



A STUDY OF INFLUENCES OF ISLAMIC BELIEFS AND HEALTH PRACTICES AMONG PREGNANCY ISLAMIC WOMEN

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This study delves into the sacred journey of Muslim women during pregnancy. Amidst the rhythm of prayers and the echo of ancient wisdom, we seek to unravel the tapestry of meanings, beliefs, and practices woven by Islam around this significant period. Through the lens of phenomenology, we explore the emotional experiences and psychological states of individuals, listening to the stories of resilience and reverence that shape the maternal experience. The primary objectives were to provide a detailed description of how Islamic teachings and beliefs influence the experiences of Muslim women during pregnancy, explore their beliefs and practices during this period, and understand how these factors shape their perceptions of health and well-being throughout pregnancy. This research aims to explore how Islamic teachings and beliefs influence the health practices and perceptions of Muslim women during pregnancy. By examining the correlation between Islamic guidelines and health outcomes, the study seeks to understand the impact of religious beliefs on the health and well-being of Muslim women throughout their pregnancy. A phenomenological research approach was employed, utilizing data gathered from semi-structured and in-depth interviews. These methods were used to explore and understand participants' lived experiences and perceptions. Participants were categorized based on educational levels, age, health-related aspects, beliefs, practices, and socio-economic backgrounds. Thematic analysis was utilized to identify patterns and themes regarding Islam's influence on pregnancy among Muslim women. The findings of this study contributed to enhancing understanding of specific health-related beliefs and practices within Islam, thereby potentially resolving misunderstandings regarding Islamic restrictions on women. This phenomenological research offers a comprehensive description of both positive and negative pregnancy experiences among Muslim women, including their practices, beliefs, ideologies, and traditions related to Islamic medicine. The findings reveal that Muslim women's pregnancy experiences are significantly influenced by Islamic beliefs and practices, which shape their approach to health and well-being. Positive experiences are often linked to the supportive role of religious practices and community traditions, while negative experiences may involve challenges related to balancing traditional practices with modern medical advice. The research highlights the importance of understanding these cultural and religious contexts, which could raise awareness and improve support for Muslim women's pregnancy-related practices within Sri Lankan society and potentially benefit other communities with similar cultural backgrounds.

Keywords: Islam, pregnancy, health, religion, beliefs, practices, women

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INTRODUCTION

This study will explore how Muslim women experience their pregnancy journey under the influence of Islamic teachings. It will examine how these religious beliefs and practices shape Muslim women's experiences, health practices, and perceptions during this period. It will pay attention to how they maintain their health condition according to the advice given by professionals as well as how they interpret and follow their Islamic health practices and teachings during the nine months of periods. In addition, their belief systems, Islamic traditional medicines, myths and the knowledge of sex education and other socio-economic aspects will be investigated through case studies.

At the broadest, pregnancy is a general condition of a woman life circle. In addition, therapy, treatment, and healing are terms that define the domain of active response to illness, disease, pain suffering and distress. They are a response to the general condition of a woman's life. Therefore, as for the person who identifies the substance of her religious healing as a letting go of concerns and turning them over to God.

Muslim people believe that the whole human race is the later generations of Adam and Eve, and that Adam was the first man whom Allah had created with his unique power and sent to this world. Qur'an also says that when Allah sent to Adam to the Earth, he would be sending many messengers and prophets to guide man. In addition, those who would follow these messengers would succeed and those who would not follow their prophets, would never succeed in the life after death, though they may get to lead this present life in whatever way Allah deemed fit. They would always be with woes and worries in the hereafter eternal life (Shaheed, 1999).

When Adam, his children and their started growing into increasing population of human race, they believed Allah fulfilled his promise by creating this world and its people. Therefore, Muslims believe that this world and whatever there is in this world, was created by the God. For Muslims, Allah who has created this world, has also granted a book to the mankind to inform about what is wrong, and how man should live his life. This book is the Quran.

Therefore, for the Muslim women each and every aspect with their lives bounded by religion. This study explores the pregnancy related health practices, beliefs, and Islamic medicines for Muslim women and tries to understand how they interpret professional's advice while accepting their religious teachings. In short, reflecting medical anthropology's general emphasis on issues of reproductive health and the increasing concern with the spread of traditional medicine. Studies of gendered bodies, health and sickness cover other areas that connect medical anthropology to the general disciplinary interest in the cultural construction of gender.

Bringing into focus women's role in production and social reproduction as these relate to health. This is the case whether a study focuses on cultural construction of gendered bodies in scientific discourses of biological reproduction, health care management and maternal mortality.

In that manner, Muslim women are one of the underprivileged social groups in all aspects in general. Also, traditional Islamic society had put some strong restrictions on women. In Sri Lanka, Muslims are the second largest minority after Tamils; majority of them speak Tamil as their mother tongue. They have been constructed themselves based on their religious identity rather than linguistic or ethnic identity.

Muslim people are non-preference to adapt western culture, because of the religious values. Moreover, they were highly interested in trade activities and gave importance to religious learning only.

"No part of the world" an American columnist has written, "is more hopelessly and systematically and stubbornly misunderstood by us than that complex of religion, culture and geography known as



Islam” (Greenfield, 1979).

