



## Food Taboo on Mothers during Pregnancy in Aceh Tribe

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### ABSTRACT

Food taboo is a cultural prohibition on consuming certain types of food. The Aceh tribe is one of the tribes that still apply food taboos. Food taboos usually arise due to customs and beliefs that have been passed down from generation to generation, and are applied to pregnant women and nursing mothers. The negative impact of food taboos can result in the mother and foetus not being able to get good nutritional intake. Medical experts explain that pregnant women should eat healthy foods and should discuss with a doctor or nutritionist so that they can get the right advice.

**Keyword:** food taboo, pregnant women, aceh tribe.

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### ABSTRAK

Pantangan makanan adalah larangan budaya untuk mengkonsumsi jenis makanan tertentu. Suku Aceh merupakan salah satu suku yang masih menerapkan pantangan makanan. Pantangan makanan biasanya muncul karena adat istiadat dan kepercayaan yang sudah turun temurun, dan diterapkan pada ibu hamil dan ibu menyusui. Dampak negatif dari pantangan makanan dapat mengakibatkan ibu dan janin tidak bisa mendapatkan asupan nutrisi yang baik. Para ahli medis menjelaskan bahwa ibu hamil harus mengonsumsi makanan sehat dan sebaiknya berdiskusi dengan dokter atau ahli gizi agar mendapatkan saran yang tepat.

**Kata kunci:** pantangan makanan, ibu hamil, suku aceh.

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## 1. Introduction

Here Indonesia is an archipelago that contains more than 1,128 tribes and cultures spread from the western to the eastern tip of Indonesia. Each culture in Indonesia has its own uniqueness and characteristics, especially in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (NAD). Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam is the name of one of the provinces on the island of Sumatra. It is located at the westernmost tip of Indonesia and has its capital city in Banda Aceh. In Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, there is one of the largest ethnic groups, the Aceh tribe. Acehnese tribes usually settle in coastal areas. With a variety of foods in Indonesia, of course, this is closely related to the various food problems that exist in each region. One of them is food taboo, a food problem that is still believed in Indonesia today.

Quoted from Kristya et al., (2021) food taboo is a form of prohibition to consume certain types of food, because it is believed to have a bad impact on health. Of course, this food taboo characterises one tribe from another. According to Chahyanto & Wulansari (2018) with the existence of a food taboo, there is a view of foods that can be consumed and those that cannot be consumed, where this view varies in each community group. The existence of food taboos is influenced by the socio-cultural environment due to interactions between communities that will form habits, behaviours, beliefs or cultures that are considered important. This hereditary understanding will thicken and give rise to a taboo culture (Gea, 2011). Another thing that affects the existence of food taboos is the decline in the health condition of the body, especially in the body of pregnant women because generally foods that are prohibited from consumption are actually nutritious so that it can

affect the decline in nutrition and affect their health (Sartika, 2014). It cannot be denied that pregnancy naturally makes pregnant women more vulnerable to malnutrition due to physiological increases in nutrient requirements, which may not be fully met through food intake. Generally, foods that are avoided are foods with nutritional sources that are important to maintain the condition of the pregnant woman and the baby she is carrying. If the nutritional needs of pregnant women are not met, this leads to Chronic Energy Deficiency (CHD) during pregnancy which will result in health problems and can even lead to the death of the mother and baby in the womb. According to the Chairman of the ICIFPRH Committee in Natasha & Niara (2022), the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) in Indonesia in 2019 was 305 per 100,000 live births. With that figure, of course, the MMR in Indonesia is still relatively high.

Food has its own part in human life, both culturally and religiously. In some tribes in Indonesia, food restrictions have become commonplace, especially in Aceh. This tribe also still believes in the existence of food taboos or food taboos, especially for pregnant women. There are several foods that are avoided during early pregnancy, namely: fruits such as pineapple, coconut water, durian, and tape because it is considered that these foods have the potential to abort the fetus in the womb. Some of these food restrictions are usually obtained from parents and in-laws.

This food restriction is a form of prohibition against certain types of food that should not be consumed at certain times, one of which is during pregnancy. Therefore, food restrictions due to pregnancy-related taboos and serious mythical beliefs can have a negative impact on the health of the mother as well as the foetus (Kavle & Landry, 2018). The practice of dietary restrictions for pregnant women is still prevalent in Indonesia. There are many studies on similar topics with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This study aims to explain food taboos on the basis of health, especially for pregnant women and their babies in the Aceh tribe, analysing from the impact to the medical point of view on food taboos and informing the types of foods that are recommended for pregnant women in the Aceh tribe.

## 2. Methods

This paper is made by conducting a literature review using journals and databases. The database used to complete the data in this paper is Google Scholar. There are approximately 239 literatures in the database and 27 literatures were used in this paper. In addition, the author used the keywords "food taboo", "pregnant women", and "Aceh tribe". After obtaining the required journals in accordance with the required themes, the authors analysed and then wrote the journals.

