

Tribal Women and Maternal Health: A Study Among Kondareddy Tribal Women of Andhra Pradesh, India

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Every society has its own culture and a set of beliefs, which give a special status to that particular society. Those beliefs also have certain impact on the health and well being of the people of that society. In India, Tribal societies have a very special status not only due to their aboriginal native roots in India but also for their distinguishing cultures, arts, food, cuisine, clothes, crafts and festivals. Tribal societies also carry within themselves the rich experience of aboriginal knowledge on medicine and health care. Tribal cultures are popularly known for the intrinsic homage and respect towards the protection of nature. Since the times immemorial, they had indigenous knowledge for the maintenance of maternal health care. At the same time, they also have a certain specific belief system around the maternal health care which at times intercedes at times obstructs the modern western allopathic stream of medicine, that the Indian State promotes. This study focuses on understanding such belief system and the perception of tribal women on health care in general and maternal health in particular. The study is based on the first hand information extracted from the narrative interviews of Konda Reddy Tribal women of Andhra Pradesh.

On the one hand, the state wants to improve the conditions of women's maternal health by providing them the modern health care facilities during the child birth. On the other hand the conditions for these government benefits to reach out to Tribal women are abysmally low. To improve the maternal health conditions of this community, the state's health care providers should understand the beliefs, perceptions and unique practices of tribal women. There is a need to establish health centers with health care professionals in the researched area and the state should also support the local traditional "healers". There is also a need to provide information about health care practices, medicine and improvement of conditions of child birth and postpartum care.

Keywords: maternal health; beliefs; indigenous knowledge; healer