

**Cultural Diversity Paper: Nigerian Culture**

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## **Introduction**

Nigerian culture is rich and diverse, encompassing various customs, traditions, languages, and beliefs. As one of the most populous countries in Africa, Nigeria is home to over 250 ethnic groups, each with its unique culture and history. Understanding and respecting cultural differences is crucial in providing effective and compassionate healthcare, particularly in maternal and newborn nursing care. Culturally competent nursing care means recognizing and appreciating the patients' and their families' values, beliefs, and practices and adapting care to meet their needs. Considering the country's diverse culture, religious beliefs, and customs, this essay will explore the cultural awareness and competence required to provide Nigerian patients with maternal and newborn nursing care.

## **Family Planning**

In Nigeria, family planning and contraceptive practices are influenced by cultural and religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, and access to healthcare services. Many Nigerians hold strong religious and cultural beliefs that emphasize the importance of large families, particularly in rural areas. However, there is a growing awareness of the benefits of family planning, particularly in urban areas, where access to healthcare services is more readily available.

Nigeria's most commonly used family planning methods include hormonal contraceptives, birth control pills, injectables, and barrier methods like condoms. Traditional methods, such as withdrawal and calendar methods, are also widely used, particularly in rural areas where access to modern methods may be limited. Religious beliefs can also significantly affect family planning practices (Muoghalu, 2019). For example, some Christian denominations and Islamic teachings may prohibit specific contraceptive methods. However, many religious leaders and organizations are increasingly promoting family planning to promote maternal and child health.

Finding a family planning provider in Nigeria is still tricky, especially in rural regions with few healthcare plans. As a result, many women rely on traditional methods or do not use any form of contraception at all (Muoghalu, 2019). Efforts to increase access to family planning services and education are underway in Nigeria, focusing on reaching women in rural areas and improving the quality of care provided by healthcare providers.

### **Pregnancy**

Pregnancy is a significant life event steeped in cultural traditions and practices. In Nigeria, cultural practices related to pregnancy are varied and diverse, reflecting the country's rich cultural heritage. Here are three pregnancy-related cultural practices commonly observed in Nigeria:

**Diet Restrictions:** In many Nigerian cultures, pregnant women must follow strict dietary restrictions during pregnancy. For example, some cultures prohibit consuming certain types of food, such as snails, fish, and bushmeat. Others may require pregnant women to avoid spicy or hot foods, as they are believed to cause miscarriage or premature labor. These dietary restrictions are believed to help protect the health of both the mother and the baby.

**Traditional Birthing Practices:** Many Nigerian cultures have traditional birthing practices passed down through generations. For example, in some cultures, pregnant women may be expected to give birth in the family home or a specific location within the community. The presence of family members and a traditional birth attendant is also familiar. Some cultures also have specific rituals or ceremonies performed before, during, or after childbirth.

**Use of Herbal Remedies:** In Nigeria, traditional herbal remedies are common during pregnancy. Many pregnant women may use herbal remedies to alleviate symptoms such as morning sickness, constipation, or other pregnancy-related ailments (Muoghalu, 2019).

However, using herbal remedies during pregnancy can be risky, as some herbs may harm the developing fetus or cause adverse effects when combined with prescription medications.

These cultural practices are deeply rooted in Nigerian culture and reflect the importance of community and tradition in pregnancy and childbirth. Healthcare providers must be aware of these practices to provide culturally sensitive care that respects Nigerian patients' beliefs and values.

### **Labor/Delivery**

Labor and delivery are significant events in a woman's life, often accompanied by various cultural practices that reflect the traditions and beliefs of a particular culture. In Nigeria, cultural practices related to labor and delivery vary across different ethnic groups and communities. Here are three pregnancy-related cultural practices commonly observed in Nigeria:

**Presence of family members during childbirth:** In Nigerian cultures, the presence of family members during labor and delivery is encouraged. This includes the woman's husband, mother, sisters, or other close relatives. Family members offer emotional support, encouragement, and assistance during birthing (Dike, 2017). In some cultures, the husband may also be responsible for cutting the umbilical cord or performing other traditional rites.

**Traditional birthing positions:** Many Nigerian cultures have specific birthing positions that are believed to facilitate childbirth. These positions often involve squatting or sitting upright, as they are believed to promote easier delivery and prevent complications. In some cultures, women may be encouraged to massage their bellies or perform other traditional exercises to prepare for labor and delivery.