## 3. Results And Discussion

### 3.1 Insight of Food Taboo

Research by (Kristya et al., 2021) said that food taboo is something that has an impact on health and nutritional status, because of the prohibition of consuming certain types of food in Indonesia. These taboos should not be violated or ignored in a particular society or culture. They are usually related to religious beliefs, traditions, or beliefs held by a group of people. There are some foods that may be considered as taboo or forbidden in some cultures, but are considered as normal foods and considered delicious in other cultures. Food taboos are also widely applied to breastfeeding mothers, the reason is the same as pregnant women because they are worried about the adverse effects on the child who is being breastfed, therefore they must pay attention to the food that enters, so that the child who drinks breast milk is not disabled. For example: Eating bananas in the Aceh tribe is believed that their children will get bruises, and eating durian will cause heat. Intan (2018) explains that in adolescent girls, many parents limit or prohibit their children from eating foods that are considered taboo. They argue that a woman must be white, clean, tall and slim so they must limit food in order to become a physically beautiful adult woman, and so that when pregnant later the child in the womb is not afflicted with bad things. The most common example is that girls are forbidden to eat pineapples and cucumbers because they are believed to make a woman unable to conceive. Then women are forbidden to eat chocolate and nuts because they can cause black and fat.

Indonesia is one of the countries where some tribes still practice this food taboo tradition. The emergence and development of this food taboo is motivated by beliefs passed down from previous people and developed to the next generation through the inheritance of knowledge. They believe that if this taboo is carried out, then they will not have difficulties when going through the process of giving birth (Harnany, 2016). The results of research from Murniasih et al., (2016) explain that people who practice food taboos are caused by the advice and suggestions given by their parents and in-laws. The advice and suggestions they give to pregnant women are cultures and beliefs that they have done and passed down from generation to generation.

### 3.2 Food Taboo in Pregnant Woman

Food taboos are still very common in Indonesia, especially in Aceh. Food taboos are unwritten knowledge, prohibitions or taboos are knowledge that is passed down by the ancestors orally to children and grandchildren to the current generation. Food taboos are generally applied to pregnant women and also breastfeeding mothers, but not only found in pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers, food taboos also exist in the elderly, adolescents, men. However, based on research in Intan (2018) women are the most vulnerable to believe in the sacredness of taboos, especially pregnant women, not least the role of parents who influence their children to apply food taboos. The reason pregnant women apply food taboos is not about the food but the impact after consuming the food, pregnant women are afraid that their foetus will experience bad things because they prohibit the taboo. Therefore, by not eating the food tabooed can help pregnant women to save the foetus in the womb.

There are some types of food restrictions that cannot be eaten by pregnant women in the Aceh tribe, pregnant women are not allowed to eat sharp and hard foods. Sharp foods and drinks such as durian, pineapple, kulu fruit, jackfruit, soda, ice, coconut, and others. If consuming these foods will cause miscarriage for pregnant women in the Aceh tribe. Apart from consuming the foods mentioned earlier, pregnant women are also prohibited from consuming too much porridge provided by the *posyandu* because this food is considered to make the baby's size large and cause the mother difficulty during childbirth (Putri, 2021).

In addition, the Acehnese also believe that certain fish should not be eaten by pregnant women. Pregnant women in the Aceh tribe are only allowed to consume bolo fish or a type of anchovy. Foods that are considered to be detrimental to the health of pregnant women also include raw fish such as sushi or sashimi. Furthermore, there is also a type of seafood that must be avoided for pregnant women in the Aceh tribe, namely shark fish. Although shark fish is good for health, pregnant women in the Aceh tribe avoid consuming it because the shark eats anything when it is alive. swordfish also cannot be consumed, the reason Acehnese people avoid it is because this fish contains high mercury and cannot be reduced. Mercury is also one of the heavy metals that are harmful to the body. In Amiruddin et al. (2021), it is explained that pregnant women usually follow the taboos told by their parents and in-laws. When pregnant until when breastfeeding, foods that are prohibited by pregnant women vary. Examples include squid, shrimp, crabs, shellfish, and foods that contain animal protein. These foods are forbidden because according to their beliefs, these foods will make the foetus sticky, making it difficult to give birth. After giving birth, eating fish and prawns is also prohibited. The reason is that they believe eating fish and shrimp will cause itching on the body, the scratching will bleed. In Aceh cultural beliefs, eating satay, pineapple, tape, and durian are also prohibited foods for a pregnant woman.

As for the various types of foods that are recommended to be consumed by pregnant women, some of them are; vegetables and fruits that are cold, for example watermelon, besides tofu water, drinking lots of water, coconut water when pregnant before giving birth. Some reasons are recommended to eat vegetables so that the baby is healthy, tofu water for white babies, and lots of breast milk, coconut water so that the baby is born with clean skin. Similar research results by Umami & Darmawati (2018) in the Aceh tribe, one of the factors indicating that the high level of anaemia in pregnant women is related to cultural beliefs, namely the abstinence from eating certain traditional foods.

