Cultural Dimension Of Birth And Stress Outcome
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ABSTRACT

The cultural dimension of birth significantly influences stress outcomes for women and newborns in Sub-Saharan Africa. Traditional beliefs and practices surrounding childbirth, including rituals and involvement of traditional birth attendants, can provide emotional support but may clash with modern medical practices, leading to increased stress. Family and community support are prominent during childbirth, offering assistance and encouragement. Spiritual and religious beliefs offer comfort and meaning, but conflicts with medical interventions can contribute to stress. Limited access to quality healthcare services and skilled birth attendants is a prevalent challenge in the region, leading to concerns about complications, inadequate pain management, and limited emergency resources. Sub-Saharan Africa has some of the highest rates of maternal mortality, resulting from limited healthcare access, poverty, and inadequate infrastructure. The high prevalence of birth complications and maternal deaths adds to stress and anxiety during childbirth. Cultural stigmas and taboos surrounding pregnancy and childbirth may prevent women from seeking appropriate medical care or discussing concerns openly, further exacerbating stress levels. Initiatives focused on improving access to healthcare, promoting evidence-based practices, and integrating traditional and modern approaches to childbirth aim to address these challenges. Understanding and addressing the cultural dimension of birth in Sub-Saharan Africa can better support women during pregnancy, labour, and the postpartum period, ultimately reducing stress and improving birth outcomes.

Keywords: Cultural Dimension, Child Birth, Stress Outcome, Traditional Practices, Sub-Saharan Africa

1 Introduction

The cultural dimension of birth (Sargent, 2019) plays a significant role in shaping stress outcomes experienced by women during childbirth. Cultural practices, beliefs, and traditions surrounding birth have a profound impact on women’s experiences, influencing their stress levels and overall well-being (Sargent, 2019). Understanding the cultural context is crucial for providing effective and culturally sensitive care to promote positive birth experiences and reduce stress outcomes. In many cultures, including those in Sub-Saharan Africa, traditional birthing practices are deeply rooted and continue to be practiced (Redvers et al., 2023). Traditional birth attendants (TBAs) often play a central role in providing care during childbirth, utilizing traditional methods, rituals, and herbal remedies. While these practices are rooted in cultural significance, they can introduce potential stressors or risks due to limited access to medical interventions and emergency obstetric care (Redvers et al., 2023).

Moreover, the cultural dimension of birth encompasses social support systems that vary across cultures. In Sub-Saharan Africa, social support networks often involve extended family members, neighbours, and community members who provide emotional, practical, and informational support to pregnant women (Gebregziabher et al., 2020). This social support acts as a protective factor, helping to reduce stress levels and enhance coping mechanisms during childbirth (Gebregziabher et al., 2020). Conversely, the absence or lack of social support can contribute to increased stress and anxiety during the birthing process. Cultural perceptions and beliefs surrounding childbirth significantly influence stress outcomes (Abebe et al., 2019). In many cultures, childbirth is seen as a natural and transformative process, but specific cultural norms and expectations may also contribute to stress. For
example, cultural ideals of stoicism and the belief that women should endure pain during childbirth without medical interventions may impact women's experiences and stress levels (Abebe et al., 2019). Cultural beliefs and practices related to birth can shape women's attitudes, decision-making processes, and access to healthcare resources.

