

Beliefs and Practices of Tribal Pregnant Women toward Foods in Alipurduar District of Eastern India

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Abstract

Objectives: A cross-sectional descriptive and community-based research was done in Alipurduar district of West Bengal to assess the existing beliefs and practices toward the foods during pregnancy. **Methodology:** A total of 170 respondents were selected randomly from Alipurduar district. The data were collected by the researcher with the help of pre-structure interview schedule. The collected data were arranged, analyzed, and interpreted to draw the conclusion. **Results and Discussion:** The study inferred that majority of the respondents (55.30%) from Alipurduar beliefs fully on eating papaya may cause a miscarriage, so it should be avoided and 58.82% of respondents were fully beliefs on taking milk with saffron, as saffron makes the baby fair skinned, whereas pomegranate and red apple may cause a baby of very bright and good complexion. **Conclusion:** Majority of the respondents (73.53%) have beliefs on prayer for preventing complications and for safe delivery. Mass awareness and preventive program about common prevalent diseases should be planned and launched in a location-specific manner in tribal areas. Proper coordination among the health workers and information, education, and communication activists of various institutional departments and disciplines are to be needed to create more effective awareness level among the tribal community for a real participatory development as mentioned in the Constitution of India.

Key words: Beliefs, Foods, Practices, Taboos, Tribal community, Tribal pregnant women

INTRODUCTION

Beliefs and taboos prevalence during pregnancy among the respondents – the restrictions imposed on people forces them to abstain from certain food and drinking items as these things are embedded into the cultural and religious threads. These taboos are a set of rules and regulations which allow us to eat or avoid certain kind of eatable or drinking items (Mintz and Du Bois, 2002). It is also seen that, due to some other kinds of health problems, people tend to follow certain rules, which are more such as restrictions on food intake and its types (Buruiana, 2003). Indian food taboos are mostly religion and to some extent

certain community based. The traditional knowledge and wisdom, as it prevails in Alipurduar region of northern part of West Bengal, the unique social ecology they are thriving with and with the relative socioeconomic capacities they are accessing to social and institutional functions are to be cited as a precedential one in comparison to other homogeneous parts of India passing through faster urbanization process on the remnants of land-based agrarian ethnic-ecology in the name of ‘development’ followed by huge deforestation. Since the geospatial distribution on nutrition ecology economy has characterized the general health status of pregnant women, the present study envisages to extract critical factors operationally elucidate this disparaging levels, as is an axiom in this study, in the status of nutrition of pregnant women being spatially distributed two different social ecologies of Eastern India. The tribal people have a strong belief that the supernatural being may bring any diseases to them if it agrees with their day-to-day activities. Wrath of the local deities and intrusion of evil spirit is considered as important reasons for various illnesses. As per their perception, some religious beliefs

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such as mythological, supernatural, or spiritual aspects of a religion are the causes of illness. Indigenous people perhaps everywhere consider ritual remedies for diseases caused by supernatural agents, and counter magic for those caused by witchcraft and sorcery practices (Bailey, 2001).

METHODOLOGY

A community-based, cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted in Alipurduar district of West Bengal which was selected purposively to assess the existing beliefs and practices toward the foods during pregnancy. A total of 170 respondents from Alipurduar district were selected randomly. The data were collected by the researcher herself with the help of pre-structured interview schedule. The collected data were arranged, analyzed, and interpreted to draw the logical conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Distribution and pattern of sociocultural beliefs with practices during pregnancy among the respondents are shown in Table 1, total seven points were included by the researcher as “eating papaya may cause a miscarriage; so it should be avoided,” “eating pineapples may cause more than two eyes of the baby,” “taking milk with saffron (Saffron makes the baby fair skinned), pomegranate, and red apple may cause a baby of very bright and good complexion,” “prayer for preventing complications and for safe delivery,” “eating ghee is important because it will make the delivery easy,” “food and water restriction in public to prevent the evil looks,” and “jackfruits and sesame seed (*til* seeds) can cause an abortion.” The points in regard to “practices” against each “belief” points were followed one after another.

