THE PRACTICE OF LYING BY THE FIRE OF THE MOTHERS AFTER CHILDBIRTH IN THAI TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper was to study the practice of lying by the fire of the mothers after childbirth in the Thai traditional medicine. This research utilized a qualitative research technique by using both non structure interview and structure interview together with an in-depth interview and participatory observation. A total of 36 informants was chosen by the criteria. The findings revealed that the lying by the fire of the mothers after birth was the Thai traditional practice to warm the body, to have only specific meal, and to use of herbal medicine and traditional rituals. In addition, the practice of lying by the fire of the mothers after childbirth was conducted according to the old Thai traditional medicine which had been practice for centuries.

Keywords: Traditional Medicine, Childbirth, Mothers

I. INTRODUCTION

Thai society has been changing by the influence of modernization including public healthcare system. Most people nationwide especially those living in cities are familiar with using the healthcare service in hospitals including receiving the service of pregnancy or maternity care and delivery as hospital can provide more appropriate and safer care [1]. Nowadays, pregnancy and maternity care after childbirth delivery by following the traditional folk care for instance the therapy by the heat of fire is not seen as a common practice. Phraya AnumanRajadhon (also known by his pen name SathianKoset) narrated in one of his books, ‘….one thing that changed so much is the way people give birth and bring up their children, influenced by advancement of scientific knowledge.’ [2]. Once traditional belief and practice on birth giving has been changed, the folk practice of postpartum care or the maternity care after giving birth has also gradually been less practiced and disappeared. The folk way of maternity care will be less recognized by people in general or even people in many local communities, however this have still been practiced in some remote areas.

A therapy for mother after giving childbirth by setting her lying near an open fire and herbs has been a folk practice that uses the heat of fire for warmth and sanitation of the mother. This tradition is practiced for recovering the mother’s health or thepostnatal care in the puerperium period. The period is critical for the recovery, which affects the health condition of the mother unless there is not an appropriate care. Therefore, there are steps of care to follow with some prohibitions. The folkway maternity care in Thailand has been practiced under folk believes and requires midwifery experience that have been passed through generations. It is believed that heat from fire relieves pains, contraction and intense of muscles, increases blood circulation, stimulates faster uterine involution, gets rid of lochia and prevents diseases that may come after giving childbirth [3].

This research involves the tradition of lying near an open fire or the therapy by use of heat of fire in accordance with the principles of Thai traditional medicine. The study area was Nong Bua Lamphu Province in the northeastern region of Thailand. There still are remote villages where local people are still living by the local way of traditions and folk believes, including the tradition of lying near an open fire of mothers after giving childbirth. The practice has become the unique identity of the place transferred from generation to generation. The statistics reported by the sub-district health promotion hospital during 2012-2014 unveiled that among a total of 108 mothers who delivered childbirth, the number of those who used natural childbirth or gave birth using no medications was 80 (74.07 percentages); the number of those who used operation was 28 (25.93 percentages); the number of those who stayed lying near an open fire was 76 (70.37 percentages); and the number of those who did not do was 32 (29.62 percentages) [4]. Moreover, there were some other studies that discovered the traditional holistic and integrated healthcare and health promotion [5]. These studies can provide a contribution to development of appropriate maternity care methods in the puerperium period in harmony with the modern healthcare.

Thereafter, the knowledge body of the maternity care after giving childbirth by using the heat of fire is believed to benefit for mothers of the puerperium period. As well, it is another way to preserve this tradition as the unique wisdom of Thai society and to promote it to new generations. In this regards, this study aimed to explore the folkway methods of this maternity care.
II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The documentary research of medication doctrines about the therapy of lying near an open fire during the maternity care found that this therapy was written in the Pathom-Jinda medical scripture which is about maternal and child health and the Maha-Chotirat medical scripture which concerns normal and abnormal menstrual blood, on palm leaves, during Ayutthaya period. Later during Rattanakosin period in the reign of King Rama 5th the doctrines were collected and recorded into the manuscript by the command of King Rama 5th and named ‘The Royal Medicine’. After the establishment of Paethayakorn School or the School of Medical Practitioners at the Faculty of Medicine, Siriraj Hospital, by Phraya PrasertThamrong (Doctor Nu) and Phraya PhitsanuPrasatwej, the manuscript was used for teaching [6].