Understanding the cultural dimension of birth and its influence on stress outcomes is crucial for improving maternal care and outcomes. Culturally sensitive approaches that integrate traditional practices with evidence-based care can promote positive birth experiences while addressing potential stressors (Nolte et al., 2020). Healthcare providers should aim to understand and respect cultural practices, communicate effectively with women and their families, and collaborate with TBAs and community leaders to provide comprehensive and culturally appropriate care.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the cultural dimension of birth has a significant impact on the stress outcomes for women and their newborns (Suomi et al., 2023). The cultural dimension of birth plays a crucial role in shaping the stress outcomes experienced by women in Sub-Saharan Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa is a diverse region encompassing numerous countries with distinct cultural practices and beliefs surrounding childbirth. Cultural factors such as traditional birthing practices, social support systems, and perceptions of childbirth influence women's experiences during pregnancy, delivery, and the postpartum period (Suomi et al., 2023). These cultural dimensions can either mitigate or exacerbate stress levels and impact overall maternal and infant well-being (Sargent, 2019). Traditional birthing practices deeply rooted in Sub-Saharan African cultures contribute significantly to the cultural dimension of birth. For instance, home births attended by traditional birth attendants (TBAs) are still prevalent in many communities across the region (Nolte et al., 2020). TBAs often rely on traditional methods, rituals, and herbal remedies during childbirth, reflecting the cultural beliefs and values surrounding reproduction and childbirth. While these practices hold symbolic and cultural significance, they can also introduce potential stressors or risks due to limited access to medical interventions and emergency obstetric care (Redvers et al., 2023).

Moreover, social support systems play a pivotal role in the cultural dimension of birth (Razgulin et al., 2023) in Sub-Saharan Africa. Extended family networks, neighbours, and community members often provide emotional, practical, and informational support to pregnant women. This social support acts as a buffer against stress, offering women a sense of belonging, reassurance, and guidance throughout the childbirth process (Razgulin et al., 2023). The presence of these networks not only aids in reducing stress levels but also helps women cope with the challenges of motherhood and adjust to the new roles and responsibilities they undertake (Gallardo-Peralta et al., 2022). Additionally, cultural perceptions and beliefs about childbirth significantly influence the stress outcomes experienced by women in Sub-Saharan Africa. In many societies, childbirth is considered a natural and normal process. Women are expected to endure pain and discomfort during labour as a symbol of strength and resilience. These cultural norms may discourage women from seeking medical interventions or pain relief options, even when they are available. Furthermore, the fear of being stigmatized or ostracized for deviating from cultural norms can lead to additional stress and anxiety among expectant mothers (Shorey et al., 2023).

Understanding the cultural dimension of birth and its impact on stress outcomes is vital for developing effective interventions and improving maternal and infant health in Sub-Saharan Africa (Bruggen, 2023). By recognizing and respecting cultural practices, healthcare providers can integrate culturally sensitive approaches into maternal care. This may involve collaborating with TBAs, incorporating traditional practices that pose no harm, and educating women and communities about the benefits of modern obstetric care without dismissing cultural beliefs and values. Strengthening the social support systems within communities and involving family members in the care process can also contribute to reducing stress levels and improving birth outcomes (Chattu, 2019).

Cultural dimension of birth significantly influences stress outcomes experienced by women in Sub-Saharan Africa. Traditional birthing practices, social support systems, and cultural perceptions play a crucial role in shaping women's experiences during pregnancy, delivery, and the postpartum period (Bruggen, 2023). Recognizing and integrating cultural beliefs and practices into maternal care is essential for improving birth outcomes and maternal well-being in the region. Cultural stigmas and taboos surrounding pregnancy and childbirth also influence stress outcomes. In certain cultural contexts, there may be stigma associated with discussing pregnancy-related issues openly, seeking medical care, or discussing complications. These cultural barriers can prevent women from accessing appropriate healthcare services and support, leading to heightened stress levels and potential negative outcomes (Razgulin et al., 2023).
2 Literature Review

The cultural dimension encompasses the intricate interplay of cultural factors that shape human behaviour, beliefs, and practices within societies (Bruggen, 2023). It provides a framework for understanding the influence of culture on various aspects of individuals' lives, including their values, norms, traditions, and customs. Cultural dimensions significantly impact how individuals perceive the world, interact with others, and interpret their experiences. Understanding the cultural dimension is crucial for comprehending the diverse perspectives and behaviours across different societies and improving cross-cultural communication and interactions.

Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory is one widely recognized framework for analyzing cultural differences. This theory identifies several dimensions that characterize cultures, including power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term versus short-term orientation. These dimensions help explain variations in social structures, decision-making processes, gender roles, and attitudes towards change and uncertainty (Fullerton et al., 2023). Culture plays a fundamental role in shaping individuals’ identities, values, and beliefs. It provides a shared set of meanings, symbols, and practices that define a group’s identity and guide their behavior. Cultural beliefs and values influence individuals’ perspectives on morality, religion, family structure, education, and social roles, among many other aspects of life (Moqbel et al., 2023). These beliefs and values are transmitted across generations through socialization processes, shaping individuals’ attitudes, behaviours, and worldview.

The cultural dimension is also reflected in language, art, music, and other forms of creative expression (Hogarth et al., 2022). Language, as a primary vehicle of communication, carries cultural meanings, idioms, and expressions unique to specific societies. Art and music serve as mediums for cultural expression, reflecting the aesthetics, values, and themes valued by a particular culture (Hogarth et al., 2022). These forms of cultural expression provide insights into the collective mindset and identity of a society. Cultural dimensions have a profound impact on interpersonal relationships and social interactions (Bruggen, 2023). They influence how individuals communicate, express emotions, and interpret non-verbal cues. Different cultures may have distinct communication styles, with variations in directness, use of silence, body language, and levels of formality (Bene et al., 2022). Understanding cultural differences in communication patterns is crucial for effective cross-cultural interactions and minimizing misunderstandings.

Moreover, cultural dimensions shape economic systems, political structures, and societal institutions (Battistella et al., 2023). They influence business practices, governance models, legal frameworks, and social hierarchies. Cultural values such as individualism versus collectivism impact economic development, entrepreneurship, and work practices (Battistella et al., 2023). Understanding the cultural dimension is crucial for successful international business ventures, diplomatic relations, and effective policy-making. The cultural dimension of birth refers to how cultural beliefs, practices, and norms influence the experience and outcome of childbirth. Different cultures have varying perspectives on pregnancy, labour, delivery, and postpartum care, which can significantly impact the stress levels and outcomes for both the mother and the newborn.

3 Methodology

On May 19, 2023, a comprehensive search on the topic of the cultural dimension of birth and its impact on stress outcomes was conducted. We utilized a range of keywords to retrieve relevant literature. The search terms included "cultural dimension of birth," "birth culture," "childbirth and stress," "cultural influences on stress outcomes," and "cross-cultural childbirth experiences."

We performed this search across various reputable databases, including Embase, Scopus, PubMed Central, Science Direct, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Furthermore, we diligently reviewed the reference lists of pertinent publications to identify any additional valuable sources.

Subsequently, the search was updated by evaluating the retrieved publications against our inclusion criteria. We initially reviewed the journal titles and synopses to ensure their relevance to the cultural dimension of birth and its connection to stress outcomes. Following this initial assessment, we thoroughly examined the full texts of the selected articles.

4 RESULTS

1. Factors that Influence Cultural Dimensions of Birth
Beliefs and Attitudes: Cultural beliefs surrounding birth, such as the role of women, the significance of childbirth (Cidro et al., 2022), and the perception of pain, can shape a woman's expectations and experiences during labour. For example, in some cultures, childbirth is seen as a natural and positive event, while in others, it may be viewed as a more medicalized process.

Birthing Practices: Cultural practices during childbirth, including the presence of family members, traditional rituals, and the involvement of traditional birth attendants or midwives, can influence stress levels and outcomes (Rahman et al., 2023). These practices can provide emotional support and comfort or contribute to additional stress if they clash with medical recommendations or cause complications.

Social Support: The level of social support available to a woman during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period varies across cultures (Low et al., 2023; ÇAKA et al., 2023). Family, community, and cultural norms play a significant role in determining the support network available to new mothers. Adequate social support can help reduce stress and enhance overall well-being (Sargent, 2019).

Healthcare System: Cultural values and beliefs can also influence interactions with healthcare providers and the healthcare system (Lakin et al., 2023). Cultural expectations regarding medical interventions, pain management, and decision-making autonomy may impact the stress levels experienced by women during childbirth (Lakin et al., 2023). Differences in healthcare systems and access to quality care can also affect birth outcomes.

