

Original Research Article

**A study on Traditional Beliefs and Practices in Newborn Care among Women Attending UHTC, NMC, Nellore A.P**

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**Abstract**

**Background:** All people urban or rural have their own beliefs and practices concerning health and disease. Cultural factors are deeply involved in health and sickness. Some customs and beliefs have positive values while others may be useless or positively harmful. Some of these cultural factors have stood in the way of implementing health programmes. This study aims to find out among the women attending outpatient department of urban health training centre of Narayana Medical College, Nellore. **METHODOLOGY:** This cross sectional study was done after obtaining permission from institutional ethical committee in female patients aged 18-70 years attending UHTC, NMC from Oct 2016- Dec 2016, over a period of 3 months. A total of 180 female patients were interviewed using predesigned, pretested questionnaire. Data was entered in MS EXCEL & analyzed by SPSS version 22. **Results:** Most of the study participants are literates. 50% belongs to 25 years age group. 78% of the participants were working. Majority of them (61.6%) belong to nuclear families. 36% of participants were initiated breast feeding within half an hour. 77.8% of participants were given prelacteal feeds to the newborn. The cultural practices and beliefs regarding bath revealed that highest percentage 79.4% of the mothers massaged the baby with oil before bath. 51.7% of the mothers gave home remedies for digestion. None of mothers applied ashes or soot or cow dung on the umbilical cord of the baby. **Conclusion and Recommendations:** A lot of beliefs were observed in this study which needs to be educated to the population.

**Key words:** traditional beliefs and practices, Newborn

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**INTRODUCTION:**

All people urban or rural have their own beliefs and practices concerning health and disease. Cultural factors are deeply involved in health and sickness. Some customs and beliefs have positive values while others may be useless or positively harmful<sup>1</sup>. Some of these cultural factors have stood in the way of implementing health programmes. These practices which are followed may affect the health of newborn and plays an important role in physical, psychological and social development in children<sup>2</sup>.

The child rearing practices has a profound influence on the health of growing children. The transfer of civilization including culture, beliefs, traditional practices etc from parents to children make the children into promising citizens of tomorrow<sup>2</sup>. A child who is breastfed has grater chances of survival than artificial fed child<sup>1</sup>.

**AIMS & OBJECTIVES:** To find out traditional beliefs and cultural practices among the women attending to OPD of UHTC, NMC, Nellore.

**METHODOLOGY:**

This community cross sectional study was done after obtaining permission from institutional ethical committee. The study was conducted in UHTC, Saraswathi Nagar, field practice area of Narayana Medical College, Nellore during Oct 2016- Dec 2016 over a period of 3 months. This study was done in all female patients aged 18-70 years attending OPD of UHTC after obtaining their consent. A total of 180 female patients were interviewed using predesigned, pretested semi structured questionnaire. Data was entered in MS EXCEL & analyzed by SPSS version 22.0.

## RESULTS:

Among 180 participants the results are as follows: Majority of the participants (78.3%) belong to Hindus. 45.6% of participants belong to BC category. Most of them (61.6%) belong to nuclear families. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of study participants.

**Table 1: socio demographic characteristics (n=180)**

Demographic variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
<20years	9	5
20-35years	96	53.3
36-50years	41	22.8
51-65years	20	11.1
>65years	14	7.8
<b>Education</b>		
Professional	2	1.1
Graduate	36	20
Inter	50	27.8
High school	40	22.2
Middle school	5	2.8
Primary school	16	8.9
Illiterate	31	17.2
<b>Occupation</b>		
Housewife	141	78.3
Working	39	21.7
<b>SES (modified BG Prasad's )</b>		
I	24	13.3
II	59	32.8
III	51	28.3
IV	36	20
V	10	5.6

Majority of the participants 143 (79.4%) were in the habit of massaging the baby with oil before bath. 93 (51.7%) were using turmeric paste and herbal

powder during bath. Some of the participants, 40 (22.2%) did not give bath immediately after feeding; they were thinking that it may cause aspiration of milk. Most of the participants, 149 (82.8%) had practice of exposing the baby over “dhoopam” smoke after bath. 63 (35%) of participants delayed first bath to the baby up to 24 hours.

The cultural practices and beliefs regarding feeding revealed that, majority of the participants, 155 (86.1%) were practicing burping of infants. 93 (51.7%) gave home remedies for digestion. 67 (37.2%) had the used hot water to evacuate stools. Table 2: shows the cultural practices and beliefs regarding feeding.

