



Research Article

TABOOS AND MISCONCEPTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH PREGNANCY AMONG RURAL WOMEN IN ALIGARH

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Food taboos are widely prevalent in India as well as in other countries. In spite of the presence of nutritional foods, pregnant women are forced to abstain from it as a part of their traditional food habits. The main reasons given by the mothers to avoid certain foods include fear of difficult labour as a result of big babies, fear of abortions and discoloration of the fetal body. Both beneficial as well as harmful customs have to be identified. Certain foods are considered as hot and some as cold. Hot foods are considered abortifacient and cold foods, orange, curd are not taken during pregnancy for the fear of having bad effect on the fetus.

Material and Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted during June –July in 2014 in the rural areas of registered villages of Rural Health Training Centre of the Department of Community Medicine, Aligarh. The study population comprised of married females above 18 years of age who had ever been pregnant. Informed consent was taken from each participant. A total of 100 females were selected for the study. Questionnaires were prepared for the study. Data was collected and analyzed using SPSS software.

Results: Most of the females under study had misconceptions or taboos. 94 females thought that eclipse may lead to congenital defects. So pregnant females should stay inside during eclipse. 68 females avoid some kind of food during pregnancy. 49 females thought that shape of the face, abdomen or built can predict sex of the baby. Out of 100 females under study, 78 females avoid papaya, 43 avoid fish, 33 avoid *badi* food (which cause gas in stomach), 27 avoid citrus foods, 18 avoid groundnuts and 8 avoid tea or brinjal. The reasons of avoiding some specific foods are abortion, placental disruption, itching and seizures or difficult labour.

Conclusion: Nutrition education and awareness generation among women is needed. Taboos/misconceptions could be removed by health education, especially by community health workers.

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INTRODUCTION

Food taboos are widely prevalent in India as well as in other countries. They can cause undernutrition in pregnancy (Oni et al., 2012). In spite of the presence of nutritional foods, pregnant women are forced to abstain from it as a part of their traditional food habits (Santos-Torres et al., 2003; Hartini et al., 2005; Ankita et al., 2013; Manderson et al., 1981; Mitchellm 1995). Milk, eggs and goat meat are the major food items prohibited during pregnancy in most parts of Nigeria (Food, 1972). The main reasons given by the mothers to avoid certain foods include fear of difficult labour as a result of big babies, fear of abortions and discoloration of the fetal body (Leslie et al., 1998; Sood et al., 1984).

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In planning community health programmes, the customs, beliefs and family influences have to be given importance (Hazel et al., 2006). Both beneficial as well as harmful customs have to be identified (Selepe et al., 2000). The existence of beliefs of denying pregnant and lactating women of known nutritious foods is because of traditional food habits (Abu-Saad et al., 2010; Bang, 2009). Certain foods are considered as hot and some as cold. Hot foods are considered abortifacient and cold foods, orange, curd are not taken during pregnancy for the fear of having bad effect on the fetus (Grewal et al., 2008).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross-sectional study was conducted during June –July in 2014 in the rural areas of registered villages of Rural Health Training Centre of the Department of Community Medicine,

Aligarh. The study population comprised of married females above 18 years of age who had ever been pregnant. Informed consent was taken from each participant. A total of 100 females were selected for the study. Questionnaires were prepared for the study. Data was collected and analyzed using SPSS software. The aim of this study was to find out the taboos and misconceptions associated with pregnancy in rural areas of Aligarh.

RESULTS

Table 1. Different Taboos/Misconceptions Present in the Study Population

(N=100)	
Taboos/misconceptions	No.
Shape of the face, abdomen or built can predict gender of the baby	49
Avoidance of some foods during pregnancy	68
Consumption of saffron results in fairer skin of the baby	29
Pregnant woman should take total bed rest	6
Staying indoor during eclipse because it may lead to congenital defects	94

Table 2. Foods avoided during pregnancy and the reasons for not consuming such foods