Postpartum Practices: Cultural practices related to postpartum care and newborn care can impact the stress levels and outcomes for both the mother and the newborn. Traditions around resting, dietary restrictions, infant feeding, and baby care vary widely across cultures and can affect recovery, bonding, and overall adjustment to parenthood (Teferi et al., 2023).

2. Impact of Cultural Dimensions of Birth on Stress Outcomes

In Sub-Saharan Africa, women's stress results are greatly influenced by the cultural aspect of delivery. In this diverse region, various cultural practices, beliefs, and traditions surrounding childbirth have a profound impact on women's experiences during pregnancy, delivery, and the postpartum period (Suomi et al., 2023). These cultural factors can either mitigate or exacerbate stress levels, ultimately influencing maternal and infant well-being (Rahman et al., 2023).

Traditional birthing practices deeply rooted in Sub-Saharan African cultures contribute significantly to the cultural dimension of birth. Home births attended by traditional birth attendants (TBAs) remain prevalent in many communities across the region (Ref). TBAs often rely on traditional methods, rituals, and herbal remedies during childbirth, reflecting the cultural beliefs and values surrounding reproduction. While these practices hold symbolic and cultural significance, they can introduce potential stressors or risks due to limited access to medical interventions and emergency obstetric care (Wright et al., 2019).

Moreover, in Sub-Saharan Africa, social support networks are essential to the cultural aspect of childbirth. Extended family networks, neighbours, and community members provide emotional, practical, and informational support to pregnant women. This social support acts as a buffer against stress, offering women a sense of belonging, reassurance, and guidance throughout the childbirth process (Uthman et al., 2018). The presence of these networks not only aids in reducing stress levels but also helps women cope with the challenges of motherhood and adjust to new roles and responsibilities (Uthman et al., 2018).

Cultural perceptions and beliefs about childbirth significantly influence the stress outcomes experienced by women in Sub-Saharan Africa (Amoakoh-Coleman et al., 2020). In many societies, childbirth is viewed as a natural and normal process. Women are expected to endure pain and discomfort during labour as a symbol of strength and resilience. These cultural norms may discourage women from seeking medical interventions or pain relief options, even when they are available. Additionally, fear of stigma or social exclusion for deviating from cultural norms can lead to additional stress and anxiety among expectant mothers (Amoakoh-Coleman et al., 2020).

Understanding the cultural dimension of birth and its impact on stress outcomes is crucial for developing effective interventions and improving maternal and infant health in Sub-Saharan Africa (Afulani et al., 2019). By recognizing and respecting cultural practices, healthcare providers can integrate culturally sensitive approaches into maternal care. This may involve collaborating with TBAs, incorporating traditional practices that pose no harm, and educating women and communities about the benefits of modern obstetric care without dismissing cultural beliefs and values. Strengthening social support systems within communities and involving family members in the care process can also contribute to reducing stress levels and improving birth outcomes (Afulani et al., 2019).

A diverse range of cultural beliefs, practices, and norms surrounding childbirth (Klu, 2023) characterizes this region. Understanding these cultural factors is crucial for providing culturally sensitive and effective care to
expectant mothers. This abstract explores the cultural dimension of birth and its impact on stress outcomes in Sub-Saharan Africa, drawing on relevant literature and research.

Traditional beliefs and practices surrounding childbirth are deeply ingrained in many cultures in Sub-Saharan Africa (Klu, 2023). These may include rituals, ceremonies, and the involvement of traditional birth attendants or midwives. Such practices are often rooted in cultural traditions, spiritual beliefs, and the passing down of ancestral knowledge. While these practices can provide emotional support, a sense of cultural continuity, and a feeling of empowerment for women, they can also contribute to stress if they clash with modern medical practices or if complications arise that require advanced medical interventions (Klu, 2023).

