

## Food Restrictions during Pregnancy among Indigenous Temiar Women in Peninsular Malaysia

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** A qualitative comparative case study was conducted to compare and contrast food taboos and avoidance practices during pregnancy among *Orang Asli* or indigenous Temiar women in four distinct locations that represent different lifestyle experiences and cultural practices. **Methods:** Through snowballing sampling, a total of 38 participants took part in five focus groups: one group each in Pos Simpoh and Pos Tohoi in Kelantan state, one group in Batu 12, Gombak in Selangor state, and two groups in a regroupment scheme (RPSOA) in Kuala Betis, Kelantan. All the transcripts were coded, categorised and 'thematized' using the software package for handling qualitative data, NVivo 8. **Results:** Variant food prohibitions were recorded among the Temiar women residing in different locations, which differ in food sources and ways of obtaining food. Consumption of seventeen types of food items was prohibited for a pregnant Temiar woman and her husband during the prenatal period. Fear of difficulties during labour and delivery, convulsions or *sawan*, harming the baby (such as foetal malformation), and twin pregnancy seemed to trigger many food proscriptions for the pregnant Temiar women, most of which have been passed on from generation to generation. **Conclusion:** The findings of this study confirm that beliefs about food restrictions are strong among those Temiar living a traditional lifestyle. However, those who have adopted a more modern lifestyle also preserve them to some extent.

**Keywords:** *Orang Asli* Temiar, pregnant women, pregnancy food taboos, restrictions, focus group discussion

### INTRODUCTION

In Peninsular Malaysia, there are three major groups of indigenous people or *Orang Asli* namely, the Negrito, Senoi and Proto Malay. Each group consists of six sub-ethnic groups with distinctive cultures, languages

and a unique lifestyle though the collective generic name of *Orang Asli* is used for this community. Some opine this term is a sort of self-identification as it forges an identity among the indigenous people of Peninsular Malaysia (Bedford, 2009:24-25). Although the term *Orang Asli* simply means 'the

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original people', in everyday Malay culture the term implies distant, inferior people. Thus they tend to be stigmatised by others as 'backward' or 'primitive'.

This study focused on a specific sub-ethnic group, the Temiar. Previously, the Temiar resided only in locations scattered in remote forests, but presently, they can be found living in more accessible locations, including villages and urban areas.

The Temiar practise food taboos and avoidances to maintain harmony with entities, natural and supernatural, and to prevent any misfortune or calamity from happening. Food taboos and restrictions are most commonly practised in relation to pregnancy. Pregnancy in various cultures is attended by many food taboos, beliefs, and restrictions (Alabi, 1991), which are often influenced by traditional notions passed on from one generation to another (Zobairi, Freitas & Wasti 1998). Laderman (1984) suggested that the term taboo implies a rule that may not be broken upon pain of supernatural or societal retribution, thus evoking obedience from all but the most daring or foolhardy. For example, during pregnancy, Malay mothers- and fathers-to-be are obliged to follow numerous taboos to ensure that their child will be born physically perfect and lacking undesirable character traits; and that the mother will not die at childbirth (Laderman, 1984; 1987).

Bolton's (1972) study on food taboos among the *Orang Asli* in Malaysia found that they rejected certain food sources for a range of reasons: because of a belief in a kindred spirit or special relationship to the animal; food considered to be unclean; inedible or poisonous food; and fear of harmful effects following consumption of a food. Jennings (1995) reported that the Temiar maintained a wide range of food prohibitions in order to avoid illness, for physical reasons or due to beliefs in the supernatural. During the prenatal period, the expectant mother is forbidden from consuming various types of food for certain reasons.

The Temiar are certainly undergoing dietary change, whether they live in forest, resettlement or urban areas. The present study attempts to provide an understanding on how Temiar from various types of locations and with different lifestyles including dietary changes, relate to their traditional food taboos and avoidances during pregnancy in modern times.