The Pathom-Jinda medical scripture describes about fertilization and implantation, pregnancy, pregnancy care, miscarriage, stages of development of the fetus, stage of labor or delivery and importance of maternity healthcare and healthcare of baby during the treatment session by using the heat of fire for uterine involution. The treatment session by using the heat of fire for uterine involution is critical and without the appropriate recovery treatment it may lead to several effects to the mother during the puerperium period both physically and mentally. Giving childbirth results in a loss of balance or the malfunction of the body system influenced by the 4 body elements, and this malfunction varies by individuals with difference of certain elements that influence the health condition. These elements are wind or air, fire or heat, earth or solid and water or fluid. Some symptoms appear because of the imbalance of these elements in the body, which can be physical illness and mental and emotional sickness. There are some examples. An imbalance of wind element will lead to loss of strength, fatigue, low vitality, cold and dryness in the body, tremors and twitches, constipation, disturbed sleep or lack of sleep, feeling confused, fearful and shaky, anxious, nervous, agitated or impatient behavior, feeling ungrounded and depressed. An imbalance of fire element results in yellow stool, urine, eyes and skin, excessive thirst or hunger, heartburn and acidity, skin rashes, acne, and boils, inflammations, difficulty in sleep, cold in the body, loss of strength and fatigue at arms and legs, cough, difficulty in breathing and excessive sleepiness. Moreover, seasons, behavior and geography or living place environment also are influencing on the health condition of mothers after giving childbirth.

In the Maha-Chotirat medical scripture, the importance of treatment methods and medicine recipes for women diseases and health symptoms was written. On the Wat Pho Epigraphic (Wat Pho or Wat PhraChettuphonWimonMangkaharamRatchaworaramahawihan), the treatment methods for women diseases and health symptoms was categorized in the science of medicine in accordance with the principles of Thai traditional medicine of maternity care during pregnancy, delivery and puerperium period, guidelines for maternity care in accordance with Thai traditional medicine and folk traditions, and changes of mother’s health condition after childbirth delivery in accordance with the principles of Thai traditional medicine.

III. DETAILS EXPERIMENTAL

3.1. Materials and Procedures

This study used the qualitative approach by the retrospective method. That is to review the past experiences of the samples, the mothers who experienced childbirth delivery and their maternity care during the puerperium period. Thus, the samples were interviewed in-depth, in both formal and informal manners, with use of observation technique. The 41 samples were grouped into the following: (1) 8 mothers who gave childbirth during a year and used the folk method of lying near an open fire or the therapy by use of heat of fire after their delivery; (2) 8 persons who had experience in maternity care, who were interviewed about the maternity care; (3) 2 hospital staffs who were in charge of taking care of the mothers after giving childbirth and visiting them at home as to follow up their overall health condition after the care service; and (4) 2 experts of Thai traditional medicine for postnatal mothers, who had certificate and acceptance by public. The selection of the study area was based on the review of villages in Thailand that still followed the folk method of maternity care for postnatal mothers which could be varied in details in different areas. The selected site was therefore the communities in Nong Bua Lamphu in the northeastern Thailand.

The unstructured and semi-structured interview techniques were utilized with the samples with the participatory and non-participatory observations made during the interviews, field observation, and focus group discussion. Other equipment used included tape recorder and camera for taking pictures of interview and observation activities for instance the therapy by use of heat of fire, herbs, behavior of the mothers, filed note and laptop. The study was separated into 3 phrases: the fieldwork to the communities for introducing and giving the purposes of the coming fieldwork; actual fieldwork for collecting the data by use of the abovementioned tools; and the summary of data into information and knowledge for returning back to the communities for benefits of their further uses.

