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THE IMPACT OF PREGNANCY MYTHS ON THE HEALTH OF THE MOTHER AND FETAL

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ABSTRAK : DAMPAK MITOS KEHAMILAN TERHADAP KESEHATAN IBU DAN JANIN

Latar Belakang: Kebudayaan di Indonesia memiliki nilai yang sejalan dengan kehidupan masyarakat, yaitu nilai religius, nilai toleransi, dan nilai peduli sosial. Faktor-faktor sosial budaya khususnya mitos-mitos yang masih berlaku di suatu daerah tertentu merupakan salah satu penyebab komplikasi ibu hamil, bersalin dan nifas. Mitos – mitos tentang kehamilan telah masuk ke dalam kepercayaan tradisional. Ada beberapa kesalah pahaman yang menjadikan ibu hamil merasa tenang secara psikologis, tetapi banyak juga yang dapat menimbulkan masalah kesehatan untuk ibu hamil.

Tujuan: Menganalisis banyaknya mitos tentang kehamilan yang masih beredar di masyarakat dan memiliki dampak untuk kesehatan ibu dan janin.

Metode: Penelitian ini merupakan pendekatan kualitatif dan tinjauan pustaka, penelitian ini meneliti berbagai sumber ilmiah yang berkaitan dengan kesalahpahaman tentang mitos kehamilan dan dampaknya terhadap kesehatan.

Hasil: Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa beberapa mitos terkait dengan pantangan makanan, menentukan jenis kelamin bayi serta aktivitas fisik yang masih banyak diyakini oleh masyarakat tanpa memiliki dasar ilmiah.

Kesimpulan: Beberapa Mitos dapat menghambat ibu hamil dalam memenuhi kebutuhan nutrisi dan mengakses layanan kesehatan yang dibutuhkan.

Saran: Edukasi berbasis bukti ilmiah sangat dibutuhkan untuk menangkai mitos yang memiliki risiko.

Kata Kunci: Edukasi Kesehatan; Kesehatan Ibu dan Janin; Mitos Kehamilan

ABSTRACT

Background: Indonesian culture has values that align with the lives of its people, namely religious values, tolerance, and social care. Socio-cultural factors, especially myths that still prevail in certain regions, are one of the causes of complications in pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum. Myths about pregnancy have entered traditional beliefs. There are several misconceptions that make pregnant women feel psychologically calm, but many can also cause health problems for pregnant women.

Purpose: To analyze the many myths about pregnancy that are still circulating in society and have an impact on the health of the mother and fetus.

Methods: This study is a qualitative approach and literature review, this study examines various scientific sources related to misunderstandings about pregnancy myths and their impact on health.

Results: This study shows that several myths related to food taboos, determining the sex of the baby and physical activity are still widely believed by the public without any scientific basis.

Conclusion: Some myths can hinder pregnant women from meeting their nutritional needs and accessing the necessary health services.

Suggestions: Evidence-based education is essential to dispel myths that carry risks.

Keywords: Health Education; Maternal and Fetal Health; Pregnancy Myths

INTRODUCTION

Pregnancy is a crucial phase in a woman's life, during which significant changes occur across physical, psychological, and social aspects. Physical

changes include fetal growth, weight gain, and hormonal changes that can impact a pregnant woman's health (Novitasari et al., 2019). Furthermore, psychologically, pregnant women often

experience mood swings, anxiety, and even stress, which can impact their emotional well-being (Ratnawati, 2015). Socially, pregnancy also brings changes in interactions with the surrounding environment, including roles within the family and support received from partners and the community (Mubasyaroh, 2016). During this period, maternal health has a significant impact on fetal development. A healthy pregnancy and a safe delivery largely depend on factors such as physical activity, dietary intake, and regular health monitoring through prenatal checkups. Therefore, to reduce the risk of problems during pregnancy and delivery, the best prenatal care is crucial.

However, social and cultural factors within society also impact the health of pregnant women and their fetuses, in addition to medical and biological factors. Pregnancy myths are part of traditional beliefs that have developed in various cultures and been passed down from generation to generation (Fauziah, 2015).

These beliefs are often considered guidelines for maintaining maternal and fetal health, although they are not always scientifically based. For example, in some cultures, there are certain food taboos believed to be harmful to the fetus, even though medically these foods actually have health benefits for both mother and baby. Furthermore, some traditions require pregnant women to avoid certain activities that actually have a positive impact on physical fitness and childbirth readiness (Ririn et al., 2022).

In some cases, pregnancy myths can have positive effects, particularly psychologically. Traditional beliefs can provide a sense of security and comfort for pregnant women, thereby reducing anxiety during pregnancy (Mutmaina, 2022). Furthermore, some myths can encourage indirectly beneficial behaviors, such as encouraging plenty of rest or maintaining a balanced diet, even though the reasons behind them may not be based on medical evidence (Nisak, 2019).

