

Cultural Birthing Practices and Experiences



Baulkham Hills Holroyd Parramatta
Migrant Resource Centre

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Migrant Resource Centre**



**Early Intervention and
Perinatal Project**

Cultural

Birthing Practices and Experiences

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Contents:

Acknowledgement.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Ethnic Diversity.....	6
Experiences in Pregnancy Overseas and Australia.....	7
Afghanistan.....	8
Burmese.....	9
Cambodia.....	10
China.....	11
Egypt.....	12
Ghana.....	13
India.....	14
Iranian.....	15
Lebanon - north.....	16
Lebanon - south.....	17
Peru.....	18
South America.....	19
Somalia.....	20
Sudanese.....	21
Thailand.....	22
Vietnam.....	23
Islam.....	24
Grandparents Recollections.....	25
Conclusion.....	27
References.....	28
Special Thanks.....	29



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Special Thanks



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Coordinator of the Early Intervention and Perinatal Project of the Baulkham Hills Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Resource Centre.



Introduction

Introduction

Australia has become one of the most ethnically diverse societies in the world, with persons from over 229 different birthplaces according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

The 1996 Census reports that 21.98% of the population was recorded as being born overseas, it is important to mention that language and religion also create a level of diversity. People have come from all parts of the world with different cultural beliefs. These beliefs lead to different practices in maternity care, such as prenatal and postnatal care, nutrition and social behavior.

In Australia there are significant differences in the Perinatal Health of CALD Communities women compared with that of the English speaking background and Australian born with the exception of Aborigines.

The Early Intervention and Perinatal Project of the Baulkham Hills, Holroyd and Parramatta Migrant Resources Centre focuses this study on previous birthing experiences of CALD women and refugee women having a baby overseas and in Australia.

The study focuses on the following major areas:

- Cultural experiences in pregnancies overseas and in Australia
- Community and social support
- Cross-cultural appropriateness of services provided
- Accessibility of information on Health services.

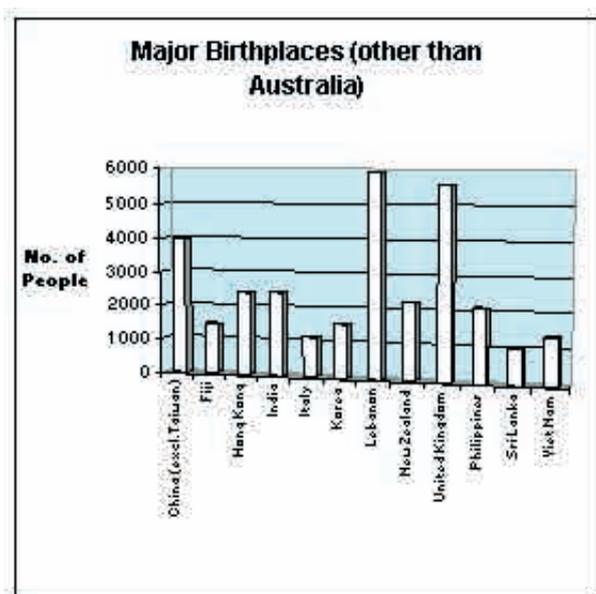
The finding of this study should have important implications for improving cultural sensitivity and correctness in service provision for CALD women and refugee women in Australia.

The Early Intervention and Perinatal Project of the Baulkham Hills, Holroyd and Parramatta Migrant Resource Centre acknowledges that over the years CALD Communities and refugees from different ethnic backgrounds display different attitudes to expectations of pregnancy and childbirth. This project identifies these experiences from other cultures, different belief values and practices. With the creation of this booklet about these experiences, it is important to mention that our aim is to maintain the health and safety of the child and mother.

Ethnic Diversity

The ethnic diversity in Western Sydney and the prevalence of more emerging culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups make it relevant for us to understand the needs and well being of mothers and babies in their cultural context.

However, it is important to mention that there are many publications and published studies, which discuss the link between culture and reproductive health issues, but they tend to focus on CALD Women's reproductive beliefs and behaviours. Few publications explore the maternal care needs of CALD women from the consumer perspective.



Parameter City Community Profile 2003
http://www.parracity.nsw.gov.au/publications/community_profile/the_people9.shtm

The ethnic diversity in western Sydney displays a range of different attitudes to and expectations of pregnancy and childbirth. Mothers from different cultures have different beliefs, values and practices.

Childbearing is a biosocial event marked both by the universality of the biological process and uniqueness of each social and cultural environment within which it occurs.

The CALD women bear their children in cultural and economic situations that are different from those they experienced in their native countries. Pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum care are practiced in different ways in different cultures. Customarily, in many cultures, other women, the mother in law, the woman's mother and sister can attend the childbirth.