## METHODS

### Research locations

Four different locations in this project represent different lifestyle experiences and cultural practices of the *Orang Asli* Temiar. The sites ranged from the most traditional locations, Pos Simpoh and Pos Tohoi in Kelantan, representing the experiences of Temiar who live in or close to the forest, to *Rancangan Pengumpulan Semula Orang Asli* (*Orang Asli* Regroupment Scheme) or RPSOA in Kuala Betis, Kelantan, a resettlement area, representing a transition from forest to town living, and the urban area, and Batu 12 in Gombak, Selangor, representing the Temiar who now live in town.

### Participants

A total of 38 participants took part in five focus groups: one group in Pos Simpoh; one group in Pos Tohoi; two groups in RPSOA in Kuala Betis; and one group in Batu 12, Gombak. For purposes of a comparative study, each focus group represented a location in which different lifestyle experiences of the *Orang Asli* Temiar sub-ethnic group indicated that something different might be said about food taboos and avoidances.

### Data collection

A qualitative approach was taken in this study to compare the cultural rules and patterns among Temiar living in contrasting social and ecological environments. The

qualitative method used was focus group discussions (FGDs). FGDs increased the range of types of participants and covered the dimensions of diversity that seemed most relevant to the research topic (Gomm, 2004). FGDs consisted of the selected key informants (*Tok Batin* or head village, health officers and midwives), and older and young cohorts of women and men. All focus group discussions took place in a familiar setting in order to motivate participants and to create a comfortable environment. Each session was audio-taped and video-recorded to allow the facilitator to focus on group responses and non-verbal behaviour, and for later transcription.

### **Ethical considerations**

The questions for focus groups were developed to ensure consistency in responses according to project themes while allowing for flexibility of later interpretations. The focus groups were conducted 'in the field' in familiar surroundings for participants to ensure cultural comfort and the best possible responses. The research procedures were fully approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Newcastle, Australia (approval number H-592-0907). Data were collected from January to June 2008.

### **Data analysis**

Focus group discussions were audio-taped and video-recorded (with permission) and these tapes were then transcribed from oral language to written language. Observation notes were analysed for patterns, themes and categories. All the transcripts were coded and categorised as either a main category or sub category and then 'thematized' using the software package for handling qualitative data, NVivo 8 with each participant identified by a pseudonym.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Similarities and differences of restricted food items during pregnancy among all research locations**

There were seventeen food avoidances, nine similar and eight different food avoidances listed by FGD participants at the four different locations. However, certain kinds of food avoidance were mentioned only by three, two or only one research locations. It is possible that the FGD participants at other locations simply forgot to mention them, or it is a matter of availability (see Table 1).

It was found that the fear of difficulties during labour and delivery, *sawan* or convulsions harming the baby (such as foetal malformation), and twin pregnancy seemed to have triggered many food proscriptions of the pregnant Temiar women, most of which have been passed on for generations. These kinds of restricted food items during pregnancy in all selected locations were analysed and categorised according to their consequences (see Table 2).

### **Fish taboos**

All participants agreed on three types of fish avoidance. The fish were prohibited to be consumed by an expectant mother because of the way they were caught not because of the fish itself. They were: fish that have been caught by other people besides the pregnant woman's husband using a chain-weighted circular throwing net; fish caught by line fishing and fish caught by *bubu* (a type of fish trap).

All the FGD participants agreed that a pregnant woman is only allowed to eat fish caught using a chain-weighted circular throwing net by her husband and no one else. Fish caught by other men in that way was forbidden because the participants believed that the chain-weighted circular throwing net would besiege the baby inside the womb, which would result in obstructed

**Table 1.** Similarities and differences of forbidden food items and the locations

<i>Restricted food items</i>	<i>Research locations</i>
<b>Aquatic animal-fish</b>	
Fish that has been caught by other people besides the pregnant woman's husband using a chain-weighted circular throwing net	All locations
Fish caught by line fishing	All locations
Fish caught by <i>bubu</i>	All locations
<i>Ikan Kelah</i>	Pos Tohoi and RPSOA Kuala Betis
Fish caught using a <i>tuba</i>	RPSOA Kuala Betis
<b>Animals</b>	
Deer, mousedeer and antelope	Pos Tohoi, RPSOA Kuala Betis and Batu 12, Gombak
Porcupine	Pos Simpor
Game animals other than antelope, deer and mousedeer caught using a trap	Pos Tohoi
Game animals other than mousedeer, deer and antelope killed by shotgun	RPSOA Kuala Betis
Game animals other than deer, mousedeer and antelope caught using a blowpipe	Batu 12, Gombak
<b>Plants</b>	
Fused double banana	Pos Simpor and Batu 12, Gombak Pos Tohoi and Batu 12, Gombak
Jackfruit	RPSOA Kuala Betis and Batu 12, Gombak
Cabbage	Gombak
Coconut	Batu 12, Gombak
<b>Processed foods</b>	
Flour	Pos Tohoi and Batu 12, Gombak
Canned food	Batu 12, Gombak
Plastic covered food	Batu 12, Gombak