However, not all myths are positive. Many pregnancy myths actually pose risks to pregnant women, especially if they hinder their ability to meet nutritional needs or access adequate healthcare (Dafiu et al., 2017). For example, some cultures discourage pregnant women from consuming nutritious foods like fish or eggs because they are believed to have negative effects on the fetus, even though these foods contain protein and essential

nutrients needed during pregnancy. Furthermore, some myths discourage pregnant women from engaging in light physical activity like walking, even though appropriate exercise can help improve fitness and prepare the body for labor.

Belief in these unfounded myths can lead pregnant women to experience malnutrition, excessive stress, or even delay routine medical checkups. Therefore, evidence-based education is crucial in countering these potentially harmful myths. Correct and accurate information must be delivered in an appropriate manner, so the public can understand which beliefs are beneficial and which should be abandoned. This way, clarifying pregnancy myths can be done without neglecting the cultural aspects that have become part of a community's identity.

Given this phenomenon, this study aims to analyze various myths surrounding pregnancy that persist in society and examine their impact on maternal and fetal health. This research is expected to contribute to the development of more effective health education tactics by explaining how these beliefs influence the attitudes and actions of pregnant women. Furthermore, health professionals should use the findings of this study as a guide to addressing public perceptions of pregnancy myths to maintain safe, evidence-based medical practices.

RESEARCH METHODODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method to analyze various myths surrounding pregnancy and their impact on maternal and fetal health. This literature review was chosen because it allows for in-depth exploration of various scientific sources (Norman & Pahlawati, 2024). This approach aims to collect, review, and synthesize information from various previous studies to gain a comprehensive understanding of pregnancy myths across cultures and how these beliefs can influence maternal behavior and health. Data for this study were collected through a literature search of various academic databases relevant to the topic of pregnancy myths. The literature sources used were selected based on certain criteria, such as relevance to the research theme, recent publications (at least five to ten years), and academic validity. Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive approach, where various findings in the collected literature were classified based on specific themes, such as the type of myth, its impact on the mother

and fetus, and medical and educational efforts to counter misinformation. Furthermore, this method also allows for comparison of various perspectives, both from medical and cultural perspectives, thus providing a more holistic understanding in addressing this phenomenon.

RESEARCH RESULT

From the results of a literature study conducted by researchers, 5 studies were found related to the impact of myths on maternal and fetal health.

Based on research by Ashriady et al. (2022), several myths and taboos related to pregnancy are still believed by coastal communities in Mamuju Regency. Some food taboos include avoiding the consumption of animal proteins such as squid, shrimp, and octopus because they are believed to cause the baby to be born without bones or have difficulty delivering the placenta. Crab is also prohibited because it is feared that the child will like to bite and develop red spots on the body. In addition, there are also taboos on fruits such as pineapple, durian, and unripe papaya, which are thought to cause miscarriage, oranges are believed to cause amniotic fluid leakage, and tomatoes are thought to make the baby's head soft. There are also myths related to behavior, where pregnant women are not allowed to leave the house at night for fear of being disturbed by spirits. These myths can have negative impacts by limiting the intake of essential nutrients for the mother and fetus, and can hinder access to adequate healthcare if pregnant women believe the myths more than medical advice.

Based on research by Ariandini et al. (2024), this study does not specifically describe the existing myths; in general, they are related to the daily behavior of pregnant women. For example, there is a belief that pregnant women are encouraged to carry scissors or other sharp objects in their underwear to protect themselves and their fetuses from harm. The impact of these myths can vary. If these myths lead to restrictions on nutritious food consumption, they can lead to malnutrition in pregnant women and potentially affect fetal growth and development. On the other hand, if myths provide psychological support and a sense of security for pregnant women, this can help reduce stress. However, regardless of their positive or negative impacts, this article emphasizes the importance of educating the public about circulating

myths and their impact on maternal and child health, so that pregnant women receive accurate information.

In a study by Siregar et al. (2023), several pregnancy myths are still believed in the Acehnese community, particularly in the Teupah Selatan Community Health Center (Puskesmas) area. One of these is the taboo of announcing a pregnancy before three months, even to health workers. Furthermore, there is a myth that mothers are not advised to eat bananas that grow close together because it is feared that the babies will be born with twins. Another myth believed is that women in early pregnancy (1-3 months) should not leave the house. People also have a habit of massaging their stomachs to ensure a good fetal position. The impact of these myths can be detrimental to the health of both mothers and fetuses. For example, the taboo on leaving the house hinders access to first-trimester prenatal care (ANC). The habit of massaging the stomach carries the risk of complications for both the fetus and the mother. Furthermore, misperceptions about genitals and a culture of shame make some women reluctant to seek prenatal care because they have to reveal private areas to health workers. This can reduce ANC coverage and risk increasing the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR).