The status of women, in her rights as citizen, education, suffrage, and vocation the Quran leaves open the possibility of woman’s full equality with man, an equality that is being approximated as the customs of Muslims nations became modernized. If in another century women under Islam do not attain the social position of their Western sisters, a position to which the latter have been brought by industrialism and democracy rather than religion, it will then be time, Muslim say, to hold Islam accountability (Smith, 1991).

The Quran requires that a woman give her free consent before she may be wed; not even a Sultan may marry without his bride’s express approval. Islam tightened the wedding bond enormously.

Individually, imperfect conditions might arise if early in marriage, the wife was to contract paralysis or another disability that would prevent sexual union. Collectively, a war that decimated the male population could provide an example, forcing (as this would) the option between polygyny and depriving a large proportion of women of motherhood and a nuclear family and sort. Muslims, though they have spoken frankly from the first of female sexual fulfilment as a marital right, do not skirt the volatile question of whether the male sexual drive is stronger than the females.

The study of the interrelations among culture, emotion, and psychiatric disorder is central to the fields of medical and psychological anthropology (Jenkins 1994).

Sri Lanka as a multi-ethnic society Islamic lifestyle is concerned with different psychological, social and physical aspects of individuals life. As in other religious thoughts, life is sacred in Islam. pregnancy is associated with great psychological, emotional, and physical stress for a woman. In addition to undergoing hormonal changes, pregnant women experience a change in their attitude toward normal lifestyle and learn to reassess their health behavior and lifestyle.

The nature of the relationship between women’s status and maternity is evident in the vast majority of the world’s societies where a woman’s worth is measured by the number of children she bears; her status may be further enhanced if she prolifically produces male offspring.

As pregnancy has become medicalized in most Western societies, in Sri Lanka too, pregnant women are required to attend antenatal care and undergo many tests in order to monitor not only their health but also that of their fetus. In this paper the opinions of women from an Islamic background about health care and religious beliefs, practices prohibition practices from religion in relation to pregnancy are presented.

METHODOLOGY

This research is characterized as a phenomenological study because it focuses on understanding the lived experiences of Muslim women during pregnancy through their own perspectives, particularly within the context of Islamic teachings. Phenomenology aims to explore and describe how individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences in specific contexts, rather than examining external factors or quantifying variables.

The research questions for this study were addressed using qualitative data collected from audio-taped, individual open-ended semi-structured interviews and observations. The study aimed to understand the meanings attributed to religion and other aspects of life by the participants.

The research utilized a combination of qualitative data collection methods, including both primary and secondary sources. Data were gathered through case studies and key informant interviews. Specifically, the study obtained data from 15 respondents with children to understand how Islam influenced pregnancy among Muslim women in the Gampola area. The sample was selected using the purposive sampling method, targeting 'known women' to ensure comprehensive and authentic case studies. The sample included women aged 25-50, with two of them being wives of religious leaders.

To capture a range of perspectives, the study included both high-religious and low-religious women, as these categories reflect common beliefs among Muslim women in the study area.



Interviews were designed based on the research objectives and questions, with semi-structured interviews being identified as the most appropriate method for exploring religious influences on pregnancy. The interviews were conducted in a friendly manner to clearly identify challenges, social status, life changes, and attitudinal shifts experienced by the participants. Additionally, indirect questions were used to investigate how Islamic culture influences their lives.

As the study was not comparative, interviews were limited to women who had experienced pregnancy. Key informant interviews were conducted to gather information from individuals with firsthand knowledge about the society and religion. Data were collected from selected families based on their religious backgrounds, focusing on high-religious and low-religious families in two main Muslim settlement areas in Gampola. One of these areas, near the prominent Kahatapitiya Mosque, was noted for its more religious population.

Secondary data on the influence of Islam on pregnancy among Muslim women were obtained through a review of various international and local journals, published books, internet sources, newspapers, and magazines. This secondary data collection provided a comprehensive view of how Islam influences pregnancy across different contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was research and analyses how Islam influences pregnancy among Muslim women describing their beliefs and practices during pregnancy, the influence Islam has on their lives, and how Islam be taught medicine practices during pregnancy for Muslim women and how they interpreted professional medicine teachings. Further, this study was to explore how Muslim women's pregnancy experiences help to re-examine and reinterpret Qur'anic religious teachings practices to weak body and Islamic treatment and specific Sri Lankan Islamic healthy practices during pregnancy. Thematic analysis of how Islam influences pregnancy among Muslim women involves understanding the religious, cultural, and social factors that shape their perspectives and practices during this significant phase of life. Below are the key themes that arose during the data analysis.

Spirituality and Connection with Pregnancy: Islam emphasizes the sanctity of life and the importance of motherhood. Muslim women often view pregnancy as a spiritual journey, a blessing from Allah, and a means of fulfilling a significant role in society by raising righteous children. "A child is a gift of Allah. We don't think that is scientifically thing because exactly it is a gift from Allah". -Sumeiya

Health and Well-being: Islamic teachings stress the importance of maintaining good health. Muslim women often seek guidance from Islamic principles on maintaining physical and mental well-being during pregnancy. Practices such as maintaining a healthy diet, engaging in moderate exercise, and ensuring adequate rest align with Islamic teachings promoting self-care.