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents by the pattern of sociocultural beliefs and practices during pregnancy

Pattern and type of beliefs and practices		Up to what extent	Frequency	Percentage
Beliefs	Eating papaya may cause a miscarriage, so it should be avoided	Fully	94	55.30
		Partially	55	32.35
		Not at all	21	12.35
Practices	Papaya is avoided	Fully	72	42.35
		Partially	47	27.65
		Not at all	51	30.00
Beliefs	Eating pineapples may cause more than two eyes of the baby	Fully	26	15.29
		Partially	61	35.88
		Not at all	83	48.82
Practices	Pineapples are prohibited during pregnancy	Fully	21	12.35
		Partially	58	34.12
		Not at all	91	53.53
Beliefs	Taking milk with saffron (saffron makes the baby fair skinned), pomegranate, and red apple may cause a baby of very bright and good complexion	Fully	103	60.59
		Partially	48	28.23
		Not at all	19	11.18
Practices	Milk with saffron, pomegranate, and red apple are consumed	Fully	07	04.12
		Partially	94	55.29
		Not at all	69	40.59
Beliefs	Prayer for preventing complications and for safe delivery	Fully	125	73.53
		Partially	25	14.70
		Not at all	20	11.77
Practices	Prayer for the same	Fully	52	30.59
		Partially	77	45.29
		Not at all	41	24.12
Beliefs	Eating ghee is important because it will make the delivery easy	Fully	19	11.18
		Partially	54	31.76
		Not at all	97	57.06
Practices	Ghee is consumed during pregnancy	Fully	15	08.82
		Partially	54	31.76
		Not at all	101	59.41
Beliefs	Jackfruits and sesame seed (<i>til</i> seeds) can cause an abortion	Fully	12	7.06
		Partially	65	38.23
		Not at all	93	54.71
Practices	Jackfruits and sesame seed (<i>til</i> seeds) are avoided	Fully	07	04.12
		Partially	34	20
		Not at all	129	75.88

Table 2: Correlation matrix of Alipurduar district (education and various beliefs)

Variables	Correlation
Education Papaya is avoided	$r=-0.798$
Education Jack fruits are avoided during pregnancy	$r=0.860$
Education Cold foods are avoided	$r=-0.814$
Education Tea is avoided	$r=0.987$
Education Milk with saffron, pomegranate, and red apple are consumed	$r=-0.963$
Education Prayed to prevent any complications	$r=-0.117$
Education Some religious artifacts	$r=0.882$

Table 2 shows the correlation coefficient between education level and various beliefs in Alipurduar districts. The correlation between education level and variables such as “papaya is avoided” (-0.798), “cold foods are avoided” (-0.814), and “milk with saffron, pomegranate, and red apple are consumed” (-0.963) is negatively correlated and the correlation was observed highly negative. Whereas the correlation coefficient between education level and variables such as “prayed to prevent any complications” (-0.117) is also negatively correlated, but the correlation was found to be a low one.

The correlation between education level and various beliefs such as “jack fruits are avoided during pregnancy” (0.860), “tea is avoided” (0.987), and “some religious artifacts” (0.882) was observed to be high positive correlation.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that majority of the respondent beliefs on taking milk with saffron, pomegranate, and red apple may cause a baby of very bright and good complexion. Another important food taboos such as “eating papaya” may cause the miscarriage and believing on that taking papaya was avoided by more than half of the respondents. The correlation between education level and various beliefs such as “jack fruits are avoided during pregnancy,” “tea is avoided during pregnancy,” and also some religious artifacts

was observed to be high positive correlation. A tremendous lack of interdepartmental coordination was found in the community development process, particularly in health and family welfare, nutrition supplementation, as well as mother and child care are to be addressed to create more effective awareness level among the tribal community for a real participatory development of Indian Tribes as mentioned in the Constitution of India. Mass awareness and preventive program should be planned and launched in a location-specific manner in tribal areas.

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