

Traditional massage “Peuseul” for pregnant women in Kuta Village and its impact on pregnant women's well-being: A qualitative study

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Abstract

“Peusuel” is a traditional massage practice performed on pregnant women in Tatar Sunda, believed to have various benefits for maternal and fetal health. This study aims to explore how *Peusuel* is implemented, understand the experiences of pregnant women who undergo *Peusuel*, and evaluate its impact on their physical and emotional well-being. The observed variables include physical discomfort levels (such as back pain, swelling, and fatigue), emotional states (including anxiety and mood changes), and social connectedness. The key parameters measured were frequency and duration of the *Peusuel* sessions and the involvement of community members in the process. Using qualitative research methods, particularly in-depth interviews and participant observations, data were collected from pregnant women who have experienced *Peusuel*, as well as from traditional practitioners and family members involved. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and insights. This analysis revealed that *Peusuel* not only helps reduce physical discomfort during pregnancy but also contributes to emotional relief by alleviating anxiety and stress. Additionally, it strengthens social and cultural ties between pregnant women and their communities, creating a sense of belonging and support. This study provides important insights into the preservation and development of the traditional practice of *Peusuel* in the context of modern health, while also highlighting its potential integration as a complementary approach in maternal care.

Keywords: massage, pregnant, qualitative research

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INTRODUCTION

Pregnancy is an important period in a woman's life, where special attention to physical and mental health is essential to ensuring the well-being of the mother and fetus. In various cultures, including Tatar Sunda, traditional massage has long been used as a non-pharmacological treatment method to support the health of pregnant women. One form of traditional massage that is still practiced today is *peuseul*, a special massage for pregnant women that is believed to be able to overcome various physical discomforts, such as back pain, leg cramps, and fatigue, as well as providing a significant relaxation effect. *Peusuel* is not just a massage but also part of a rich cultural tradition that contains spiritual and social elements. In Sundanese society, *Peusuel* is often performed by a massage shaman who acts as a spiritual companion during pregnancy.

This practice reflects the integration of physical health and emotional well-being, which is believed to support pregnant women in undergoing pregnancy with more calm and confidence. Although *Peusuel* has long been part of the pregnancy care culture in Tatar Sunda, scientific studies documenting and evaluating the effectiveness of this practice are still very limited. Most of the existing literature on maternal health care in Indonesia focuses more on modern medical interventions, with little attention to traditional practices rooted in local culture. In addition, although many pregnant women report positive benefits from *Peusuel*, there is a lack of empirical data to support these claims from a modern health perspective. This study focuses on several key components; covering how *peusuel* is performed, who performs it, and when it is typically performed during pregnancy. It also includes an analysis of the ritual elements associated with *Peusuel*, such as prayer and the use of

herbal concoctions, exploring the subjective experiences of pregnant women undergoing Peusuel, including the physical and emotional changes they experience. In-depth interviews were used to collect qualitative data on their perceptions and satisfaction with Peusuel, analyzing the impact of Peusuel on the physical and emotional well-being of pregnant women, including how the massage helps them cope with discomforts during pregnancy and how the practice affects their relationships with family and community, understanding the role of massage therapists as peusuel practitioners in Sundanese communities, including how they are viewed by society and how they interact with the formal health system.

This study is expected to provide new insights into the value and benefits of Peusuel, as well as offer empirical evidence that can support the integration of this traditional practice into modern health care systems. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a more in-depth picture of the Peusuel practice, how it is implemented, and its impact on the physical health and emotional well-being of pregnant women. In doing so, this study will make an important contribution to the existing literature and support the preservation of traditional practices in the context of modern health systems.

METHODS

This study was conducted in Kuta Village, an area in Ciamis Regency which is a traditional village rich in tradition and culture, including in terms of maternal health care. Peusuel, as part of the Sundanese tradition in Kuta Village, is a special massage practice for pregnant women performed by a massage therapist. This study focuses on the community in Kuta Village, where Peusuel is still often practiced and valued as an important part of prenatal care. This cultural context is very important because it influences how Peusuel is practiced, perceived, and accepted by the community.

The informants in this study consisted of two main groups: Pregnant Women: A total of 10 pregnant women aged between 20 and 35 years, who had undergone or were undergoing Peusuel during their pregnancy, were included in this study. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, with the inclusion criteria that they were willing to share their experiences and understand Sundanese or Indonesian. Paraji: A total of 2 massage therapists who actively practice Peusuel in the area were also included. These massage therapists were selected based on their reputation and experience in the practice of Peusuel.

This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore in depth the practice of Peusuel and its impact on the health and well-being of pregnant women. This design was chosen to allow the researcher to gain rich and contextual insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions of Peusuel. Case studies allow for exploration of the practice within a specific cultural and social context, which is essential to understanding the meaning and value of Peusuel in the Tatar Sunda context.