Based on Retnoningrum et al. (2024), this study focuses on beliefs about myths and their relationship to prenatal care. Although this article does not detail the specific myths believed by the local community, the results show that beliefs in myths are significantly associated with low frequency of prenatal care (ANC). This means that pregnant women who believe in myths tend to have fewer prenatal care check-ups as recommended by health workers, which is less than four times during pregnancy. The impact is that pregnant women who believe in myths are at risk of not receiving adequate information and health services during pregnancy. In fact, prenatal care is important for early detection of potential health problems in the mother and fetus, as well as providing appropriate interventions. Lack of prenatal care can increase the risk of complications during pregnancy and childbirth, and negatively impact fetal health. This article concludes that beliefs in myths that hinder prenatal care in early pregnancy are factors that influence mothers' awareness of their pregnancy check-ups.

Based on research by Astianti et al. (2023), this study highlights the culture of "pamali" or taboos

that are still strongly believed by the Ammatoa Kajang Indigenous People in Bulukumba Regency regarding pregnancy. Some examples of these taboos include: husbands are prohibited from torturing and killing animals in the forest, where people believe that this action can cause defects in the unborn baby; pregnant women are not allowed to sit in front of the door, because it is considered to complicate labor because the baby's head will be blocked by the door (pelvis); and there is another myth related to pregnant women being advised to

DISCUSSION

Identifying Common Pregnancy Myths in Society

In various cultures, pregnancy is often associated with various beliefs that have been passed down through generations. These myths cover various aspects of a pregnant woman's life, from what to eat and what activities to avoid, to predicting the baby's gender and the birth process. While some of these myths are insignificant, others can impact the health of the mother and fetus if not challenged medically.

One of the most common myths concerns the foods consumed by pregnant women. According to Khoirunnisa & Winarsih (2023), there is a misconception that eating pineapple or durian can cause miscarriage, even though there is no medical evidence to support this belief if consumed in appropriate amounts. Another belief is that eating fish during pregnancy can cause the fetus to develop a fishy odor (Yulandari, 2021). Omega-3 fatty acids, which are abundant in fish, are excellent for embryonic brain development. Conversely, there are also myths that encourage pregnant women to consume certain foods to ensure the baby is born with certain characteristics, such as increasing the consumption of green beans to promote thick hair (Normasunah et al., 2023), although these effects are not fully scientifically proven.

Besides diet, physical activity during pregnancy is often associated with various myths. Some people believe that pregnant women should not engage in strenuous activity because it can cause miscarriage or premature birth (Aryani et al., 2022). In fact, light exercise such as walking, prenatal yoga, or prenatal exercises are actually recommended to maintain physical fitness and help facilitate labor. Conversely, there is also a myth that pregnant women should squat frequently to facilitate labor (Mutiarra et al., 2023), although medically, squatting

carry safety pins and onions attached to clothes or underwear, where sharp objects are believed to protect the mother and fetus from disturbances by spirits. The impact of these myths, most of these taboos have no scientific basis and have the potential to have a negative impact on the health of the mother and fetus. It was concluded that although culture related to pregnancy is an important part of the Ammatoa Kajang Indigenous People, some beliefs contradict medical knowledge.

is only recommended under certain conditions and is not mandatory.

When it comes to maternal health, many myths can impact medical decisions. For example, there's a belief that pregnant women shouldn't take medication, even if prescribed by a doctor, because it can harm the fetus (Zulfa & Handayani, 2022). However, some medications are safe to take during pregnancy and are necessary to maintain the health of both mother and baby. There's also a myth that pregnant women shouldn't sunbathe or bathe too late at night because it can cause the baby to be born with certain conditions, although medically there's no direct link between these habits and fetal health.

In addition to myths about food and activity, there are also widespread beliefs about the baby's gender. Some people believe that the shape of a pregnant woman's belly can indicate the baby's gender—a rounder belly is thought to indicate a girl, while a more pointed belly is associated with a boy (Veniaty, 2023). Another myth states that mothers who crave sweet foods will give birth to girls, while those who prefer salty or savory foods will give birth to boys (Prayoga, 2021). Although these beliefs are still widely held, medically, the baby's gender can only be determined through an ultrasound or genetic testing.

Finally, regarding childbirth, various myths have developed regarding how to ensure a smooth birth. For example, there is a belief that pregnant women should avoid talking about difficult birth experiences to avoid experiencing the same thing themselves. Furthermore, some beliefs suggest that hanging scissors or sharp objects in a pregnant woman's room can ward off supernatural disturbances that could complicate labor. Another popular myth is that drinking large amounts of coconut oil or young coconut water can smooth the

birth canal, although their effectiveness has not been scientifically proven (Sudargo et al., 2022).