(n=100)	
FOODS AVOIDED	No.
PAPAYA	78
FISH	43
GROUNDNUT	18
BADI FOOD	33
CITRUS FOODS	27
BRINJAL, TEA	8

Table 3. Reasons for not consuming foods

(n=100)	
REASONS	NO.
ABORTION	68
PLACENTAL DISRUPTION	43
ITCHING	16
DIFFICULT LABOUR, OVERWEIGHT, SEIZURES	23

Table 4. Source of Information Regarding Food Intake During Pregnancy

(N=100)	
SOURCES	NO.
MOTHER	54
MOTHER-IN-LAW	68
GRANDMOTHER	24
NEIGHBOUR/FRIENDS/OTHERS	13

As shown in Table-1, most of the females under study had misconceptions or taboos. 94 females thought that eclipse may lead to congenital defects. So pregnant females should stay inside during eclipse. 68 females avoid some kind of food during pregnancy. 49 females thought that shape of the face, abdomen or built can predict sex of the baby. 29 females thought that intake of saffron results in fairer skin of baby. As shown in Table-2, out of 100 females under study, 78 females avoid papaya, 43 avoid fish, 33 avoid *badi* food (which cause gas in stomach), 27 avoid citrus foods, 18 avoid groundnuts and 8 avoid tea or brinjal. Table-3 shows the reasons of avoiding some specific foods are abortion (given by 68 females under study), placental disruption (given by 43 females), itching (16 females under study gave this reason) and seizures or difficult labour or overweight (23 females).

As shown in Table-4, source of information regarding food intake during pregnancy was given by mainly mother-in law (68%), mothers (54%), grandmothers (24%) and neighbours or friends or others (13%).

DISCUSSION

Most of the females under our study had misconceptions or taboos. 94 females thought that eclipse may lead to congenital defects. So pregnant females should stay inside during eclipse. 68 females avoid some kind of food during pregnancy. 49 females thought that shape of the face, abdomen or built can predict sex of the baby. 29 females thought that intake of saffron results in fairer skin of baby. 78 females avoid papaya, 43 avoid fish, 33 avoid *badi* food (which cause gas in stomach), 27 avoid citrus foods, 18 avoid groundnuts and 8 avoid tea or brinjal. The reasons of avoiding some specific foods are abortion (given by 68 females under study), placental disruption (given by 43 females), itching (16 females under study gave this reason) and seizures or difficult labour or overweight (23 females). A similar study was done in Surendranagar district (15). Most common foods avoided were papaya (53.5%), citrus food (24.7%) and groundnut (13.6%). Another similar study was conducted in Tamil Nadu (16) in which 82% women avoided papaya during pregnancy. In another study (Puri *et al.*, 2006), it was reported that 16.5% women believed that papaya can cause abortion. Milk, green vegetables and fruits were the most commonly mentioned best food items during pregnancy in a study conducted in Bihar (Piaseeki *et al.*, 2014). Another study revealed very restricted diet immediately following the delivery to dry out the uterus (Ramakrishnan *et al.*, 2012). Another study (Kameswar *et al.*, 2016) reported restriction of cold water for drinking in pregnancy, restriction of papaya fruit. Fish, papaya, green leafy vegetables and green dal was restricted by rural mothers.

Fish may cause pruritis. Green leafy vegetables were restricted for the loose of motions in the child. Antenatally, food quantity is reduced by rural women for fear of obstructed labour by big baby. Rural mothers consumed special foods like Kayam (78%) and fried jeera (60%). All pregnant women stay indoors during eclipses for the fear of ultra-violet irradiation causing congenital defects in the children. Another study (21) in Lahore reported 84% of women during pregnancy and lactation avoid foods like beef, eggs, brinjal, fish, citrus foods. In another study (Rajkumar *et al.*, 2010), more than 60% of respondents told that some vegetables/fruits should be avoided during pregnancy. The most common reason for restriction of specified fruits/vegetables was abortion. In this study, more than 80% people believed that papaya should not be consumed. Misconception about saffron that it would cause the skin of child fairer was present in this study. Papaya is considered to be hot and it is thought that it may cause abortion. Cold foods are avoided during lactation as it may affect the quality and quantity of milk production (Mukhi, 1990). In Sudan (Jellif, 1986), avoidance of meat and fish is there during pregnancy. In Tamil Nadu, buffalo milk is avoided. Melon, sugarcane and long bananas are avoided in Vietnam during pregnancy. Fish, curd, grapes, pineapples, mangoes, coconut are avoided in India. According to Rao (Meera, 1995), in a diet survey of 68 pregnant women in 3 villages of Karnataka, 30 refused to indicate the specific amount of food eaten by them during the last 24 hours as it

could have adverse effect on their nutrition. Most mothers believed in another study (Nisha *et al.*, 2015), that saffron would give a fairer child and ragi or sesame would result in darker child. Eggs were tabooed to increase ear discharge and cause alopecia, hence avoided by few mothers during pregnancy. According to the mothers the food practices and beliefs had always been decided by the elders in their family and they had to follow it. Fish was not given after delivery because fish bone may pass through mothers breast milk and may obstruct the baby throat.

Conclusion

Nutrition education and awareness generation among women is needed. Taboos/misconceptions could be removed by health education, especially by community health workers. Literacy can remove these misconceptions. Large studies should be conducted in the community to assess the picture.

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