Perceptions and Practices of Hmong Childbearing Women: Promoting Cultural Respect

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Purpose:
To understand the meaning of childbirth and traditional cultural practices as related through perspectives of Hmong women living in the highlands of Vietnam.

Background:
Increasing knowledge about the meaning of childbirth in diverse cultures can promote culturally respectful nursing care. Hmong are a highland ethnic minority group dispersed across Southeast Asia. War, conflict, and refugee resettlement has led to numerous Hmong communities worldwide. Unique cultural beliefs exist in Hmong culture about the spiritual and physical world as well as ritual practices associated with childbearing. This includes variations of ancestor worship, reincarnation, and healing practices by shamans. Traditionally, Hmong families take an active role in childbirth with Hmong women frequently laboring and giving birth silently in their home.

Methods:
A qualitative study was conducted in six highland Hmong villages near the border of northern Vietnam and China. Following IRB approval and informed consent, Hmong women who had recently given birth were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide with questions regarding pregnancy and birth. Data were also obtained from ethnic midwives and a female Hmong trek guide. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Transcripts and field notes were evaluated by the research team individually for preliminary themes followed by collaboration and generation of final themes. Data collection and analysis occurred using guidelines appropriate to qualitative inquiry.

Results:
Data analysis revealed insights into the perceptions and meaning of childbirth to Hmong women living in the highlands of Vietnam. Significant themes were identified and include 1) highly valuing motherhood, (2) laboring and giving birth silently, (3) giving birth with the comfort of home and family, (4) feeling capable of birthing well (5) feeling anxiety to provide for a new baby, and (6) embracing cultural traditions. Other customary birth practices include home birth, mother-in-law as birth attendant, placental rituals, dietary restrictions, postpartum taboos. Healthcare decisions are frequently determined by extended family.

Conclusion:
It is important for healthcare providers of Hmong childbearing women to recognize the value and importance placed on bearing children in Hmong culture and support family participation in the birth. Recognizing the importance of specific food preferences and restrictions in the childbearing period can also promote a culturally respectful birth experience.

Due to global migration, nurses are caring for markedly diverse populations of women. It is important for nurses to be aware of cultural variances specific to vulnerable populations of childbearing women. Listening to the voices of Hmong women provides greater understanding of the meaning of childbirth and significant cultural practices. This awareness increases cultural
sensitivity and knowledge in nurses caring for Hmong women. Nurses can meet health care needs of Hmong women by integrating traditional cultural practices with evidence-based practices to promote satisfying birthing experiences and assure respectful, safe, and quality health care.

**Title:**
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**Keywords:**
Childbirth, Cultural Respect and Hmong

**Abstract Summary:**
Gaining greater understanding of Hmong cultural beliefs and practices can promote respectful nursing care leading to positive health outcomes. Nurses can integrate traditional Hmong cultural practices when feasible with evidence-based practice to ensure quality healthcare and satisfying birthing experiences.

**References:**

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