
Iranian births

A lesson in cross-cultural care

Information about cultural patterns in this article and others in this series represents generalizations, which should not be mistaken for stereotypes. Cultural generalizations will not fit every patient, but awareness of broad patterns can give practitioners a starting point from which to provide appropriate care. The information on Iranian births in this article is taken from H Haftizi's chapter in *Culture and Nursing Care: A Pocket Guide*, edited by J G Lipson, S L Dibble, and P A Minarek.

The most difficult patient that Susan, a labor and delivery nurse, ever attended was Robabeh, an Iranian woman. Robabeh yelled and screamed throughout her entire uncomplicated labor. After the delivery of their infant, Robabeh's husband gave her a 3-karat diamond ring. When Susan commented on the expensive gift, Robabeh explained dramatically that it was because "He made me suffer so much." It is customary among Iranians to compensate the woman with expensive gifts for the suffering

she experiences during childbirth; the greater the suffering, the greater the gifts, especially if the child is a boy. No one will know how much she is suffering if she does it in silence.¹

PREGNANCY CARE

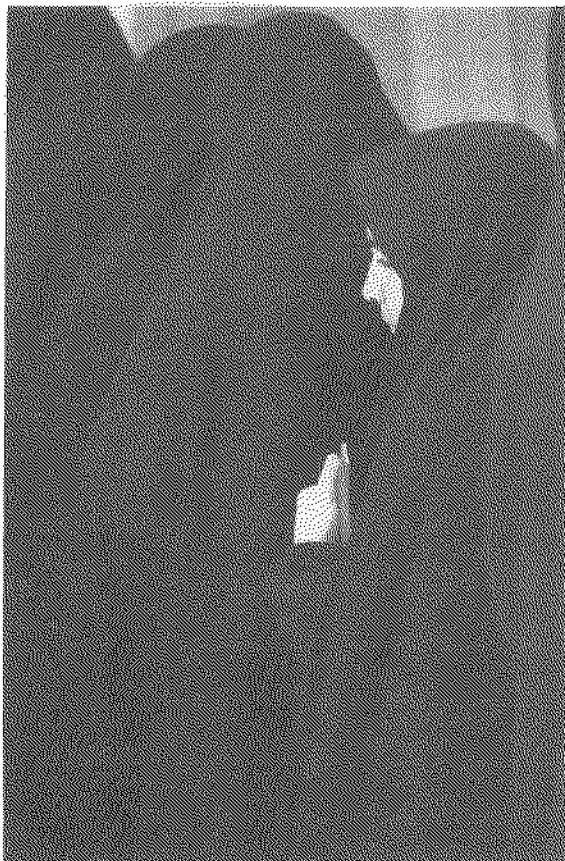
Prenatal care depends on financial stability.² The family provides help and support. An expectant mother is en-

Gerl-Ann Galanti
Department of
Anthropology
California State
University
Los Angeles, CA 90032
Division of Nursing
California State
University
Dominquez Hills

Correspondence to:
Dr Galanti
ggalanti@mediasone.net

Competing interests:
None declared

West J Med
2000;173:67-68



Behnaz Mahdavi/STB

Iranian women in the holy Shiite city of Qom

couraged to balance diet and rest adequately and to refrain from heavy work throughout pregnancy.

LABOR PRACTICES

A midwife or a physician is acceptable at childbirth. Walking before delivery is encouraged, and Iranian women are generally agreeable to Lamaze classes. Expectant fathers are involved and interested in the birthing experience. During labor, a woman should be offered pain relief. Taking a shower soon after birth is common.

ROLE OF THE LABORING WOMAN DURING BIRTH PROCESS

A woman's role during labor depends on her personality. Some will moan and grunt during labor, and others may get hysterical. Modesty remains a controlling factor.

Giving credit where credit is due

The photographer who captured the beauty of the Na Pali Coast on the cover of our June issue is Homer Hernandez. Dr Hernandez, whose work appeared on the cover of our January 2000 issue as well, lives and practices medicine in Southern California.

ROLE OF FATHER AND OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS DURING BIRTH PROCESS

More acculturated Iranian fathers take an active role. Female family members are supportive and present.

METHOD OF DELIVERY

Iranian women have no preference for either vaginal delivery or cesarean section. The health of the mother and baby are defining factors.

BREAST FEEDING

Breast feeding is preferred over bottle feeding. Breast milk is mixed with solid food when the infant is about 4 to 6 months of age. Iranian women avoid using prepackaged baby food, and they generally do not mix breast and bottle feeding unless the mother works outside the home. They may continue to breast-feed as long as 1 year.

BIRTH RECUPERATION

Rest, proper diet, hygiene, and emotional ease are considered essential. Female family members and friends provide support and guidance in the care of a newborn.

PROBLEMS WITH BABY

If a baby is diagnosed with an ailment, the best person to speak with is the father of the child. Health care professionals should always give hope and discuss methods of treatment.

MALE AND FEMALE CIRCUMCISION

Female circumcision is never performed. Male circumcision is done either at the hospital soon after birth or at a later date. Male infants are always circumcised and, in some families, the occasion is marked by a period of festivity.

References

- 1 Galanti GA. *Caring for Patients From Different Cultures*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; 1997.
- 2 Hafizi H. Iranians. In: Lipson JG, Dibble SL, Mimarik PA, eds. *Culture and Nursing Care: A Pocket Guide*. San Francisco: University of California; San Francisco, Nursing Press; 1996:169-179.