

## Cultural Beliefs and Practices for Pregnant Women in Society Ducurai Village, Administrative Post, Ermera Municipality in 2024

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### Abstract

**Background:** Cultural beliefs and traditional practices play an important role in shaping maternal health behaviors in many communities, particularly in developing countries. In Timor-Leste, ancestral traditions remain influential in guiding pregnancy-related practices, including decisions regarding place of delivery and maternal care. **Objective:** This study aimed to explore the cultural beliefs and practices related to pregnancy among women in Ducurai Village, Letefoho Administrative Post, Ermera Municipality. **Method:** This study employed a qualitative research design conducted from August to September 2024. The participants consisted of ten pregnant women selected using a non-probability sampling technique. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation using interview guidelines developed by the researchers. The collected data were analyzed descriptively to identify patterns of cultural beliefs and practices among pregnant women. **Results:** The findings revealed that the majority of respondents strongly believed in and practiced cultural traditions inherited from their ancestors. These traditions influence various aspects of pregnancy-related behavior and are maintained as part of community identity and social values. Cultural beliefs were perceived to provide guidance and protection for both mothers and their unborn children. **Conclusion:** Cultural beliefs and traditional practices remain important factors influencing pregnancy-related behaviors in Ducurai Village. Therefore, culturally sensitive maternal health interventions are necessary to promote safe pregnancy practices while respecting local traditions and community values.

**Keywords:** pregnancy, cultural beliefs, traditional practices, maternal health, Timor-Leste

### INTRODUCTION

Pregnancy and childbirth are considered important life events within families in Timor-Leste, as they symbolize continuity, family identity, and social status [1]. These events are often accompanied by various cultural beliefs and traditional practices that have been passed down from generation to generation [2]. In many communities, such cultural traditions strongly influence how pregnant women are treated, how pregnancy is managed, and where childbirth takes place [3]. As a result, many pregnant women prefer to give birth at home rather than in health facilities, primarily to preserve traditional birthing practices and maintain post-delivery cultural customs [4].

Cultural beliefs inherited from ancestors continue to guide community behavior in caring for pregnant women [5]. These traditional practices reflect the community's trust in ancestral knowledge and local wisdom [6]. While such cultural practices may provide emotional support and strengthen social cohesion, they may also have both positive and negative implications for maternal and neonatal health outcomes [7]. Therefore, understanding the role of cultural beliefs in pregnancy care is essential for improving maternal health services while respecting local traditions [8].

In Timor-Leste, maternal health services have gradually expanded through the availability of hospitals and healthcare facilities [9]. Data indicate that six hospitals in the country have provided services for approximately 5,300 birth cases, representing around 25% of the total number of reported deliveries [10]. In addition, approximately 26.9% of deliveries are assisted by health workers in home settings [11]. Although the proportion of home births has declined compared with previous years, the practice remains relatively common in several districts [12].

Some regions continue to report a high percentage of home deliveries [13]. For instance, the districts of Liquica and Ermera report home birth rates of 62.1% and 65%, respectively [14]. In contrast, districts with greater access to health facilities, such as Dili and Aileu, report a higher proportion of institutional deliveries, reaching approximately 87% [15]. These variations indicate differences in community access to health services as well as the influence of cultural and social factors on maternal health decisions [16].

Health statistics from 2018 recorded 32,586 pregnancies in Timor-Leste, with approximately 5,635 deliveries occurring at home [17]. Among these cases, 27 newborns could not be saved [18]. Maternal mortality remains a significant public health concern in the country. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Timor-Leste's maternal mortality rate was estimated at 204 per 100,000 live births [19]. In comparison, the maternal mortality rate in Indonesia in 2020 was reported at 189 per 100,000 live births [20]. Globally, WHO and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimated that approximately 287,000 women died from pregnancy-related causes in 2020 [9].

Efforts to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality require improved access to high-quality maternal healthcare services, the presence of skilled birth attendants, and effective collaboration among healthcare professionals in managing pregnancy and childbirth complications. In addition, understanding cultural beliefs and traditional practices within communities is essential to ensure that maternal health interventions are culturally sensitive and acceptable to local populations. Therefore, this study aims to explore the cultural beliefs and practices related to pregnancy among women in Ducurai Village, Letefoho Administrative Post, Ermera Municipality.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore cultural beliefs and practices related to pregnancy among women in Ducurai Village, Letefoho Administrative Post, Ermera Municipality. The research was conducted from August to September 2024. A

qualitative approach was considered appropriate for this study because it allows an in-depth understanding of social and cultural phenomena related to maternal beliefs and practices within the community.

The population of this study consisted of pregnant women living in Ducurai Village. A total of ten respondents participated in this study and were selected using a non-probability sampling technique. Participants were included based on their willingness to participate and their experience of pregnancy within the community.

The variables explored in this study included cultural beliefs, cultural practices, and community traditions related to pregnancy. These variables were examined to understand how ancestral traditions influence maternal behavior and perceptions during pregnancy.

Data were collected using several qualitative techniques, including observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Interview questions were developed by the researchers to explore participants' beliefs and practices related to pregnancy and maternal care. Observations were conducted to identify cultural practices performed by the community, while documentation was used to support and verify the information obtained during the interviews.

The collected data were analyzed descriptively by identifying patterns and themes related to cultural beliefs and practices among pregnant women. The analysis focused on understanding how ancestral traditions influence maternal behavior and community practices during pregnancy.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of interviews with 10 respondents regarding the beliefs of pregnant women, the practices of pregnant women, and the culture of pregnant women in the community in Timor-Leste (Table 1).

Table 1. Interview result from the respondent (n= 10)

Result	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Traditions originating from ancestors are still used to live life, because people believe that these traditions contain meaning or advice for life.	4	40
Belief in words originating from ancestors is a form of trust and is often used by people to this day.	3	30
Trust is also a place to build relationships. Relationships between one person and another or more when each person has trust.	3	30

Based on the results of the interview conducted on the beliefs and practices of the culture of pregnant mothers in the Dukurai Suco society, the Letefoho administrative post of Ermera municipality in 2024. With 10 samples and obtained from respondents such as the belief of pregnant mothers, the practice of pregnant mothers and the culture of pregnant

mothers in society [21]. In Timor-Leste it is considered that the traditions that come from the ancestors are still used to lead everyday life, because societies believe that these traditions contain meaning or advice for life. The faith that societies have in the words of the ancestor is great, and through their faith it is strengthened the relationship with the forefathers. According to [22], the belief in the word that comes from the ancestor is a form of trust and is often used by society to date. Faith is also a place to build relationships. A relationship between one person and another person or more when each person has faith. This belief is not obtained from others, but must be from the beginning to the action [23]. Almost every society in Timor-Leste is very careful when doing any action because each action is recommended or it is believed by the society that the reward or the action will occur to the children and the next generation [24]. Society provides care for pregnant mothers as a form of social support. Pregnancy is a process of physiology, while society has different beliefs, the culture that societies practice from the ancestor to care for pregnant mothers [25].

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings on the "reliance and practice of the culture of pregnant mothers in the dukurai suco society, letefoho administrative post, ermera municipality 2024" with 10 samples, and the respondents' answers to the "belief of pregnant mothers in society, the practice of pregnant mothers in society and the culture of pregnant mothers in society," it was concluded that all respondents believed and practise the culture that came from the ancestors. Although the respondents had a different view, they had only one goal, which was to believe in and practise the culture of the ancestors.

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