labour. The following excerpts show the unity in this belief:

*"It is okay if the chain-weighted circular throwing net is ours. But if we ... eat fish caught from someone else's chain-weighted circular throwing net, if he caught the fish, if we consume other people's fish, then inside the womb it's like, stuck, the thing (refers to baby) inside is stuck."* (Ahmad, male, 32 years old, Pos Simpor)

*"If other people use a chain-weighted circular throwing net to get fish, my wife is not allowed to eat it if she is pregnant; only if it was caught by my own chain-weighted circular throwing net because it means, when my wife eats fish caught by other people's chain-weighted circular throwing net, it is feared that the baby cannot*

*come out, it is blocked, the baby is blocked."* (Halim, male, 45 years old, Pos Tohoi)

*"Ha... for example... when delivering the baby it will be difficult because it (the baby) will be constrained by the chain-weighted circular throwing net. So it will be difficult to deliver."* (Sulong, male, 37 years old, RPSOA Kuala Betis)

*"The taboos exist because we are afraid that we will be affected. There are many of us that have been affected, for example, if a woman eats fish caught using a chain-weighted circular throwing net, later the baby won't come out. It will be stuck... stuck."* (Jamilah, female, 40 years old, Batu 12, Gombak)

**Table 2.** Four categories of restricted food items based on the consequences considered to follow if taboos are violated.

<i>Consequences</i>	<i>Restricted food items</i>
1. <i>Sawan</i> or convulsions	Animals such as deer, mousedeer and antelope <i>Ikan Kelah</i>
2. Obstructed labour, which will result in difficult delivery	Fish caught by other people besides the pregnant woman's husband using a chain-weighted circular throwing net Fish caught by line fishing Fish caught using a <i>bubu</i> (a type of fish trap) Coconut Canned food Plastic-covered food Cabbage
3. Harm the baby	Fish caught using a <i>tuba</i> (poison) Game animals other than deer, mousedeer and antelope killed by shotgun Game animals other than mousedeer, deer and antelope killed by blowpipe Game animals other than antelope, deer and mousedeer caught using a trap Jackfruit Flour Porcupine
4. Twin pregnancy	Fused double banana

The chain-weighted throwing net closes to trap the fish, so the fear is that eating the fish will transfer that metaphor to the delivery. If a pregnant woman eats even a fish caught by her husband using his chain-weighted circular throwing net, when the woman is ready to deliver the baby, that same net should be hanging open or be strewn open on the ground. Thus the act of opening out the chain-weighted circular throwing net is a metaphor for opening the womb to deliver the baby. If the fish was caught by someone else, it may be impossible for the woman to know the identity of the fisherman so his net cannot be opened to ease the delivery.

Fish caught by other people using a fishing line must also be avoided by a pregnant woman, but fish caught using a fishing line owned by the pregnant woman's

husband is safe to consume. In case she inadvertently eats a fish caught by someone else using a line, one male participant stated that "*if a pregnant woman eats fish caught using line fishing, we have to find the line and then she wears it on the wrist*" (Penghulu, 67 years old, Pos Tohoi). It was also claimed that if a pregnant woman eats fish caught using a line, the hook, which symbolises the opening of the womb, should be straightened during labour to ease the delivery.