However, in Australia the father can be present at the childbirth, this can be a little uncomfortable because some of the parents are not used to this idea.

In addition, (McHugh, 1991; Rice, 1994 & Khan, 1994) "Fear about differences has stopped many CALD women from following their own culture birthing practice, resulting in their suffering stress".

This study will look into different cultural beliefs Those beliefs lead to different practice in childbirth, postnatal care and dietary practice. The finding of this study should have important implication for improving cultural sensitivity and correctness in service provision for CALD and refugee women in Australia.



Experiences in Pregnancy

Overseas and Australia



Afghanistan

Country: Afghanistan

Language Spoken: Afghan

Northern Region and Kabul (Capital city)

Muslim Women

Mother of three from Kabul

During Pregnancy

During the pregnancy the father did not play any role.

The only information a woman received was from her mother and grandmother,

Women ate nutritional food like nuts and savoury food.

During Delivery

The Placenta is buried in dark red ground.

Most of the women give birth at home; some of them die because there is no professional help. Usually a grandmother is the one who delivers the babies.

After Delivery

The new mother needs to relax and have nutritional food.

Mother stays at home for forty days.

The father recites a prayer in the right ear (Azan) God gives you the baby and it belongs to God.

And in the left ear: Akama meaning a short version of Azan.

Before the new mother breastfeeds the baby, a grain of soil from the around the tomb of the Imam Karabelo (in Kabul) is placed in the baby's mouth. It is a blessing for the baby.

After forty days, the baby will be fed with a small spoonful of soup.

Babies are bound tightly in wooden cradles with a drain for urine or carried by the mother in shawls.

They may be breastfeed for more than two years.

Children are cared for by a large group of female relatives

Children learn early that no one will intervene when they cry or are hurt.

Adults do not interfere with children's games, which can be tough.

Children move freely from the female part of the house to the public one and learn to live in group settings.

Burma

Country: Burma

Language Spoken: Burmese and Karen

Four mothers participated some birthed in hospital others in the village

During the pregnancy: women still continue their duties as no special care is given to them when they become pregnant.

Food that the pregnant women eat is separate from the family. They are not allowed to lift heavy objects, usually their mode of transport is a bicycle, but, for their own protection, women stop riding cycles as the roads are usually in poor condition.

Mothers from the city get a monthly check up at the hospital, when they are pregnant. Towards the end of the pregnancy, they have a fortnightly check up. Most of the mothers prefer to give birth in a private hospital because most public hospitals don't have a good reputation.

Most of the women are encouraged to have Caesareans and the doctor gives the date when to turn up at the hospital, most of the women would not be in labour when the caesarean happens.

They are given pain medication
All hospital care has to be paid in advance; sometimes it is a financial strain for the families.
The women found that in the public hospitals, expectant mothers were afraid of the nurses who helped in the delivery of natural births.
Some women declared that nurses smack women who make too much noise during the delivery.
Only medical staff is allowed practices no husband and family.

Some Traditional Practices

The baby is cleaned and the placenta is kept for medicinal purposes.
Women are in hospital for 7 days and food is sent from home such as chicken, beef, and vegetables.
Special turmeric balls are given to drink and traditional medicines are used to encourage blood flow.
Women are encouraged to drink liquids especially hot soup with pepper as a main ingredient.

The mother takes care of her baby after the birth. In some areas, it is a tradition that some women are wrapped up for 45 days.
To prevent suffering pains, the new mother has a steam body bath in which herbs are placed. The use of hot compresses for the breast helps the flow of milk.
Some women in the villages don't touch their baby as soon as it is born it is placed on her legs and the baby is washed, After the washing mothers can touch the baby.
The Placenta is kept and fed to the child when is older especially if he/she is a bed wetter.
The Placenta is also used for medicine. It is washed and cut up and preserved for later use.

Babies are massaged in mustard oil on the body and fontanelle.
Newborn babies are given rice; if the baby likes it he/she has a long life, If not a short life.
It is traditional for all the community to see the baby as new mothers like lots of visitors.
When mothers return to the community, ground beef is mixed with herbs and other ingredients placed in leaves and distributed to all the neighbours and their families.
Babies wear black bangles and some use herbs for protection.



BURMA

Cambodia

Language spoken: Khmer, French, and English

Pregnancy:

During pregnancy, women avoid exposure to wind and wear warm clothes. Warm afternoon showers are preferred. Evening showers, especially if cold, are believed to make the baby fat and increase amniotic fluid in the womb.

Rubbing the lumbar spine while showering is thought to prevent membranes becoming too thick and preventing too much amniotic fluid.

