

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON PREGNANCY HEALTH LITERACY BETWEEN ANCIENT SRI LANKANS AND MODERN SOCIETY IN NUWARA KALAVIYA

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This comparative study examines the pregnancy health literacy of ancient Sri Lankans and the modern society of Nuwara Kalaviya. Pregnancy health literacy refers to the understanding, evaluation, and knowledge required to effectively engage with healthcare professionals regarding the well-being of pregnant women and those around them. Inadequate health literacy in this context can result in undesired pregnancies, abortions, maternal deaths, and infant mortality. To investigate the state of pregnancy health literacy in modern society, this research draws on literary sources such as Mahavamsa, Saddharmalankara, and SararthaSangraha, as well as inscriptions. Additionally, A field study was also conducted in several traditional villages of Nuwara Kalaviya. The purpose of this research is to find out the measures that can be taken to increase the health literacy of modern pregnant women in Nuwara Kalaviya through traditional knowledge. Rituals such as ‘Gab Perahara’ and recitation of ‘Angulimala Piritha’ were performed to seek blessings for pregnant women. Historical records indicate the existence of dedicated hospitals for pregnant women since the reign of Pandukabhaya. Kings such as Dutugemunu and Buddhadasa bestowed gifts upon pregnant women and midwives. Dietary practices during pregnancy focused on consuming nourishing foods while avoiding hot, cold, and bitter items. Pregnant women were provided with nutritious food, including white awara, al rice, king mee, cow's milk, jackfruit, and plantains. The community actively contributed to the well-being of pregnant women, and special offerings were made to them, considering them as 'Doladuka'. However, recent field studies reveal a significant lack of pregnancy health literacy among women. Many problems have arisen due to an improper diet and early or middle-aged pregnancies. Factors such as malnutrition, poor postnatal hygiene, and family or community behavior have degraded women's mental and physical health. In this study, it was found that the traditional knowledge revealed through ancient literature and folk consciousness can be used to increase the sexual and pregnancy literacy of women in Nuwara Kalaviya.

Keywords: pregnancy health literacy, ancient Sri Lanka, Nuwara Kalaviya, modern society, sexual literacy

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