

**POSTPARTUM PRACTICES AMONG CAMBODIAN MOTHERS
IN PREAH VIHEAR PROVINCE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF
BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**

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ABSTRACT

In Cambodia, traditional postpartum practices culturally exist among postpartum mothers despite delivery at home by TBAs or in health facilities before returning home. This is ethnographic research exploring the traditional postpartum practices among Cambodian mothers and analysing how socio-cultural factors influence these practices. This is a qualitative study using in-dept interviews and participant observation techniques in Tbeng Mean chhey district, Pheah Vihear province Cambodia. Seven postpartum mothers within two months of delivery were interviewed. One medical doctor, one secondary nurse, one traditional birth attendant (TBAs), and one traditional healer for postpartum mothers were also involved in the study, to get more information.

It was found that there are many kinds of traditional postpartum practices that mothers follow. These practices are related to heating the body, food restrictions and prescriptions, rest, personal hygiene, exposure to wind, rainwater, and dew drops, sexual abstinence, and additional supernatural practices. The adherence to the traditional cultural postpartum practices lasted 90 to 180 days. These practices are based upon curative and preventive beliefs. However, according to biomedical classification, these practices could be divided into four items: beneficial, harmless, uncertain, and potentially harmful.

Traditional practices are still dominant in contemporary Cambodian cultures. These practices are influenced by cultural and social factors. Local beliefs, customs, and the lay referral significant female relatives play key roles in recommending these practices.

Basing upon findings, several recommendations are made for designing and providing appropriate safe motherhood health programs and further research. The recommendation include changing the point of view of health staff toward client cultures, providing information, and educating women in the benefits of contemporary postpartum care and strategies to help them to integrate their beliefs and modern ways of care. Recommendations for further research include study with a broader target population, research to find out long term effects of traditional postpartum practices on the mother's and newborn's health, and a study to seek gender issues.

KEY WORDS: POSTPARTUM/ BELIEFS/ PRACTICES/MOTHER/
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