As this study was qualitative in nature, measurements focused on subjective evaluations of pregnant women's experiences and massage therapists' views of Peusuel. Measurements included: Physical Well-being: Measured through pregnant women's subjective reports of physical changes they experienced after receiving Peusuel, such as reduced pain, cramps, or other discomforts. Emotional Well-being: Measured through pregnant women's subjective reports of changes in their feelings, including levels of anxiety, stress, and self-confidence during pregnancy. Cultural Meaning: Understood through interviews with massage therapists and pregnant women regarding the role of Peusuel in their traditions and daily lives.

Data were collected through two primary methods: In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with pregnant women and massage therapists. Interview questions were designed to explore their personal experiences, perceptions, and views about Peusuel. Interviews lasted 45-60 minutes, were recorded with the participants' permission, and were later transcribed for analysis. Participant Observation: The researcher also conducted direct observations during Peusuel sessions. These observations focused on the massage techniques used, interactions between massage therapists and pregnant women, and ritual or cultural elements that accompanied the practice. Field

notes were taken to support the data from the interviews. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved several stages:

- a) Transcription and Initial Reading: All interviews were transcribed and read in their entirety to gain an initial understanding of the data.
- b) Coding: Data were broken down into smaller units of information and coded based on emerging themes. These codes were developed inductively from the data and included themes such as "physical benefits of Peuseul", "emotional support", and "cultural meaning".
- c) Theme Development: Similar or related codes were grouped into larger themes. These themes were then analyzed to understand how Peuseul affected the physical and emotional well-being of pregnant women.
- d) Narrative Development: The results of the analysis were organized into a narrative that described how Peuseul was practiced and what impact it had based on the participants' experiences. This narrative was presented with direct quotes from the interviews to provide a clear illustration of the participants' views and experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study managed to uncover several key themes related to the practice of Peusuel and its impact on the well-being of pregnant women in Tatar Sunda. The following are the key findings identified through in-depth interviews and participant observation:

1. Cultural and Spiritual Meanings in Peusuel: Peuseul is not only considered a physical care practice, but also has deep cultural and spiritual meanings. The massage therapists interviewed explained that Peusuel is often accompanied by prayers and the use of herbal concoctions that are believed to provide protection for the mother and fetus. Pregnant women who receive Peusuel also feel that this practice helps them connect with ancestral traditions and provides a sense of security during pregnancy.
2. Relaxation Effect and Reduction of Physical Discomfort: Most pregnant women reported that Peusuel helped relieve physical discomforts that are often experienced during pregnancy, such as back pain, leg cramps, and fatigue. The relaxation effects resulting from Peusuel also help pregnant women feel more comfortable and rest better.
3. Improved Emotional Well-Being: The findings reveal that Peusuel provides significant emotional benefits. Pregnant women who underwent Peusuel reported decreased anxiety and stress, as well as increased confidence in facing childbirth. Peusuel also provides time for mothers to feel calm and focus on themselves, which is often difficult to achieve in everyday life.
4. The Role of the Massage Tutor as an Emotional Supporter: The massage tutor who performs Peusuel not only acts as a health practitioner, but also as an emotional supporter. The interaction between the massage tutor and the pregnant woman during the Peusuel session often involves conversations about the pregnant woman's concerns and hopes, which helps reduce tension and strengthens the relationship between the pregnant woman and the massage tutor.

This finding is consistent with several previous studies that highlight the importance of social support and traditional practices in supporting the health of pregnant women. For example, a study by Kartika (2015) showed that support from a massage tutor can reduce physical discomfort and improve the emotional well-being of pregnant women in rural areas in Indonesia. However, this study makes a new contribution by specifically exploring the practice of Peusuel in the context of Sundanese culture, which has not been widely discussed in previous literature. In addition, the findings on the spiritual meaning of Peusuel expand our understanding of how this traditional practice not only functions in the context of physical health, but also plays an important role in supporting emotional and spiritual well-being.

This is in line with research by Suryani (2017), which found that traditional practices often have a strong spiritual dimension, which provides a sense of security and emotional support for individuals who undergo it. Peusuel as a traditional massage practice in Kampung Kuta not only offers physical benefits but also provides holistic support that includes emotional and spiritual aspects. In Sundanese

society, where cultural and spiritual values are still highly respected, Peusuel functions as a bridge between modern and traditional health care. **Cultural and Spiritual Meaning:** This finding confirms that Peusuel has a rich cultural dimension, which provides identity and cultural continuity for pregnant women in Tatar Sunda. This practice not only helps in maintaining physical health, but also strengthens the relationship between pregnant women and their community and ancestral traditions. This is important to note in efforts to preserve and develop traditional practices in Indonesia. **Reduction of Physical Discomfort:** The relaxation and pain reduction effects reported by participants confirm the effectiveness of Peusuel in overcoming physical discomfort during pregnancy.