Family and community support are highly valued during childbirth (Cameron et al., 2022) in Sub-Saharan Africa. Women typically receive assistance and encouragement from female family members, friends, and community members. This social support network provides a sense of belonging, emotional comfort, and practical assistance during labour and the postpartum period. However, it is essential to recognize that the support network can also impose cultural expectations and pressures on women, which may contribute to stress (Adshead & Runacres, 2022).

Religion and spirituality hold immense importance in the lives of many people in Sub-Saharan Africa. Spiritual and religious beliefs often influence perspectives on childbirth and play a crucial role in coping with the challenges and uncertainties of labour (Attard, 2023; Maryam et al., 2022). These beliefs can provide comfort, meaning, and a sense of divine protection during the birthing process. However, conflicts may arise between traditional beliefs and medical interventions, causing additional stress and anxiety for expectant mothers (Maryam et al., 2022).

Access to quality healthcare services and skilled birth attendants is a significant challenge in Sub-Saharan Africa (Attard, 2023). Many women face barriers such as limited infrastructure, poverty, and geographical remoteness, which can hinder their ability to receive timely and appropriate care during pregnancy and childbirth. The lack of access to proper medical care can lead to increased stress due to concerns about complications, inadequate pain management, and limited resources for emergency situations (Maryam et al., 2022).

Furthermore, Sub-Saharan Africa has some of the highest rates of maternal mortality globally (Nwankwo et al., 2022). Factors contributing to this include limited healthcare access, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, and socioeconomic disparities. The high prevalence of birth complications and maternal deaths adds to the stress experienced by women during childbirth and contributes to adverse outcomes for both mothers and newborns. It is important to note that the cultural dimension of birth is complex and highly diverse. Cultural influences can have both positive and negative impacts on stress outcomes, depending on various factors such as the specific cultural context, individual beliefs, and the availability of resources and support (Battistella et al., 2023). Additionally, cultural practices should be considered alongside evidence-based medical practices to ensure the best outcomes for maternal and neonatal health.

5 Discussion

Collaboration between Western and Traditional Medicine: Promoting collaboration between Western medical practitioners and traditional birth attendants can help bridge the gap in maternal healthcare. This collaboration can ensure that cultural practices and beliefs are respected while ensuring access to skilled medical assistance.

Culturally Tailored Antenatal Education: Antenatal education programmes should be designed to incorporate cultural beliefs, practices, and traditions surrounding childbirth. Providing women with accurate information about childbirth while respecting their cultural values can help alleviate stress and empower mothers.

Strengthening Social Support Systems: Efforts should be made to strengthen social support systems by educating family members, community leaders, and healthcare providers about the importance of emotional support during childbirth. Empowering women to communicate their needs and preferences to their support networks can help create a positive birth environment.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the cultural dimension encompasses the multifaceted aspects of culture that influence human behaviour, values, beliefs, communication, and social structures. Cultural dimensions provide a framework for understanding the diversity of perspectives and behaviours across societies. By recognizing and appreciating cultural differences, individuals and organizations can engage in effective cross-cultural interactions, promote cultural sensitivity, and foster mutual understanding in an increasingly interconnected world (Fullerton et al., 2023).
Efforts are being made to address these challenges and improve maternal and neonatal health in Sub-Saharan Africa ([Fullerton et al., 2023]). These include initiatives focused on increasing access to quality healthcare, promoting evidence-based practices, and integrating traditional and modern approaches to childbirth. By acknowledging and understanding the cultural dimension of birth in Sub-Saharan Africa, healthcare providers can better support women during pregnancy, labour, and the postpartum period, ultimately aiming to reduce stress and improve birth outcomes. In conclusion, the cultural dimension of birth significantly shapes stress outcomes experienced by women in Sub-Saharan Africa. Traditional birthing practices, social support systems, and cultural perceptions influence women's experiences during pregnancy, delivery, and the postpartum period. Recognizing and integrating cultural beliefs and practices into maternal care is crucial for improving birth outcomes and maternal well-being in the region.

1. References

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