Cambodian mothers believe that rising earlier than the husband and finishing meals before he does will ensure a quick and easy labour.

Resting too much during the pregnancy, other than a short sleep in the afternoon, may result in a long labour and a baby with a slow brain.

During labour:

The Cambodian Mothers prefer a female doctor, because delivery by a male doctor would be extremely embarrassing, as would removing clothes for medical examinations.

Preference is for a female relative in the delivery room, the husband does not attend the delivery.

After delivery:

Women who have just given birth must be kept very warm. Traditionally, post partum, the new mother lays on a bamboo bed with hot coals underneath for the first 3 days and a smaller fire for the next 15 days. This is thought to help damaged veins, muscle and skin.

The women should not shower for three days after the birth. A special herbal drink, with rice wine or hot water, is given to the mother for 51 days after the birth to clear blood from the womb.

In Australia, they may substitute brandy or whisky.

A head scarf and socks may be worn.

During this time the mother is treated as a special person and must not be alone in case of danger from evil spirits.

She needs to drink plenty of soup, to stimulate the milk. Ice and pepper ginger and garlic are believed to help also.

Culturally, it was considered dangerous to breast feed a new baby for three days. The length of the breastfeeding time varied with the sex of the child. Males are breast feed for two years, females for one.

Breastfeeding is thought by some mothers to make their baby strong, smart and obedient to the parents, but breastfeeding may be difficult because of competing school, job and/or household responsibilities. Babies may be fed rice soup as early as six weeks old.

Babies, usually from 8 to 10 months, may lose weight, as the new mothers do not introduce solids, with exception of rice soup until the baby is 12 months old.

The new mother usually does what she feels is right for the baby, such as feeding it on demand. Nappies are not used and babies are usually over dressed by Australian standards leading to the possibility of dehydration. (Australian Centre for International and Tropical Health at the University of Queensland).

Cambodia

China

Country: China

Language Spoken: Chinese, Mandarin, and Cantonese

Chinese Migrant Welfare Association women group kindly participated in this study.

During Pregnancy:

A pregnant woman should not touch dirty things and not go to dirty places; they should be getting rest and having good food.

During Delivery

Traditionally, husband will not be present during the birth
Chinese mothers prefer to give birth in a sitting or squatting position.
The women must not cry out or scream during labour.
The father does not play any role during the pregnancy.

During Delivery

The new mother rests for one month cared for by the family who provide hot food with plenty of meat, chicken, pork leg and ginger. During the period of confinement there are dietary and behavioural restrictions aimed at restoring the body heat which has been lost, For example, women should dress warmly, limit showers, and eat only hot foods.

Infant Feeding:

Customarily, babies are breastfed on demand and for as long as the baby wants; however, women from wealthy families often wet nurse or bottle-feed their babies.

The tradition has been that nutritious Chinese food was given when the baby could take solids. (S.Chan & C. W. Leong 1994)

There was more information available to mothers in Australia than in China during pregnancy and after the baby's birth.



China

Egypt

Language spoken: Arabic

Generally a new born baby in Egypt is a celebration, a blessing with pride and great joy. The Ceremony called "The Sebou" meaning the seventh is one of the oldest and most special celebrations. The family congregates a week after the birth of the baby of either a boy or girl. All families, Coptic or Muslim, rural or urban, rich or poor take part in 'The Sebou'.

During pregnancy:

It is desirable, in Egypt, for the first born to be a son.

Some families visit shrines or slaughter sheep when they know about a pregnancy for the well being of the mother.

If the mother is healthy and in good spirits during the pregnancy it is believed she will have a boy.

If the mother has rashes or redness they believe it is a girl

Around six months of pregnancy, the shape of her belly tells what the sex of the baby will be.

Perfectly round bellies indicate a boy while those that are not indicate a girl.

In the seventh month, the women's parents are in charge of preparing the clothes and other items for the baby. Usually seven sets of baby items are purchased as the number seven is a lucky number.

Also earrings, necklaces and bracelets of gold are bought for the girls. As well, Talisman, written prayer rolls that are sometimes placed in gold or silver cases decorated with precious stones are also bought for the baby for protection against the evil eye, bad spirits and diseases.

The family makes sure the other essentials like soaps, cleansing powder, herbal medicine, crystallised sugar (nabat) are placed in small white bags, made from silk if they have enough money to do so.

After the delivery of the baby, it is washed in warm water and dressed in a long white cotton dress.

A specially blessed safety pin with prayers is normally attached to the headgear to frighten the bad spirits.

On the seventh day, the Sebou celebration starts with the baby taking a bath and then getting dressed in a new outfit

Women cook all the lamb for the people to eat.