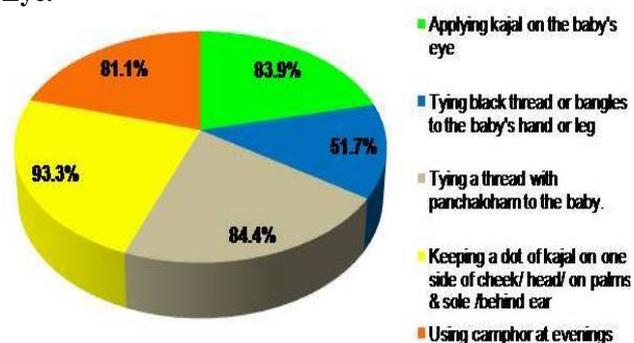
**Table 2: cultural practices and beliefs regarding feeding**

S.no	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1	<b>Initiation of breast feeding</b>		
	<1/2 hour	65	36.1
	Within 4 -6 hours	84	46.7
	>24 hours	31	17.3
2	Giving pre lacteal feeds soon after birth	122	77.8
3	Discarding the colostrums	38	21.1

**Table 3: Other Cultural Practices and Beliefs Related To Newborn Care**

S no	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1	Removing coated tongue by using masikaya (herb) / turmeric / cloth	159	88.3
2	I accept “empty cradle should not be moved”.	102	56.7
3	I accept “Baby's cloth should not be placed outside at night”.	108	60
4	Baby is not allowed to be taken out after 6 pm.	100	55.6
5	Blowing air into nose & ears to clear mucous	99	55

**Figure 1. Cultural practices and beliefs to prevent Evil Eye.**



The cultural practices and beliefs related to umbilical cord care revealed that, 148 (82.2%)

participants were applied antiseptic powder to umbilical cord. 62 (34.4%) had practice of applying heat to umbilical cord to make it dry. Only some people 12 (6.7%) had applied ashes/ soot/ cow dung to umbilical cord. 3 (1.7%) had applied turmeric powder to umbilical cord.

Cultural practices in disposal of fallen umbilical cord: 77 (42.8%) of them buried the cord, 54 (30%) hid the cord in their homes, 8 (4.4%) kept cord in amulets, 38 (21.1%) had given cord to others, 41 (22.8%) had mixed practices in fallen umbilical cord. Figure 1: shows the cultural practices and beliefs to prevent evil eye.

The cultural practices regarding care during jaundice revealed that 143 (79.4%) had practice of exposing the baby to sunlight when the newborn had jaundice. 106 (60.6%) had practice of taking baby to hospital. 25 (13.9%) had practice of exposing the baby to sunlight. 16 (14.4%) had practiced skin branding & leaf extracts (pasaru) to newborn in case of jaundice. Table 3: shows the other cultural practices and beliefs related to newborn care.

There is significant association between educational status and giving prelacteal feeds to newborn ( $\chi^2 = 58.902$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), educational status and baby should not be taken out after 6 PM ( $\chi^2 = 24.006$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ), educational status and baby clothes should not be placed outside at nights ( $\chi^2 = 30.294$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ).

## DISCUSSION:

In our study 79.4% of participants used oil massage before bath, which is similar to study conducted by Reshma<sup>3</sup> et al in Mangalore taluk. 52% of participants in our study used herbal powder/ turmeric for bathing baby, which is similar to a FGD conducted by Sanghamitra Pati<sup>4</sup> in Odisha and Leena Shankar JL<sup>5</sup> et al., in Trivendrum. Certain traditional practices like oil bath with turmeric and other ingredients possessing a beautifying effect, is a healthy habit.<sup>2</sup>

Our study showed that 37.2% of participants used hot water to evacuate stools, where as it is 32% in a study conducted by Reshma<sup>3</sup> et al in Mangalore

taluk. Though this practice is not recommended, some people are still using this in newborn care, these needs to be educated. 52% of participants tried remedies for home digestion, which is nearer i.e, 53% to a study conducted by Reshma<sup>3</sup> et al in Mangalore taluk. This harmful practice sometimes may lead to diarrheal diseases in newborn

Our study showed 77.8% were given prelacteal feeds to new born, which is not at all a good practice, where as it is 62% in a study conducted by Leena Shankar et al<sup>5</sup>, 80% in Sangamitra pati<sup>4</sup> giving prelacteal feeds like honey, sugar water etc. are strictly prohibited because not only they introduce infection but also they replace colostrum & interfere with sucking.