In the Aceh tribe, there is a ritual called *madeung*. *Madeung* is a ritual where a postpartum mother is not allowed to leave the house and is prohibited from eating sour and spicy foods, the reason is that it is feared that it will cause the baby to have a stomachache (Asli, 2017). In addition to *madeung*, there is also an Aceh tribal tradition in postpartum mothers, namely the *badapu* tradition. According to research from Zakiyuddin & Reynaldi (2020) in the *badapu* tradition there are several food restrictions that must be implemented. Foods that are prohibited in the *badapu* tradition include: eggs, shrimp, shellfish, tuna, milk, papaya, bananas, pineapples, and chillies, as well as various kinds of fruits that have water content, such as oranges, watermelons and so on. This *badapu* tradition has been passed down from generation to generation so that they have the desire to continue doing this *badapu* tradition.

### 3.3 Why did food taboo emerge among the Acehnese?

The triggering factor for the emergence of food taboo culture among the Acehnese is the cultural factors they absorb, a strong cultural orientation that has an impact on the lives of the Acehnese people. This affects various aspects of group life, including in terms of group health, experiences and conditions related to pregnancy in Acehnese pregnant women are strongly influenced by the cultural values they absorb and in this case the cultural values are finally manifested in the form of activities to deal with a phenomenon that occurs in the life of the group. Therefore, the cultural value dimension is vital for the emergence of food taboos in Acehnese society (Nulwita Maliati et al., 2022).

### 3.4 The impact of Food Taboo on the health of pregnant women

In Nantama (2019), it is explained that food taboos in pregnant women not only have a negative impact on the health of the mother, but also have a positive impact. Pregnant women do need adequate sources of protein and nutrition, but if pregnant women are not given taboos, it will also have an impact on their babies. Like milk, there are some milks that are not suitable for consumption in pregnant women. Likewise with meat, pregnant women cannot eat all kinds of meat because it will affect the baby if there is an incompatibility. This makes pregnant women will be careful about what they consume during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Food restrictions can have a negative impact on pregnant women, because pregnant women generally follow the knowledge that has been passed down from generation to generation without seeing the truth from the medical side, which can result in the mother and the fetus in the womb not getting enough nutritional intake for themselves and also for the baby. The lack of nutritional intake will also make the mother emotionally disturbed. Many pregnant women still believe in food taboos, one of which is eating nutritious and protein foods that cause the baby in the womb to grow quickly. Iron tablets, which are important for pregnant women, are actually a taboo for pregnant women in Aceh itself. In terms of health, iron is the most important thing to prevent anaemia and also bleeding when the mother is about to give birth (Nantama, 2019).

The abstinence from protein foods, be it eggs, meat, fruit, vegetables, etc. is also an influential thing in terms of health, people who believe in their traditions consider that when consuming these foods will harm themselves and even their babies, including causing stunted child growth, drying up breast milk, easily sick children if they are born.

### *3.5 Medical perspective on food taboos*

Medical and health professionals' views on food taboos for pregnant women may vary depending on factors such as culture, religion, the mother's health condition, and the type of food being avoided. In general, medical and health experts recommend that pregnant women eat a healthy and balanced diet rich in nutrients, such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean proteins and healthy fats. However, if there are foods that are considered taboo by certain cultures or religions, then pregnant women should discuss with their doctor or nutritionist to find out the health effects of these foods and find healthier alternatives (Diana et al., 2018).

Medical and health experts say that actually the hardest taboo for pregnant women is to only consume alcohol, caffeine, and cigarettes in large quantities, because it can be proven that caffeine, alcohol and nicotine can harm the fetus, making the baby born will have physical defects and disrupt fetal development. According to the explanation of Diana et al., (2018) the medical expert's view of food taboos for pregnant women is that pregnant women should eat healthy and balanced foods that are rich in nutrients, and avoid foods that can bring dangerous health risks to the fetus. If there are foods that are considered taboo by certain cultures or religions, then pregnant women should discuss with doctors or nutritionists to get the right advice and recommendations. Because if the mother and baby do not get enough nutrition, the baby is at risk of malnutrition or stunting.

## **4. Conclusion**

Food taboo culture has become common among pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers, because some taboo foods can be dangerous if consumed during pregnancy, for example foods that contain acid and heat such as pineapple, durian, which are believed to make pregnant women miscarry. In the Aceh tribe, there are foods that contain protein such as meat that are taboo for pregnant women to consume, they do not consult these taboo foods to doctors or nutritionists because they believe in the traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation by their tribal ancestors. Traditionally, Acehnese people consider food taboos as values that must be obeyed because it will affect the health and safety of pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers. However, from a medical and nutritionist perspective, foods that cannot be consumed by pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers are anything containing alcohol, caffeine, raw food and cigarettes. From a medical point of view, it is also seen that pregnant women really need a lot of protein to avoid malnutrition during pregnancy which can cause the risk of stunting.

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