Women's Health and Childbearing Cultural in China

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Abstract

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) emphasizes behavior and dietary choices to balance the opposing energies, Yin and yang. Around 80% of Chinese births occur in hospitals or clinics, and Western biomedical practices less influence family planning. Medical interventions are common in labor and delivery; private hospitals offer adequate pain management and obstetrician-involved birthing experiences, but rural hospitals provide communal patient rooms without pain management. Postpartum care is a month-long period of seclusion and isolation. Chinese people are strict about food consumption after childbirth, and the one-child policy puts a child at risk of obesity and lack of exercise. Postpartum depression affects 30% of Chinese women. Childbirth announcement is distributing red eggs to neighborhoods that symbolize happiness and fortune. Confucianism still exists, and the government should financially support epidurals in rural hospitals to improve the labor and delivery environment and ensure women's physical and mental health.

Introduction

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) originates in Buddhism and has been practiced in China since 2000 B.C. It views the human body as a chaotic entity that needs control and equilibrium. To keep balance and avoid emotional and physical problems, TCM strongly emphasizes behavior and dietary choices. Traditional lay midwives dominated the field of delivery attendants until the acceptance of Western biomedicine in the 20th century. Today, the Chinese government uses biomedical technology to regulate human health and reproduction, including pregnancy and childbirth, reflecting state control and modernization. Around 80% of Chinese births occur in state-run hospitals, women-and-baby hospitals, and rural health clinics. Women-only hospitals are another birthing option only in larger cities and towns.

Family Planning

Home births are becoming increasingly rare in rural areas due to economic difficulties, poor prenatal care, lack of transportation, fear of hospitals, and inconvenience. One-child policy (1980-2016) limited Chinese families to having one child, resulting in more males than females and a shrinking workforce due to Confucianism, leading to increasing in premarital and unmarried pregnancies. Young adults' desire to marry has declined due to commitment anxiety, inflation, and high divorce rates.

Pregnancy

Chinese prenatal care varies across socioeconomic and geographic boundaries, with state hospitals providing first-come, first-served care and traditional pregnancy restrictions. Physicians are now the preferred medical providers for childbirth in hospitals, while midwives have more autonomy and scope of practice in rural clinics and smaller woman-baby hospitals. Pregnancy traditions in China are based on the belief that everything a pregnant woman does and sees affects her unborn child. To maintain proper qi, pregnant women should practice self-control and limit "cold" food to balance the Yin and yang. Traditional behavior restrictions for pregnant women include avoiding moving heavy objects, participating in celebrations, preparing an infant's bed, attending funerals, cutting the wings and legs off a chicken, or using scissors near a bed are all prohibited. Studies have found links between cultural taboos and poor physical health, but the causality of the relationship is unclear. Adherence to cultural norms can strengthen familial harmony and reduce maternal stress, associated with better outcomes.

Labor and Delivery

Maternal mortality in China fell from 80 to 18.3 deaths per 100,000 live births between 1991 and 2018. Medical interventions are common in labor and delivery in private, women-and-

baby, or state-run hospitals. Despite efforts to reduce unnecessary cesarean deliveries, the rate has increased from 28.8% in 2008 to 36.7% in 2018. This is due to government pressure for childbirth modernization, women's preference to avoid the pain and uncertainty of vaginal delivery, and obstetricians and gynecologists accepting bribes. In 2022, during the intrapartum experience, hospitals offered epidurals to only 30% of females during delivery. It is because there are only 6.7 anesthesiologists for every 100,000 people in China. In rural areas, natural childbirth is often enforced without a cesarean section, even when the mother's or fetus's life is in danger. Cesarean sections were once widespread in China, but since the "one-child policy" was repealed, the government and media have encouraged parents to try for a second child. Because of future complications for a second child, this rescinded policy made women concerned about choosing cesarean for their first delivery. Family members, including the husband, are prohibited in China's early labor or postpartum recovery rooms. Squatting is an ideal labor position because a belief in a female back touching the chair will not give enough strength to the child to come out. A necklace is placed around the baby's neck before cutting the umbilical cord as the necklace is considered to be a substituted baby’s life and then cut out.

Postpartum Care

"Doing the month" is a postnatal custom based on Yin and Yang philosophy. It is a month-long period of seclusion and recovery that includes the presence of a female’s family to assist with recovery. Women are only allowed to eat foods that can warm their bodies and nutritious foods to give newborns high-quality breast milk. After a month, women can shower. Some women report appreciating the opportunity for rest and recovery, increased confidence in their childcare abilities, and a sense of intergenerational connection. In contrast, others reported worsening postpartum trauma or recovery.

A woman's maternity leave (paid) is legally limited to 98 days. If delivery is complicated, they can apply for an additional 15 days. If a parent has twins or multiple twins, they are qualified to receive another 15 days per child. Although not required by law, husbands also take time off and spend it with their wives, and their vacation period ranges from 7 days to 1 month.

Postpartum depression affects an estimated 30% of postpartum Chinese women. Factors of PPD are a lack of partner support, a difficult pregnancy, poor infant health, a history of depression, and anxious attachment styles. High socioeconomic status showed less diagnosis of PPD. Attending childbirth classes and mental care are preventive interventions, but only a few women seek professional emotional support.

Newborn Care

When a child is born, the family will hand eggs colored in red to other houses to notify their newborn. If they had a girl, they would distribute odd numbers. If it was a boy, they give out eggs in even numbers. In Chinese culture, red represents happiness and fortune that will protect them from bad luck. The red egg expresses a family's hope in a happy atmosphere, safely cares for the child, and prevents disasters. When a boy is born, the house will be decorated with expensive jewelry, like jade or gold. If a girl were born, they would hang decorations made of pottery, so the traditional idea of male-dominated women continued.

In Chinese culture, fat, and chubby are considered healthy and cute. Due to the "one-child policy," a new growth of 421 syndrome is making a child obese. Most Chinese families have four grandparents, two parents, and one baby. The one child in a household puts the child at risk of obesity and lack of exercise. Furthermore, the family tended to resist the pediatrician's recommendation of an unhealthy fat baby. It is common for parents to disagree or be angry with the pediatrician's advice, resulting in the rejection of education.

Recommendation

Even though TCM may benefit postpartum women from recovery, China's historical involvement in Confucianism violates women's health. The childbearing process should use a scientifically proven regimen, avoid gender-preferred abortion and improve women’s basic rights when practicing “Doing the month.” The Chinese government should support the cost and availability of epidurals in rural hospitals to improve their poor labor and delivery environment and ensure women's physical and mental health during their prenatal visit experience. In postpartum care, women should shower after delivery and exercise to promote recovery. Improvements in local hospitals decrease rural residents' concerns about having a child. Following a professional's regimen to reduce the portion of child feeding will prevent early child complications and improve the family's overall healthy lifestyle.

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