"Pantang" practices among Malaysian women and its overall health effects

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Confinement care, known as pantang, represents a crucial postpartum period focusing on maternal recovery through traditional practices deeply rooted in the Malaysian culture. In Malaysia, this practice is widely embraced across the multi-ethnic population, including Malays (92.4% adherence), Chinese (96.4% adherence), and Indians (85.6% adherence), highlighting its vital role in postpartum recovery. The practice encompasses various traditional methods including dietary restrictions based on "hot" and "cold" food concepts, massage therapy, body wrapping, herbal remedies, and extended rest periods typically lasting 30-44 days. With over 30% of women and newborns worldwide not receiving adequate postnatal care during critical first days after birth according to WHO, understanding these traditional practices becomes essential for improving maternal healthcare outcomes. **Materials and Methods:** A comprehensive literature review was conducted using electronic databases including Science Direct, PubMed, Google Scholar, NCBI, and Scopus. The search strategy employed specific keywords such as "confinement care", "postpartum care", "pantang", "traditional practices", "modern practices", "maternal health", "health effects", and "Islamic perspective". Approximately 20 relevant articles published between 2020 and 2025 were selected based on inclusion criteria requiring studies published in English within the last five years and directly related to confinement practices and their health effects. Additional studies were identified through reference screening of relevant articles to ensure comprehensive coverage of the topic. **Results:** The review revealed that traditional confinement practices offer significant physical and mental health benefits when properly implemented. Physical health benefits include enhanced blood circulation through massage therapy, improved uterine involution, better abdominal muscle tone recovery, and restoration of body balance through dietary practices emphasizing "warm" foods while avoiding "cold" foods like pineapple and watermelon. Mental health benefits encompass reduced risk of postpartum depression through structured rest periods, family support systems, and professional care in specialized confinement centres. However, challenges arise in balancing cultural customs with evidence-based medical care. Modern approaches encourage moderate activity versus traditional prolonged bed rest, balanced nutrition versus restrictive diets, and professional healthcare guidance versus solely traditional caregivers. The integration of both perspectives shows promise, with contemporary confinement services now incorporating customized meal plans alongside medical guidance. **Conclusion:** Confinement practices remain culturally significant and can positively impact maternal well-being when wisely integrated with modern healthcare approaches. Healthcare providers play a vital role in ensuring safe and effective traditional practices while respecting cultural beliefs. From an Islamic perspective, Maqasid Shariah principles support postpartum care through preservation of life (rest and recovery), religion (spiritual support), intellect (mental health care), family (support systems), and wealth (economic assistance), aligning with comprehensive maternal care objectives. Moving forward, fostering collaboration between traditional and modern healthcare systems through health experts involvement to enhance postpartum care, ensuring new mothers receive comprehensive support that respects both cultural traditions and medical advancements.

Keywords: Confinement care, postpartum care, pantang, traditional practices, maternal health