The participants also mentioned that fish caught by fish traps—*bubu*—were forbidden to an expectant mother. Fish traps are set early in the afternoon and the catch collected the following morning. The participants explained that there are two types of *bubu*; one is round in shape and the other is long in shape. Specifically, fish

caught using the long-shaped *bubu* should be avoided by the pregnant woman because inside it there is a narrow spiked funnel that prevents the fish exiting the trap. Eating fish caught this way will complicate the birth by impeding the birth canal. The way fish is caught is once again an analogy of a baby trapped in the womb.

If a pregnant woman consumes fish caught using a *bubu*, the *bubu* is put aside until the woman wants to deliver. When the woman is in labour, the *bubu* is burned in the fire until nothing is left behind. One male participant from Pos Tohoi explained:

*“If we made a bubu and set it in the river to catch fish, and then gave the fish to our wife to eat, if she is someone else’s wife or my wife, the bubu should be put aside, then we burn it.”* (Penghulu, 67 years old)

This metaphor of fishing equipment—chain-weighted circular throwing net, fishing line, and *bubu*—is a Temiar way of thinking about a woman’s womb. The shape of fishing equipment that resembles the pregnant woman’s womb is the reason for this taboo: there is nothing inherently wrong with the actual fish.

According to FGD participants at RPSOA Kuala Betis, a pregnant woman was not allowed to eat fish that was caught using *tuba*. The reason given was that the fish meat might have been poisoned from the *tuba*—a poison made from various roots that are spread in the water to kill fish—as the poison might harm the unborn child.

#### *Ikan kelah*

At Pos Tohoi and RPSOA Kuala Betis, participants stressed that a pregnant woman must restrain herself from consuming *ikan kelah*. This implies that the taboo on consuming *ikan kelah* may not always be observed by women at times other than pregnancy. *Ikan Kelah* is a powerful fish known as the King of the River because of the fight it musters to wriggle off the angler’s hook. *Ikan Kelah* is also known as the Mighty

Mahseer, or Greater Brook Carp, and scientifically as *Tor tambroides* (Abdullah, 2008).

Although *ikan kelah* is a desirable, high-protein food, the Temiar believe that its consumption may result in convulsions. Says a Temair woman:

*“We are Temiar, so we are forbidden from eating some foods during pregnancy, for example fish that can cause sawan (convulsion) such as the ikan kelah”* (Timah, female, 40 years old, RPSOA Kuala Betis).

In the Temiar belief system, a large animal is considered to have the strongest spirit. Thus, because of its large size *ikan kelah* is believed to have a strong spirit that might cause convulsions if consumed by a pregnant woman.

#### **Observing taboos while travelling**

Travelling to other places does not mean a pregnant woman and her husband are allowed to disobey food taboos. The FGD participants at Pos Simpoh described the correct protocol for a pregnant woman travelling to another place who is served a meal of fish. The woman should first ask the origins of the fish. If she chooses to eat the fish, she should keep the fish bones so that the *Halaq* (Shaman) can later burn them into ashes, chanting incantations and massaging the ash paste onto her abdomen during the delivery process. The following excerpt from one participant explained the treatment procedure:

*“Put aside the fish bones until the time the baby is due. When the woman wants to give birth, we burn the bone, burn until it is charred, then we pound the charred bone until it becomes ashes, and give it to Halaq. He chants the incantation, and then we rub it on”* (points to stomach). (Andak, male, 40 years old)

#### **Animal taboos**

FGD participants in Pos Tohoi, RPSOA Kuala Betis and Batu 12, Gombak agreed that

antelope, deer, and mousedeer were disallowed because it is believed they can cause convulsions if consumed by a pregnant woman. Bolton (1972) found that consumption of these animals was forbidden to both a pregnant Temiar woman and her husband. A study by Alabi (1991) on food taboos affecting pregnant women in Nigeria reports that the pregnant women in Imo, Cross River, and some in Yoruba States are also restricted from consuming antelopes because it is believed that consuming the meat will result in prolonged labour and excessive bleeding.

A central concern of Temiar animistic belief is the relationship between animals and humans, a relationship that is treated with respect and not a little ambivalence. It is believed that the meat of the larger and less commonly caught animals have the strongest spirits. If eaten by a pregnant woman, the spirits might possess the woman and cause convulsions.