Modesty and Privacy: Islam places a high value on modesty and privacy. Pregnant Muslim women may prefer female healthcare providers, and they often seek healthcare services that respect their need for privacy and modesty during examinations and consultations.

Religious Practices during Pregnancy: Some Muslim women engage in specific religious practices during pregnancy, such as increased prayers, recitation of Qur'anic verses, and supplications for a healthy pregnancy, delivery, and a righteous child. Some also adhere to certain dietary practices or cultural rituals believed to benefit the health of the mother and child.

Decision-Making and Healthcare Choices: Islamic teachings emphasize seeking knowledge and making informed decisions. Muslim women may consult Islamic scholars or healthcare professionals who understand and respect their religious beliefs when making decisions related to prenatal care, childbirth, and postpartum practices.

Cultural Variations: Islamic practices related to pregnancy may vary among different cultural and geographical contexts. While some practices are directly influenced by religious teachings, others



might be rooted in local traditions and customs within Muslim-majority countries or communities.

Challenges and Stigma: While Islam promotes the sanctity of motherhood, some women might face challenges or stigma related to pregnancy, especially if they experience complications, infertility, or societal pressures. Islamic teachings also emphasize empathy and support for individuals facing difficulties.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The phenomenological study used Microsoft Excel to categorize the collected data and the results demonstrated the emergence of eight main themes. The research study's participants revealed in face-to-face open-ended semi-structured interviews the Muslim women to share their pregnant experiences and influences of Islam on pregnancy. This phenomenological research study utilized the approaches of a literature review, observation, interviews, audio-recording, and transcription to collect data and answer the following primary research and sub-research questions.

With the development of this phenomenological research study, eight salient themes emerged from the data that helped examine and explore the meanings, practices, and beliefs of the influences of Islam on pregnant experiences among Muslim women in the Gampola area. Theme one, Spirituality and Connection with Pregnancy: Islam emphasizes the sanctity of life and the importance of motherhood. Muslim women often view pregnancy as a spiritual journey, a blessing from Allah, and a means of fulfilling a significant role in society by raising righteous children.

Theme two, Health and Well-being: Islamic teachings stress the importance of maintaining good health. Muslim women often seek guidance from Islamic principles on maintaining physical and mental well-being during pregnancy. Practices such as maintaining a healthy diet, engaging in moderate exercise, and ensuring adequate rest align with Islamic teachings promoting self-care. As the study was not comparative, interviews were limited to women who had experienced pregnancy. Key informant interviews were conducted to gather information from individuals with knowledge about the society and religion.

Theme three, Modesty and Privacy: Islam places a high value on modesty and privacy. Pregnant Muslim women may prefer female healthcare providers, and they often seek healthcare services that respect their need for privacy and modesty during examinations and consultations.

Theme four, Religious Practices during Pregnancy: Some Muslim women engage in specific religious practices during pregnancy, such as increased prayers, recitation of Qur'anic verses, and supplications for a healthy pregnancy, delivery, and a righteous child. Some also adhere to certain dietary practices or cultural rituals believed to benefit the health of the mother and child.

Theme five, decision-Making and Healthcare Choices: Islamic teachings emphasize seeking knowledge and making informed decisions. Muslim women may consult Islamic scholars or healthcare professionals who understand and respect their religious beliefs when making decisions related to prenatal care, childbirth, and postpartum practices.

Theme six, Cultural Variations: Islamic practices related to pregnancy may vary among different cultural and geographical contexts. While some practices are directly influenced by religious teachings, others might be rooted in local traditions and customs within Muslim-majority countries or communities.

Theme seven, challenges and Stigma: While Islam promotes the sanctity of motherhood; some women might face challenges or stigma related to pregnancy, especially if they experience complications, infertility, or societal pressures. Islamic teachings also emphasize empathy and support for individuals facing difficulties. Participants postulated they are the best narrators to tell society about the meanings, practices and belief of their religion on pregnant experiences.

Participants' responses in this research study drew attention to the need of Islamic scholarship for Muslim women in an effort to educate others about their religion and religious medicine practices. Literature and data from participants posit Muslim women specially life events like during pregnancy have sought to read and reinterpret passages in the Qur'an differently by thinking about them in a modern context to find new meanings: reinterpretations fought by traditionalists.



This phenomenological research study examined and explored the meanings, practices, and beliefs on pregnancy among Muslim women within Islamic religion. The finding of this phenomenological research study could help bring an awareness of Muslim women's pregnancy related practices, beliefs, and traditional medicine practices to other communities in Sri Lankan society.

This phenomenological research study offers a vivid and rich comprehensive description of the positive and negative pregnancy experiences of Muslim women, as well as an insight into their Islamic medicine practices, beliefs, ideologies, and practices. The information gathered in this phenomenological research study may enable Muslim women to increase awareness and broaden an understanding to an area of study unfamiliar to scholars, academia, and researchers. Certainly, Islam has significant influences on various aspects of life, including pregnancy and childbirth among Muslim women.

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