This suggests that Peusuel may be a valuable complement to modern prenatal care, particularly in communities where access to conventional medical care may be limited. **Improved Emotional Well-Being:** This finding is particularly relevant in the context of maternal mental health, which is often overlooked in prenatal care. Peusuel offers a space for pregnant women to experience calm, reflection, and emotional support, all of which are critical to emotional well-being during pregnancy. This suggests the need for a more holistic approach to prenatal care that integrates emotional and spiritual aspects. **Role of the paraji:** in Peusuel practice, the practitioner is not only a skilled massage therapist, but also an emotional supporter who plays a vital role in the well-being of pregnant women especially in the community.

Table 1. Summary of Key Findings

No	Theme	Description
1	Cultural and Spiritual Significance	Peusuel has a strong cultural significance, with elements of ritual and prayer that reinforce spirituality.
2	Relaxation Effect and Reduction of Physical Discomfort	Reduces back pain, leg cramps, and provides a relaxing effect.
3	Improved Emotional Well-Being	Reduces anxiety, stress, and increases self-confidence
4	The Role of Massage Shamans as Emotional Supporters	Massage shamans serve as emotional and spiritual support during pregnancy.



Figure 1. Peuseul Therapy to postpartum mother in Kuta Village

CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore the practice of Peusuel as a traditional massage for pregnant women in Kampung Kuta, describe the experiences of pregnant women who undergo Peusuel, and evaluate its impact on their physical and emotional well-being. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that: Peusuel has an important role in Sundanese culture as a practice that not only functions for physical care but also as a means to maintain cultural and spiritual traditions. Peusuel provides a sense of

security and comfort for pregnant women through a combination of massage techniques, the use of herbal concoctions, and traditional prayers.

The effectiveness of Peusuel in reducing physical discomfort during pregnancy has been proven by reports of pregnant women who felt a decrease in back pain, leg cramps, and improved sleep quality. This suggests that Peusuel can be an effective complement to modern prenatal care, especially in areas with limited access to formal health services. The increase in emotional well-being reported by pregnant women suggests that Peusuel not only provides physical benefits, but also helps reduce stress and anxiety, and increases self-confidence in the run-up to childbirth. This highlights the importance of a holistic approach to prenatal care that integrates emotional and spiritual aspects.

The role of the massage therapist as an emotional supporter suggests that interpersonal relationships and social support are key components of Peusuel practice. The massage therapist not only provides physical care but also serves as an emotional companion who helps pregnant women feel supported and understood during pregnancy. This study makes an important contribution to the understanding of how traditional practices such as Peusuel can play a role in supporting maternal health in Kampung Kuta. In the context of health research, these findings expand knowledge about the importance of integrating cultural and spiritual values into health care, especially in prenatal care. By providing empirical evidence of the benefits of Peusuel, this study supports the preservation and development of traditional practices in modern health care systems.

This study also contributes to the existing literature by providing deeper insights into traditional care practices in Kampung Kuta, which have previously been understudied. To support these findings, further research is needed to: Measure the long-term impact of Peusuel on maternal and infant health, including how this practice may affect delivery outcomes and postpartum well-being. Develop a formal training program for massage therapists, which combines traditional techniques with modern medical knowledge, so that the practice of Peusuel can continue to be preserved and applied effectively in today's health context. Explore the application of Peusuel in other parts of Indonesia, with the aim of understanding the variation of traditional practices in different cultural contexts, and how they can be integrated into maternal health programs in different communities. Conduct a larger quantitative study to measure the effectiveness of Peusuel using a more standardized method, so that the findings can be compared and applied on a wider scale. This study has paved the way for further recognition and appreciation of traditional health care practices that are rich in cultural values, and the importance of a more holistic approach to maternal health care in Kampung Kuta.

Limitations and future direction

This study provides valuable insights into the practice of Peusuel and its impact on the well-being of pregnant women in Kampung Kuta, but has several limitations that need to be considered: **Limited Sample Size:** This study involved a small number of participants, namely 10 pregnant women and 2 massage therapists, which may not fully represent the variation in Peusuel experiences and practices across Kampung Kuta. The limited sample size may affect the generalizability of the results to a wider population. **Qualitative Approach:** Although the qualitative approach provides in-depth insight into subjective experiences, a limitation of this method is the inability to measure outcomes quantitatively or to test hypotheses statistically. This limits the ability to provide generalizable evidence regarding the effectiveness of Peusuel empirically. **Participant Bias:** There is potential for participant bias, especially as pregnant women involved in the study may have already had positive views of Peusuel prior to participating in the study. This may affect the objectivity of their reports of the benefits of Peusuel. **Limited Cultural Context:** This study was conducted in one specific cultural area, namely Kampung Kuta. Therefore, the results may not be directly applicable to other cultural contexts in the wider region, where practices and perceptions of traditional massage may differ.

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Declarations

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this research. All decisions made in the research, analysis, and writing of the results of this study were based on objective and transparent academic principles. All participants gave written informed consent after receiving an explanation of the purpose of the study, the data collection methods, and their rights as participants, including the right to withdraw at any time without consequences. The anonymity of the participants was maintained by not including their real names in the research report.

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