#### *Porcupine: consequences and maintenance*

Taboo against eating a porcupine was mentioned only by FGD participants at Pos Simpor because porcupine is plentiful there and can be easily encountered. It is believed that if a pregnant woman eats a porcupine, the baby will be born with raised blisters on the skin. According to Aunger (2002:5):

*“the rationale of the rule is derived from some anomalous aspect or behaviour of the animal which suggests something resembling that feature might become characteristic of the consumer—or in the case of pregnant women, the foetus—if eaten.”*

In this case, consumption of porcupine by the expectant mother will result in the baby having blistered skin that resembles the porcupine's spines.

#### *Game animals caught by traps: consequences*

Only FGD participants at Pos Tohoi mentioned that other game animals caught by traps were forbidden for the expectant

mother. The participants believed that the way the trap catches the animal by the neck symbolises the trapping of the baby in the mother's womb. This taboo is strictly imposed both on the pregnant woman and her husband. The husband is even forbidden to set a trap to catch animals.

#### *Game animals killed by shotgun: consequences*

Forbidding the consumption of game animals killed by shotgun was a more 'modern' prohibition. This restriction was mentioned only by FGD participants at RPSOA Kuala Betis. The reason given was that the meat might have been poisoned from the bullet.

#### *Game animals caught using a blowpipe: consequences*

Beliefs regarding the consumption of meat were similar at Batu 12, Gombak to those at the other communities. However, here, game animals killed by blowpipe (other than the standard deer, mousedeer and antelope) were also forbidden to pregnant women because the meat might have been poisoned. Although the Temiar in all locations employ the blowpipe and other instruments during hunting expeditions, only participants at Batu 12, Gombak mentioned this taboo.

#### **Plant taboos**

The Temiar, do not put a distance between humans and plants; rather they stress similarity and relationship of resemblance. They have a peculiarly intimate relationship to the jungle and to its flora. Thus, plants do play an important part in forming Temiar food taboos and avoidances.

#### *Fused double banana: consequences and maintenance*

A fused double banana is considered a metaphor for twins and is therefore taboo. Evans (1918) found a similar prohibition among the Sakai (Senoi) of the Ulu Kinta in Peninsular Malaysia 82 years ago. In that

case, the prohibition was imposed not only on the pregnant women but all women. Interestingly, prohibition against eating a fused double banana by an expectant mother was mentioned only by participants in the most traditional location, Pos Simpor and the least traditional location, Batu 12, Gombak. The following excerpt from a female participant in Batu 12, Gombak endorses the widespread belief that if a fused double banana is eaten by a pregnant woman it can cause a twin pregnancy:

*“A fused banana should be avoided. If we eat a double banana like that, we will have a twin pregnancy. Hmm... it is true, a twin pregnancy. If someone eats that, when she gets pregnant, it will be twins.”* (Jamilah, 40 years old). She continues, *“If the pregnant women still want to eat a fused double banana, split it. Give one to a woman, and the other one to a man, then you can eat it.”*

Notably, the woman seems to control the operation of this taboo, which matches other findings among indigenous people. Taboos are viewed as protecting pregnant women from consuming dangerous foods that might transform their foetus through magical contagion, the content and transmission of these beliefs is largely controlled by women (Aunger, 2000:466).

#### *Jackfruit: consequences and maintenance*

Another plant food item forbidden for the expectant mother is jackfruit. FGD participants at Pos Tohoi and Batu 12, Gombak believed that the sticky rubbery sap from the jackfruit will collect inside the pregnant woman's womb and make delivery difficult. When the baby attempts to come out, it will spring back to the previous position. Moreover, delivering the baby will be difficult as the baby will change position if jackfruit has been consumed. In previous research, Jennings (1995) also found that a pregnant Temiar woman must refrain from consuming fruit that has a sticky sap that might impede the birth canal. The same

reason was given by pregnant women in nearby Indonesia. Traditionally the pregnant Indonesian women avoided eating jackfruit because:

*“consumption of jackfruit could lead to the formation of a sticky layer of thick fat around the newborn”* (Hartini et al., 2005: 205).

