	10 Applied burned cow dung to stop cord stump bleeding	3	2.512*	* Not significant
	11 Applied wood ash on the cord stump to prevent bleeding.	3	.896**	Not significant
	12 Applied jaiaw plant leaves on the cord stump prevents bleeding.	3	3.342**	Not significant
	13 Applied black stone powder on the cord stump prevents bleeding	3	1.810**	Not significant
	14 Applied bamboo ash on the cord stump prevents bleeding	3	.896**	Not significant

\*p<0.05 significant at 0.05 level of significance.

\*\*p> 0.05 non –significant at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 6 shows that there is significant association between education of women and unhealthy practices related to pregnancy, child birth and new born care, i.e. did not take green leafy vegetables which cause diarrhea in the baby, also there is no significant association between education of the women and other unhealthy practices. Hence research hypothesis and null hypothesis is partially accepted and partially rejected.

## DISCUSSION

In the present study the majority of Khasi women (85%) cut the umbilical cord with a bamboo stick during delivery, similar to findings by Vanphanom Sychareun et al. (2009) that most TBAs use a bamboo called "Mai Ka See" or razor blade.<sup>[4]</sup>

Additionally, 53% of women gave oil massage to their babies before bathing, in line with studies by Tasneem Affzal and Afzal Saeed (2006)<sup>[5]</sup> and Reshma & Sujatha R. (in Mangalore) that found frequent oil massage practices in 61% and 95% of babies, respectively.<sup>[6]</sup>

This study found that 52% of women gave sugar water to their babies, while 25% gave warm water as a pre-lacteal feed. This aligns with previous research by Yagnavalkya K Jani et al. (66.2% of mothers offered boiled water as a first feed).<sup>[8]</sup> Other studies have also shown varying rates of pre-lacteal feeding: 40% of women in Bangladesh gave honey, 16% gave sugar water, and 44% of newborns in Egypt received pre-lacteal feeds in the first week of life.<sup>[8,9]</sup>

In this study results 94% of women ate what they craved during pregnancy, consistent with a similar study by Berrin Okka et al. (2012). 91% of women believed that the dried umbilical cord should be kept on a wooden/bamboo ceiling, and 89% practiced it.<sup>[10]</sup> In a study by Ravi Prakash Upadhyay (2010), one-eighth of mothers kept the cord of male babies to increase the chances of having male babies in future pregnancies.<sup>[11]</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It was concluded from present research study that majority of Khasi women have cultural beliefs and practices related to pregnancy, child birth and newborn care. Some beliefs and practices are unhealthy. The study findings also show that there was significant association between some unhealthy practices with age and educational status of women of Khasi tribe.

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