Salt is tossed on the mother and around the house to keep the evil eye away.

Then, the baby is placed in a decorated container and carried through the house followed by members of the family carrying candles.

During this ceremony, the mother steps over the baby seven times without touching it, while older women make loud noises to make the baby aware of sounds.

The grandparents shake the baby horizontally and give him orders to obey only their family.

Finally, after the meal, bags of candies, sweets, nougat, gold and silver coins are distributed to all attendees.

Egypt

Ghana

Country: Ghana

Language: English, Akan (Dialects), Gad, Ewe.

During Pregnancy

It is taboo to eat egg yolks, and fried plants.

During pregnancy, it is a cultural taboo to have wet dreams as this means danger to the foetus. If you have this type of dream, people believe that a bad spirit wants to destroy the foetus, Some mothers look for spiritual help from the church and/or witch doctors to prevent this happening

In Ghana hospitals don't usually provide ultrasounds to determine the sex of the baby. The new mothers believe more in cultural custom to determine the sex of the baby.

If your stomach spreads: it is a boy

If your stomach is prominent: it is a girl

If your feet are swollen: it is a boy

Care after the Delivery:

The new mother in Ghana believes that she has to wear white coloured clothing for three months after the delivery of the baby, because it is a healing colour for the body.

They believe also that God saves them from death during the delivery of the baby. After the delivery of the baby, the new mother sits for a period of time over a bucket of hot water with camphor in it. This is to heal any wounds inside the body, while cotton covers any wounds on the outside of the body.

A new mother eats good nutritional foods: soup, corn and plenty porridge.

Care of the baby

For Hiccups: any thread from the baby's clothes is put on his/her head to stop the hiccups. For choking, blow air on top of the baby's head.

Circumcision

It is a very important issue and should be done within the first 8 days after the delivery of the baby boy. The belief is that no one will marry him if he is not circumcised

The people who do the circumcision are called **Wanzam**.

The people who are not circumcised are call **Koteboto**, and it is a serious insult. Some times, if someone calls another person by that name, the person named has the right to sue the name caller in court and the accusation can be tested (i.e. whether the person is/is not circumcised)

Ghana women don't usually marry white men because they may not be circumcised.

If the new mother has a baby boy it is a celebration, and some people congratulate the mother for having a "Human Being".

There is no celebration if a new mother has a baby girl. A naming ceremony is usually performed 9 days after the baby's delivery.

Ghana mothers believe that babies can communicate with the dead because babies stare and make funny faces and smile into blank spaces.

When the mother's breast tingles, it is sure indication that the baby is awake or crying. To prevent the siblings to becoming jealous of the new baby, usually the grandmother gives the first bath to the baby, sitting down with the baby on her legs. Warm water is used to wash the baby and then is collected and used to bath the other children. It is the first spiritual bath for the baby.



Ghana



India

Country: India

Language Spoken: Hindi

Participants: Mother of two children

During the Pregnancy:

The father plays an important role of being supportive to his wife

A special party is celebrated for the expectant mother similar to the western baby shower.

Women eat healthy food only lentils, ghee, nuts and milk.

Care after Delivery:

On the sixth day of after baby's birth, we have a ceremony where the baby's aunty puts a black dot on the forehead of the baby to protect it from the evil eye.

Normally mothers stay in the house and cannot go into the kitchen for 12 days

A special lady comes to massage the mother and baby at home.

Women stay at home for two months.

The Ladakhi of Kashmir hides the birth of the boy for the first few years, dressing him like a girl to avoid the eye and jealousy of neighbours.

- After birth a special drink is made of spices, milk and fresh food given to keep the body warm, as after birth, the body cools down and mothers can become sick.

- Baby is breastfed.

- After 6 weeks the baby's hair is shaved off.

In Australia we receive more information than in India. Only advice from our relatives and parents is given to expectant mothers in India.

India

Iran

Language spoken: Persian also known as Farsi

Women's Experiences

It is customary among Iranians to compensate the woman with expensive gifts for the suffering she experiences during childbirth; the greater the suffering, the greater the gifts, especially if the child is a boy.

No one will know how much she is suffering if she does it in silence.

Prenatal Care depends on financial stability; family provides support and help.

During the pregnancy the mother is encouraged to have a balanced diet and rest adequately, she is to refrain from heavy work throughout pregnancy.

Labour Practices:

A midwife or doctor is present at childbirth. Walking before delivery is encouraged and Iranian women are generally agreeable to Lamaze classes. The fathers are involved and interested in the birthing experience during the delivery of the baby.

It is a common practice for mothers to take a shower soon after birth.