**Postpartum confinement:** In Nigerian cultures, postpartum confinement is practiced to promote the mother's recovery and protect the newborn's health. This involves the woman staying in bed for several weeks after childbirth and following specific dietary and hygiene

practices. Family members and friends may also offer support by providing meals, assisting with household chores, or caring for the newborn.

### **Postpartum Care**

Postpartum care is an essential aspect of maternal health influenced by cultural practices and beliefs. In Nigeria, postpartum care is often centered around the woman's recovery and the newborn's health. Here are three postpartum-related cultural practices commonly observed in Nigeria:

**Postpartum confinement:** Postpartum confinement, also known as "omugwo" in some Nigerian cultures, is a common practice that involves the woman staying at home for several weeks after childbirth (Okafor, 2018). This practice promotes the mother's recovery and protects the newborn's health. During this time, family members and friends may offer support by providing meals, caring for the newborn, or assisting with household chores.

**Herbal remedies:** In many Nigerian cultures, herbal remedies are expected postpartum. These remedies promote healing, increase breast milk production, and alleviate postpartum symptoms such as pain and fatigue (Okafor, 2018). For example, a popular postpartum remedy is "pepper soup," a spicy broth made with herbs and spices believed to aid healing.

**Postpartum rituals and ceremonies:** Many Nigerian cultures have specific rituals and ceremonies performed during the postpartum period. These may involve naming the newborn, blessings from elders or religious leaders, or offering gifts to family members and friends (Okafor, 2018). These rituals and ceremonies are believed to bring good luck and protect the newborn's health.

### **Newborn Care**

Newborn care is a crucial maternal and child health aspect influenced by cultural practices and beliefs. In Nigeria, newborn care is often centered around ensuring the

newborn's health and well-being while observing traditional customs and rituals. Here are three newborn-related cultural practices commonly observed in Nigeria:

Naming ceremonies are an essential cultural practice in many Nigerian communities. They usually occur within a few days or weeks of the newborn's birth and involve naming the newborn, often with a name that reflects the family's cultural or religious beliefs (Dike, 2017). Prayers, songs, and the offering of gifts to the newborn often accompany these ceremonies.

Traditional newborn care practices: Many Nigerian cultures have specific traditions and customs related to newborn care. For example, some cultures believe that applying coconut oil or shea butter to the newborn's skin can help keep the skin soft and prevent skin conditions. Others may use traditional herbal remedies to treat common newborn ailments such as colic or jaundice.

Breastfeeding practices: Breastfeeding is an essential aspect of newborn care in Nigeria, and cultural practices related to breastfeeding vary across different communities. In some cultures, women may breastfeed exclusively for the first six months, while in others, they may offer other liquids or solid foods (Dike, 2017). Additionally, some cultures may observe specific practices related to breastfeeding, such as avoiding certain foods or drinks or seeking assistance from lactation consultants or traditional healers.

## **Recommendations**

As healthcare providers, it is essential to provide culturally sensitive care that respects our Nigerian patients' beliefs and values. While cultural practices and beliefs may differ from ours, it is essential to approach these practices with an open mind and seek to understand their significance to the patient and their community. However, in some cases, cultural practices may cause harm or raise safety concerns. In such cases, healthcare

providers must provide appropriate recommendations to ensure the health and safety of the mother and newborn.

For example, in cases where cultural practices related to newborn care involve the use of herbal remedies or traditional medicines, healthcare providers should educate patients on the potential risks and benefits of these practices (Okafor, 2018). They should also ensure that patients are aware of any potential interactions between these remedies and medications that they may be taking. Additionally, healthcare providers should encourage patients to seek medical advice if their newborn experiences any concerning symptoms or health issues.

Similarly, in cases where cultural practices related to postpartum care involve prolonged confinement or restricted physical activity, healthcare providers should educate patients on the importance of physical activity in promoting recovery and preventing complications such as blood clots (Okafor, 2018). They should also provide patients with information on safe exercises that can be performed postpartum.

### **Summary**

Cultural practices and beliefs play a significant role in maternal and newborn care in Nigeria. Cultural practices are deeply rooted in Nigerian communities, from naming ceremonies to traditional newborn care and breastfeeding practices. As healthcare providers, it is crucial to approach these practices with an open mind and provide culturally sensitive care that respects the beliefs and values of our patients. Healthcare practitioners should, nevertheless, equally ensure that certain cultural customs will not endanger the mother's and baby's safety and well-being. In cases where cultural practices may cause harm or raise safety concerns, healthcare providers should provide appropriate recommendations to promote the health and safety of their patients.

## References

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