The accuracy of the data was proved by use of the triangulation method. After that, the data was analyzed by the content analysis technique carried out by making the topology of the raw data and then with an alignment of the research conceptual framework. The induction from the categorized data was done,
and the discussion was made in response to the question of how the folk method of lying near an open fire or the therapy by use of heat of fire after their delivery affected the mother’s health condition; and of whether there was any similarity and difference in the results between the folk and modern practices for the maternity care of the postnatal mothers.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that the mothers who chose the folk method of lying near an open fire by 3 reasons: (1) their past experience with this method, and therefore having willingness and confidence about it; (2) following the parents’ and cousins’ suggestions; and (3) following the tradition. The results of the method occurred with the sampled mothers showed that there were both direct and indirect benefits in terms of treatment and recovery. The direct benefits include the body receiving the heat; the heat reduces muscle contracture and muscle tone resulting in an expansion of blood tube and increase of blood circulation, reduces pains from the operation, gets rid of lochia, and relieves aches. Besides, the study found that this method was used with herbs which had the properties of increasing an ability of mothers’ body to produce breast milk, improving the maintenance of blood, and reduces allergic symptoms. The indirect benefits include allowing the mothers to rest after giving childbirth, and promoting them to take care of themselves by the medical principles, and supports of their mental condition by assembly of and being surrounded by family members, or by visits of cousins and neighbors who will give them courage and suggestions about how to take care of the baby and of themselves. It can be concluded that the period of adopting the method of lying near an open fire is the time that fosters warmth, courage and confidence for the mothers after their childbirth delivery.

The focus group discussion allowed the author to know that the mothers during their puerperium period paid high attention and importance to personal healthcare by the folk method as the first priority. The observation showed that those who chose this folk method were able to use appropriate ways of healthcare on their own with the main purpose of health retreat and recovery to gain back the normal condition. Furthermore, the review of literature in regards to this folk method practiced by the northeastern Thai mothers found that there were similarities between the folk method and the method of the Thai traditional medicine found in the Pathom-Jinda medical scripture. The scripture describes the details of herbs used in the folk method of lying near an open fire, symptoms after giving childbirth, and some details of the practice of staying in herbal steaming room that keeps new mothers healthy after childbirth. However, the steps of lying near an open fire were not written in the scripture.

The remain by a fire is believed to be similar to remaining under the interdiction aiming to allow time of the new mothers to rest and take care of their health condition after childbirth delivery. This is the tradition passed from generation to generation. The wisdom has been communicated, received, preserved and transmitted orally from one generation to another, telling how to behave during the period of lying near an open fire, what to eat, what herbs to use and other related rituals. This agreed with the studies of SonwangPhumthong et al. [7] and of NattapongPhutkla [8] stating the this folk method had still been practiced at the present especially in families that had the elderly or grandparents who were strict in the practice and who also taught the new mother the know-how. Herbs used in this folk practice are diverse for instance herb roots and instant ones available at markets, or those used with modern medicines. This concurred with the studies of KanithaMeepradit [9], MontiraKiewying [10] and PimsabPimpisut [11]. These herbs have the property of getting rid of lochia and stimulating breast milk. It can be concluded that this folk method provides valuable body of knowledge of local wisdom for new mothers to follow in order to gain back to the balance of body after giving childbirth and at the same time to allow them to learn how to take care of themselves at home. According to the local people in Dong Mafai Village, the village where people have still preserve their traditional believes, rituals and practices, lying near an open fire is a culture that rehabilitates body, mind and spirit of new mothers, and encourages an assembly of family members, cousins and neighbors.

CONCLUSIONS

In order to preserve and continue the folk practice of lying near an open fire of new mothers, it is necessary that family members and communities recognize the value of this folk practice. The study of SirilakBatprakhon [12] summarized that there were 4 values of Thai wisdoms: (1) wisdoms that strengthen the community and encourage self- reliance; (2) wisdoms with presence of uniqueness and identity for public pride; (3) wisdoms that can be applied in daily life; and (4) wisdoms that sustainably support balance and engage interrelationship between human and nature. It found that the local people in Dong Mafai Village had preserved the folk way of lying near an open fire, through learning by observing how old generation did, trying; it was the learning based on the experiences of the elderly, the village midwives, the experienced cousins and neighbors, and on personal experience. It should be noted that one of ling-term learning is the learning by the transmission within family from generation to generation, before passing the knowledge to other people. This knowledge becomes the tacit knowledge, which will be more valuable after going through exchanges and interactions between people, and integrating with

other bodies of knowledge. That is, the knowledge with high values for solving problems, enhancing persons’ capabilities, organizations, communities and society as a whole.

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