Women's manner/demeanour during labour depends on her personality, Some will moan and grunt during labour and others may get hysterical, Modesty remains a controlling factor when delivery occurs.

More cultural aware Iranian fathers now take an active role. Female family members are supportive and present.

Breast Feeding:

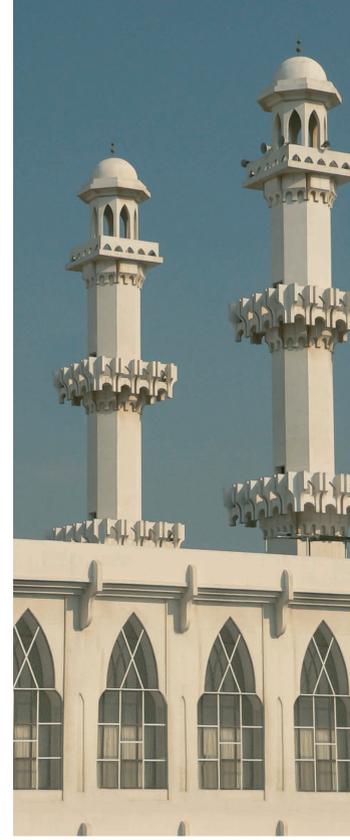
It is preferred over bottle feeding; Breast milk is mixed with solid food when the infant is about 4 to 6 months of age, New mothers avoid using pre-packaged baby food.

They generally do not mix breast and bottle feeding unless the mother works outside the home. They may continue to breast feed until the baby is one year old.

Rest, proper diet, hygiene and emotional ease are considered essential. Usually family and friends provide support and guidance in the care of a newborn.

Female circumcision is never performed.

Male circumcision is done either at the hospital soon after birth or at a later date. Male infants are always circumcised and in some families, the occasion is marked by a period of festivity. (Galanti, G.A. 2000).



Iran



Lebanon - North

Country: Lebanon

Language Spoken: Arabic

PARTICIPANTS

4 mothers from Lebanon

1 Muslim woman from Latin America married to a Lebanese man

1 Mother of 8 children under five

During the Pregnancy:

Husband helped during the pregnancy, especially with the chores at home.

During the Delivery:

Men are not present at the delivery in Lebanon. Usually a female relative will be the support for the mother. In Australia men will attend the delivery in some cases.

Care after Delivery:

The new mother has to rest for forty days at home eating nutritional food.

The baby's umbilical cord needs to be covered with white cotton band to be protected until it is dried.

In some cases they may use a coin to cover the umbilical cord with a white cotton band.

Islam prohibits the use of alcohol. Some Muslim patients may object to being prescribed medicines containing alcohol, for example: tonics or local antiseptic spirits for an infant's umbilical infection.

If it is a boy, the family offers two sheep to the poor people.

If it is a girl, the family have to offers one sheep to the poor people.

The baby's hair needs to be cut after 7 days.

It is a religious custom that the placenta of the baby should be buried underground after 3 days.

A male will perform a calling prayer (Azan), in the right ear of the baby, asking for the Blessing of God.

Babies often wear a gold or silver pendant with written scriptures of a prayer of the Koran. Sometimes this also has a blue bead attached.

Lebanon

Lebanon - South

Country: Lebanon

Language Spoken: Arabic

Mother of three children

Two children born overseas one born in Australia

Christian religion

During Pregnancy

Clothing and accessories for the baby are purchased before birth

The information overseas is different; they don't provide enough material about pregnancy and childbirth.

The father plays no role during the pregnancy.

In Lebanon medical information was not provided and doctors were not consulted.

Care and Delivery

A midwife supervises a normal delivery at home.

Cultural Rites

The child is blessed by the church

For forty days mothers do not socialise or leave the home.

Special foods are lentils, protein and wheat products to keep the mother healthy.

Mothers received lots of valuable information on how to look after themselves and the baby in Australia



Lebanon

Peru

Country: Peru

Language spoken: Spanish

Mother of Four children from Peru.

During the pregnancy mothers don't eat hot food, wear tight dresses or high heeled shoes.

The father doesn't play any role during the pregnancy.

Cultural Practices

Women eat hot hen soup to give them strength, red meat, food high in iron, liver, and lentils.

Malt blended with one egg or spoonfuls of sweet condensed milk gives the mother more milk to breastfeed the baby.

Cups of white tea to nurse the baby with more milk.

During the delivery no one is allowed in the delivery room except the doctor/midwife.

Sexual relations are forbidden from forty days after delivery.

"In Peru the only information I received was from my mother about the pregnancy."