21% of participants discarded colostrums in present study, where as it is 16% in Reshma et al<sup>2</sup> and it is 10% study conducted by Canturk Capik<sup>6</sup> et al in Turkey, 43% in a study conducted by Saadia Gul et al<sup>9</sup>. 13% in Latika Nath Sinha<sup>10</sup> Our study showed that many (21%) of participants were discarding colostrum. This shows that they had less knowledge regarding importance of colostrum like high concentration of proteins & other nutrients, anti infective properties which protect the baby against respiratory & diarrheal diseases<sup>1</sup>. This needs attention of health personnel in our field practice area and planning for programmes to educate the mothers about importance of colostrum.

36% initiated breast feeding within half an hour in our study. Breast feeding to be initiated within half an hour of birth, because newborn is very active during first hour of life & therefore reflexes are strong. Early initiation ensures that the baby gets colostrum positively<sup>2</sup>.

A study conducted by Leena Sankar JL<sup>5</sup> in Trivendrum showed that 98% of participants practiced burping, where as in our study 86% of participants practiced burping. Burping helps let out of swallowed air, and also helps to prevent from evening colic.

82.2% of participants used antiseptic powder for cord care, where as it is 46% in Canturk Capik<sup>6</sup> study. 56.5% used turmeric powder in Avadhesh Kumar<sup>8</sup> study, but in our study it was 1.7%. 22%

had the practice of giving fallen cord to others, with a belief that, if that cord was ingested by the couple who do not have children, they will have a child in future (as a remedy for infertility). 4.4% had the belief that fallen umbilical cord if kept in amulets so that this will help the child from ghosts & evil spirits.

Our study showed 79% of individuals had the practice of exposure to sunlight in jaundice where as it is 73% in a study conducted by Reshma<sup>3</sup> et al. This practice helps in decreasing the incidence of jaundice in children and this is a healthy practice<sup>2</sup>. 16% had practiced branding, applying leaf extracts (pasaru) in newborns. Traditional practice of treating illness by branding of skin, using leaf extracts are brutal practices, may affect the health of newborn<sup>2</sup>

In this study majority (84%) of the participants applied kajal on baby's face to prevent from evil eye, this finding is similar to study conducted by Reshma<sup>3</sup> et al and a FGD conducted by Canturk Capik<sup>6</sup> et al, Jamila Abuidhail<sup>7</sup> et al. Applying kajal to eye may result in conjunctivites<sup>2</sup>. Almost all participants used kajal/ amulets/ black threads/ using camphor to prevent the newborn from evil eyes.

In this study more than half (54%) of participants were accepting statements like “empty cradle should not be moved, baby should not taken out after 6 PM, baby clothes should not be dried outside” this finding is also observed (59%) in a study conducted by Reshma<sup>3</sup> et al. This was more in illiterates compared to literates ( $\chi^2 = 24.006$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ). They believe that if baby clothes dried outside at night some insects & lizards may crawl on clothes, may affect the health of the baby. Some were in belief that if baby was taken outside after 6 PM, some birds may fly over the baby and may leads to ghost intrusions into the baby. This area needs the focus of importance of health education to all mothers & women of reproductive age group.

In this study we observed more than half (55%) of participants had a practice of blowing air into nose, ears, anterior fontanel to clear mucous, where as it is 92% in a study conducted by Leena Sankar JL<sup>5</sup> et al in Trivandrum. This practice needs to be changed, sometimes may cause risk to new born.

## CONCLUSION:

In our study we observed majority of them started breast feeding within 4 hours. Three fourth are giving prelacteal feeds like honey, sugar water. A lot of participants were in belief that colostrums is not good for Newborn, some are practicing home remedies for digestion, using hot water to evacuate stools. Majority used antiseptic powder in cord care. Fallen umbilical cord was given to others in belief that if they swallow the cord, they will have children in future. Majority will go to doctor if the baby had jaundice. Some of them practicing branding, pasaru (leaves extract), amulets as remedies for jaundice. Most of them using kajal on face of newborn, tying amulets, black threads, using camphor to protect from evil eye. Most of them still accepting empty cradle not moved, baby not taken out, baby clothes not placed outside at nights etc. In conclusion, mothers adopted a few safe practices; however, there were gaps in the adoption of several safe practices despite being informed of them. There is a need for dissemination of information and education regarding optimal breastfeeding practices and for protecting and promoting healthy practices.

## RECCOMENDATIONS:

Periodical health education regarding do's and don'ts of newborn care should be conducted which will definitely minimize the unhealthy traditional practices. There are many such practices, rituals, beliefs and offerings which either protect or harm the health of the baby. Maternal education plays an important role in newborn care. Educating the mother regarding importance of breast feeding, colostrums feeding is necessary. Involvement of pregnant and lactating mothers, elderly women in various IEC activities is desirable as they all have an important role in initiation of breastfeeding and other healthy feeding practices at the community level.

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