Overall, these pregnancy myths have become deeply rooted in society and influence the mindset and behavior of pregnant women. While some may be harmless, others can pose health risks if followed without considering the scientific basis. Therefore, health workers and the public must understand and educate pregnant women so they can discern correct information based on accurate medical evidence.

A Critical Analysis of Pregnancy Myths

Comparison between Traditional Beliefs and Medical Evidence. Pregnancy myths have been passed down through generations across various cultures and are often viewed as guidance for pregnant women in maintaining their pregnancies (Fauziah, 2012). These traditional beliefs are usually based on ancestral experiences passed down without a strong scientific basis. Some myths may have had a reasonable empirical basis at the time, but many are not in line with developments in modern medical science.

For example, in some cultures, pregnant women are prohibited from consuming certain foods, such as pineapple or durian, because they are believed to cause miscarriage. Medically, these fruits do contain the enzyme bromelain (in pineapple) or sulfur compounds (in durian) (Murdianti, 2013), but in moderate amounts, consuming these fruits is not harmful to healthy pregnant women (Riaty, 2023). Conversely, pineapple and durian contain vitamins and nutrients that are beneficial for pregnancy when consumed within recommended limits.

Additionally, there are beliefs that a pregnant woman's sleeping position can determine the baby's gender, or that the shape of the mother's belly can be an indicator of whether the baby is a boy or a girl. From a medical perspective, a baby's gender is determined early in pregnancy by the chromosomes of both parents, and the only accurate way to determine this is through an ultrasound or genetic testing (Savitri, 2018).

On the other hand, there are also myths that are actually in line with medical advice, such as the prohibition against lifting heavy objects or overexerting pregnant women. Medically, lifting heavy objects can increase the risk of injury and complications such as back pain or premature contractions (Gamagitta et al., 2024). Therefore, it's important to distinguish between myths that have

benefits and those that can actually harm the health of the mother and fetus.

Factors Influencing the Persistence of Myths in Society

Despite rapid advances in medical science, various pregnancy myths persist in society and are still believed by many pregnant women. One of the main factors contributing to the persistence of myths is cultural and social influences. People tend to respect traditions passed down from generation to generation, especially when those teachings come from elders or respected community figures (Mahardhani & Cahyono, 2017). In some communities, questioning or rejecting myths is considered disrespectful to family traditions.

Another factor is limited access to accurate medical information. In rural areas or communities with limited access to healthcare, pregnant women rely more on information from family or their immediate environment than on medical professionals (Sa'adah & Sukmana, 2025). Lack of health literacy also contributes to the spread of myths, as pregnant women may have difficulty distinguishing between evidence-based information and unscientific beliefs (Widiyastuti et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the influence of the media and the internet also plays a significant role in spreading and perpetuating pregnancy myths. Although the internet provides access to broader medical information, many pregnant women are still exposed to unverified news or viral content that reinforces certain myths. Social media, pregnancy forums, and personal stories shared online are often more credible than medical recommendations from official sources.

Finally, psychological and emotional factors also contribute to the persistence of pregnancy myths. Pregnancy is a time of uncertainty and anxiety for most mothers, so they tend to seek guidance from various sources, including myths and traditional beliefs. Some pregnant women adhere to myths not because they truly believe them, but as a precautionary measure to avoid taking risks that could harm their fetus.

By understanding the factors that influence the persistence of pregnancy myths, health workers can adopt a more effective approach to educating pregnant women. Strategies that prioritize culturally sensitive approaches and empathetic communication can help replace myths with

evidence-based information without neglecting traditional values still held within the community.

CONCLUSION

Pregnancy myths are a social phenomenon that has become ingrained in various cultures and is still believed by some people, even though many have no scientific basis. Some myths can have positive psychological effects, such as increasing feelings of security and awareness about pregnancy. However, many myths actually pose risks to the health of the mother and fetus, particularly those related to dietary restrictions, restrictions on physical activity, and delays in accessing necessary health services. This study found that pregnancy myths can have negative impacts if not addressed properly, particularly regarding maternal nutritional needs and health-related decision-making.

SUGGESTION

Evidence-based health education is crucial to reduce the harmful impact of myths and ensure pregnant women receive accurate information. Health workers have a strategic role in addressing pregnancy myths through an empathetic and culturally informed educational approach. Health education involving families and communities can also help curb the spread of myths that pose risks to maternal and fetal health. Furthermore, the government and health institutions need to strengthen evidence-based reproductive education programs and increase access to information.

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