Mother in law stated "I am happy to see my daughter in law treated well in Australia during the pregnancy and delivery, it's not the same in my country"



Peru

South America

Country: South America

Language spoken: Spanish

Mother of 2 children from Peru

During Pregnancy

A cultural tradition is that women always close their legs whenever possible so the baby's head does not become too big.

The father needs to provide for all the food cravings, for example, out of season fruit like mangoes in winter.

Because, most of the people are Catholic, women pray before the delivery to nearly all the Saints.

Typical food eaten during the pregnancy is raw fish.

Care after Delivery:

Culturally all baby boys are circumcised.

Before a baby is christened, he/she needs to wear a red band with a special seed called "guairuro" in the right hand to protect from the evil eye.

If the baby is scared or restless, mothers who believe in the 'eye' cure the baby with the following rites:

Women use a fresh egg and perform a prayer usually reciting the Holy Father for three times in the form of a cross.

The egg is then passed over the body of the baby praying three times in the form of the cross.

- The egg is put in a glass of water, if the egg has blood in the water they believe the baby is cured from the evil eye.

- The egg is then thrown into the toilet cursing the evil eye.

- Mothers like to stay warm as their temperature drops after delivery.

- Women stay at home for two weeks.

- Women eat pigeon soup to recover all their energy.

-No housework for 40 days, usually family members help.

-Women receive support from relatives in particular from mothers and sisters who provide advice.



South America



Somalia

Somalia

Country: Somalia

Language Spoken: Somali

Mother of one child

During Pregnancy

In Somalia the father does not play any role during the pregnancy.

Pregnant women eat normally unless told by the doctor to eat something different

During Delivery

In townships, mothers deliver their babies in a hospital; it is not common for husbands to be present.

In country regions midwives or other women help the mother to give birth and help with the postnatal care. Mother's circumcision is cut during the delivery and sewn together afterwards.

Midwives are very experienced especially in the area of home birth.

After the birth the women does not leave the house for 40 days - this is called Afatanbah.

Cultural Practice.

This includes preparing special foods such as soup, porridge, and special teas. During Afatanbah, the mother wears earrings made from string placed through a clove of garlic.

The baby wears a bracelet made from string and herbs to ward off the evil eye. Incense is burned twice a day to protect the baby from the ordinary smells of the world, which have the potential to make him or her sick.

At the end of the 40 days there is a celebration at the home of a friend or relative. The baby is given a name at birth. There is also a (second) naming ceremony for the child. In some families this occurs within the first 2-3 weeks of the baby's life. In other families, the naming ceremony is held at the same time as the celebration at the end of Afatanbah.

Breastfeeding is common for up to two years after birth in Somalia. Most mothers give colostrums. Some believe colostrums are not good and a supplement is given.

Rice and cows milk are given to six month old babies and then solid food. When the baby is awake, the mother will hold a small basin in her lap and then hold her baby in a sitting position over the basin at regular time intervals. In a short period of time infants are used to the potty.

Pigmentation occurs on newborns and is often misinterpreted as bruising. The spots disappear by three or four years of age.

Children under two who fall ill are often taken to a traditional healer who will remove a bad tooth with a knife. This practice cures them and is practiced on children who have diarrhoea as a result of teething.

Sudan

Sudanese Women

Languages spoken: Dinka, Equatorial and shuluk.

The Sudanese women's experiences of child rearing and childbirth while similar throughout Sudan, is significantly different in some instances, Sudanese women have the support of the family and friends in Sudan, but in Australia these support mechanisms are often not as strong.

Husbands did not attend the birth of their children in Sudan, as it was not a culturally appropriate practice or role for men to be at the delivery.

Most women receive help from family members after the birth of their baby with minimal assistance from the husband.

There is a common cultural practice in Sudan that for 40 days after the birth of the baby the mother will rest and be looked after by female members of the family. This assistance includes cooking, cleaning and looking after other children and guests.

Most husbands do not take an active role in child rearing while the baby is young, but take a more active role once the child is older by taking them to school, assisting with homework and discipline.

Nutrition and Child feeding patterns in the Sudan:

In the northern region of Sudan(Darfour and Kordofan), children's eating patterns depend on the availability of cereal staples such as millet.

Almost every mother in Sudan breastfeeds her baby, as traditionally breast feeding is the single most important protection for the infant.

Children can be breast feed until 21 months. Mothers tend to introduce children to a household diet without transitional weaning food at around 9 months. Mothers tend to withhold breast milk during illness.

During the pregnancy, mothers are prohibited from eating fattening food to keep the foetus small and to make for an easier delivery.



