

## **A MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY ON POSTNATAL FOOD BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF MUSLIM WOMEN**

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Food practices are an integral part of a culture. Thus, culture defines human diet, and the ways by which people maintain health, strengthen ethnic identity and religious belief, and distinguish social status, age and gender. Therefore, anthropologists have long been interested in food, food ways, nutrition and human behavior related to it. These practices become even more important during festivals, at the time of child birth, during menstruation and in case of death (Siddhartha Sharma, 2013). Thus, after giving birth women in many cultures are subject to postnatal/postpartum rituals. Further, Sri Lankan postnatal food practices also reflect diverse cultural norms and myths. Although, it is common among Sri Lankan women, there is a clear difference existing between various ethnic communities. Therefore, this paper will provide a summary of various beliefs and practices of Muslim women –after child birth. Therefore, a study has been carried out among Muslim women who have baby/babies within three months (who live in Ketakumbura GS division), in order to find out the postnatal food dietary patterns and practices of Muslim women. Therefore, ten women were purposely selected from the divisional midwife’s list for the sample population. In order to collect data some in depth interviews were carried out among sample population as well as among selected elderly ladies, traditional health practitioners (*vedamahatthayas*), and mid wives. Study reveals that the food and related practices of mothers after child birth are based on two main categories as follows; 1) Acceptable foods (permissible foods), 2) Avoided foods (taboo foods). Further, study also shows that certain foods are avoided according to some beliefs in the thermal quality of foods (“The hot cold theory”) and beliefs in pollution and the purity or impurity of foods. It was also noted that the religion also plays a vital role in the determination of food beliefs and practices. It was also found that the major dietary practices are aimed to improve the strength of the body and muscles tone as well as to provide energy and nutrition. In the sense postnatal food practices have been considered as a food therapy (food as a medicine) which is related to certain myths and beliefs of women in a particular society.