Sudan



Thailand

Thailand

Country: Thailand

Language spoken: Thai

Mother of two children one born in Thailand and the other born in Australia

During Pregnancy:

The Mother goes to the temple to pray for a safe pregnancy and delivery. The mother is not to eat too much chilli, but should eat a lot of vegetables and drink lots of water.

The father is involved with the home especially with the heavy housework.

Delivery:

Nobody is allowed in the delivery room, except the doctor/midwife.

After the delivery, women drink plenty of warm water, have a warm shower, and eat a lot of soup and have a lot of rest.

Women need to be at home for two weeks resting after the birth.

Religion & Culture:

Thai traditional belief is that the day of the child's birth will impact on his/her personality. For example, Monday and Friday are good for girls, Tuesday, Saturday and Sunday for boys, Wednesday should be avoided if possible for either boys or girls. Thursday is good for either gender. (Naksook & Rice 1999: 249).

Traditional Thai belief suggests that it is important to choose the person who cuts the umbilical cord, since the child will follow the personality and the virtues of that person (Naksook & Rice 1999:247).

Thai parents believe that the newborn head is the seat of the soul and should not be touched.

Other Information

The care and the information given to pregnant women in Australia are outstanding in comparison with Thailand.

Thai women receive more information about pregnancy, nutrition, and development of their unborn baby and a lot of care in the hospital for the mother. (Australia).

Vietnam

Language spoken: Vietnamese
Vietnamese Women

Some women are reluctant to feed colostrum to their babies, believing it to be bad for the baby.

Women prefer to be attended by females during the birth of the baby.

Mothers are concerned when babies breastfeed slowly.

Traditionally, babies were given rice water or thin gruel as a supplement after the first month.

Solids such as rice flavoured with minced pork and vegetables and condiments such as soy sauce, salt and sugar are introduced. To the baby at four months. Cooked vegetables and some fruit like bananas, apple, and pears are given from 3 to 4 month.

Lemon and sour fruit like, pineapple is avoided.

Orange juice may be given to prevent constipation.

When the child is sick, the first recourse may be to a folk or family remedy. A common remedy is rubbing the location of the illness (chest, forehead, and neck stomach) with a spoon or coin and some unguent. Such as Tiger Balm or heating oil until bruising results.

This kind of cure is called cao gio rubbing the bad wind. It is reputed to work by getting rid of the wind (GIO OR PHONG) which causes the cold, sore throat, stomach or back pain or headache. This action can be mistaken for child abuse as the marks caused by cao gio are in straight lines usually on the forehead, neck, back, arm or chest.



Vietnam



Islam

The Status of Children in Islam

Children are valued and respected in Islam as individuals with inherent rights, The Prophet Mohammed stated: “ A child has three rights over his fathers, First, that he gives him a good name, second, that he teaches him reading and writing, and third, that he finds him a good spouse”.

Birth:

In Islam there is no preference for a boy over a girl, contrary to the customs of some Muslim countries. The sexes are seen as spiritually equal and equally valuable.

Postnatal ceremonies and customs: there are many customs associated with the birth of a child, the majority of which are not mandatory by religion and in some cases, may be discouraged or prohibited. Women rest for forty days before they continue sexual relations with their husband.

The following are Islamic customs, none of which are mandatory, Shortly after birth, the calls to prayer are whispered into the ears of the child. On the seventh day, in addition to circumcision (for boys), a sheep is slaughtered with the meat distributed to the needy (done for boys and girls)

The head is shaved with the weight of the hair given in silver or gold as alms to the poor (done for boys and girls).

Circumcision is an obligatory issue for the boys, and it is preferable for it to be performed on or after the seventh day of life.

Analgesia and all safety methods available should be used. Circumcision can be contradicted if the baby is known to have a bleeding disorder. It should not be performed at any time.

Islam is the only religion in which breastfeeding is addressed in the sacred Scripture. “And the mothers should suckle their children for two whole years for him who desires to make complete the time suckling ...”

(Hedayat, K.M. & Pirzadeh, R.)

CALD Grandparents

The group of grandparents as carers who meet at Merrylands agreed to contribute information for this study.

In South America the midwife is called “Comadrona” it is the name for an unqualified midwife who usually works in the country areas of places such as Peru, Uruguay, Colombia, Argentina, or Chile.

“Partera” or “Obstetric” is the name for the qualified Midwife.

Usually in the countryside of South America, the person that delivers the baby is not professional but people like them delivered babies for centuries.

During pregnancies: to prevent the breast to become infected, they need to massage with the breasts with oil and need to wash the breasts every night, this will prepare them when the baby is delivered and it will be easier for the baby to suckle. (Grandmother from Chile)

During pregnancy to prevent the skin breaking down, the stomach is massaged in oils so the skin will be more flexible and prevent the cracking. (Grandmother's from Colombia).

Also some use cacao cream to prevent (astrillas) stretch marks (Grandmothers from Uruguay).

Women are recommended to have good nutritional meals, but because of their economic status this is sometimes not possible.

Now, in South America, some governments have created a Health Centre where they provide food for new mothers.

During the last forty years the fathers were not involved during the pregnancy, but times have changed for the better and some fathers are now involved especially at home (doing heavy lifting chores) (Grandmother from Chile).

Some grandmothers used to talk to their baby during the pregnancy because they believed the unborn child can hear and feel everything.

Some husbands are more involved during the pregnancy than others. In Uruguay the fathers there are not usually involved (statement from Uruguay grandmother)

Some believe that the babies come because the women want them.

For some fathers, it is important to have children around but they are not interested in being involved during the pregnancy.

In South America, some mothers believe that the husbands can suffer from morning sickness, stomach upsets, vomiting, and tiredness.

All the symptoms disappear after the delivery of the baby. (Grandmother from Chile)

Some grandmothers appreciate the help that the new mothers receive in Australia.

They like the information that new mothers receive and the fact that husbands are encouraged to be involved at delivery. In some countries in South America until recently, the husband was not permitted to be in the delivery room. (Grandmother from Peru).

Twenty years ago, some fathers had to wait three days before they knew about the baby. This was hospital policy. (Grandmother from Chile).



Grandparents

CALD Grandparents



In some hospitals in Chile, before you can go to the maternity ward, one of the visitors has to donate blood before they are allowed to see the baby, this rule can also apply to anyone who is hospitalised (Grandmother from Chile).

Every month the expectant mothers need to go for check up to measure the weight, height, and the heart rate of the foetus (unborn baby).

In Peru, the grandmothers don't recommend that the new mothers take a shower just before the delivery of the baby, because there have been some incidents where the mothers delivered the baby in the shower and the babies die because of the injuries received in the impact with the floor.

Forty years ago, in South America, before the mother went to the delivery room, the midwife used to give them an enema. They believed the new mother needed to have their stomach cleaned out before the delivery of the baby.

In some countries in South America, the new mothers have a shower immediately after the delivery. The nurses provide a sponge bath for the mothers that deliver the baby by Caesarean. (Grandmother from Uruguay)

Story from a Midwife from the countryside of Uruguay in practice for 40 yrs. "When it is a difficult delivery and the baby is at risk they perform force in the delivery, they fractured the collar bone of the baby and pull with force. Now they don't practise this procedure anymore, they prefer to perform Caesarean."

Some grandmothers declared that their mother always advised them not to have a shower for 45 days after delivery. This is a cultural belief.

Story of a Grandmother from Chile who had a, negative experience at the age of 17 years old with her first baby.

It was not common for mothers to give advice to their daughters about pregnancy.

"I was left alone in the maternity ward because the staff were having a lunch break and nearly delivered my baby in a breach position by myself".

In Peru when the baby is in a breach position usually the Comadrona "or midwife, massages in the mother's stomach to try and turn the baby to save the mother from having a Caesarean.

In Australia, breach babies are not usually turned around during the pregnancy and babies are delivered by caesarean.

After the delivery of the baby the new mother needs to relax for 40 days, and eat a nutritional soup (hen soup), the baby is not allowed to go outside of the house for the first month.

In some parts of Peru, some mothers cover their head with white cotton rags after they deliver the baby. (Peruvian Grandmother experiences 1940).

Conclusion

“In Australia only my husband and I opened the door of the house and celebrated. No one celebrated with us, there was no cooked food, no happiness around us”

(Down & Palacios 2006)

This study identifies that the Australian Health system could be more sensitive and understanding of the traditional birthing practices of CALD communities to relieve the stress experienced by these women, who may feel isolated and separated from their own values. This of course, must be balanced against the medical expertise that our doctors and hospital provide. More training could be provided to increase their understanding of those issues.

These stories of CALD women show their experiences in regard to childbirth.



Special Thanks

Special Thanks for their contribution

Australian Chinese Association

CALD Grandparents caring for grandchildren

Mothers from the following countries;

Afghanistan
Burmese
Cambodia
China
Egypt
Ghana
India
Iran
Lebanon (North & South)
Peru and South America
Somalia
Sudan
Thailand
Vietnam



Cultural
Birthing Practices
and
Experiences



Norma Boules

CALD Family support worker
BHHP Migrant Resource Centre



**Baulkham Hills Holroyd Parramatta
Migrant Resource Centre**



**Early Intervention and
Perinatal Project**



Cultural Birthing Practices and Experiences

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