One male participant from Pos Tohoi began to explain that if a pregnant woman did consume jackfruit, the *Halaq* (Shaman) would burn the fruit into ashes and chant some incantations, but before he could finish his comment, a female participant interjected that what should be burnt is the jackfruit leaf, not the fruit. The ash paste from the burnt leaves was then rubbed on the pregnant woman's abdomen. This supports Jennings' (1995) finding where she observed that to ease the delivery process, the paste spread across the pregnant Temiar woman's abdomen is made from ground jackfruit leaves.

#### *Cabbages: consequences and maintenance*

Prohibition against eating cabbages was mentioned only by FGD participants at RPSOA Kuala Betis and Batu 12, Gombak. Cabbages are forbidden to pregnant women because of their round shape that resembles the womb, but has no opening. Metaphorically, there is no channel or passage out of which the baby can exit.

#### *Coconut: consequences*

Prohibition against consuming a coconut by an expectant mother was mentioned only by FGD participants at Batu 12, Gombak. The morphology of the coconut; round in shape, resembles a pregnant woman's womb, but without any kind of opening. In this case, if a pregnant woman consumes a coconut, it might “block the womb”. One female participant explained:

*“Coconut is forbidden because the shape is round, and it is like... the baby cannot come out. How*

*can the baby come out? There is no birth canal.*" (Minah, 52 years old)

Participants in other locations did not mention the coconut as taboo. Although there are plenty of coconut trees found in their locations, it was not found to be favourite food among them. However, coconut is popular among the Temiar in Batu 12, Gombak. They have been introduced by their Malay neighbours to new recipes that require coconut as an essential ingredient.

### Processed food taboo

Flour is categorised as a processed food. Participants from Pos Tohoi and Batu 12, Gombak agreed that a pregnant woman must refrain from eating flour because the delivered baby will be covered with sticky white material. A similar procedure used by the *Halaq* (Shaman) to treat a pregnant woman who consumed jackfruit was applied to a pregnant woman who had consumed flour. The expectant mother should keep the flour, and when she is about to deliver the baby, the flour is to be burnt into ashes and then rubbed on the woman's abdomen to help with the delivery process:

*"We have to be careful if flour is consumed. When it is time to deliver, the flour should be burnt. Then we do like this ha..."* [showing how the burnt flour is rubbed on his abdomen]. (Pengahulu, male, 67 years old, Pos Tohoi)

At Batu 12, Gombak where modern, processed foods are eaten, traditional beliefs have been transferred to other foodstuffs according to form. Canned foods and food covered with plastic were to be avoided because they lacked some kind of opening. If processed foods without openings have to be consumed, the pregnant woman should open the cans or plastic covers by tearing them into pieces as this act resembles the opening of the womb. Both the pregnant woman and her husband should avoid any foods that might potentially 'block the womb.'

### Husband and Wife Restrictions

In an early study among the Orang Asli of Malaya by Ratos (1957), it was reported that the Senoi in general have a system of food taboos, which not only regulate the diet of pregnant woman but that of the husband. Food taboos were imposed upon the pregnant woman and her husband in a similar way at all four different locations. The focus group participants at RPSOA Kuala Betis mentioned that taboos should be observed by both the pregnant woman and her husband for nine months or until the baby's birth. They added that both parents observing the rules would ensure a successful delivery and a healthy child. The claims regarding restrictions placed upon both Temiar parents are similar to those reported in a Malay peninsula tribal study by Montgomery (1974:159-160):

*"They believed that the father is as capable of influencing the child in the womb as the mother and the conduct of both parents while the baby is unborn can have far-reaching consequences for the birth situation."*

Since Montgomery's data was collected over 35 years ago, the fact that this belief still prevails, shows continuity in Temiar culture regarding taboos and food avoidances during pregnancy.

### Level of adherence

FGD participants in Pos Simpor and Pos Tohoi agreed that they still practised the customs and rules descended from their ancestors. The majority believe that it is best for them to practise the belief system in order to survive in a remote area and in the jungle.

Some Temiar in RPSOA Kuala Betis still practise traditional customs and beliefs and some do not. For example, one respondent said:

*"Customs and prohibitions still exist. Half of them still practise. Still ... the knowledge is there but from what I can see from the new generation,*

*I can see that it's not there anymore.*" (Sulong, male, 37 years old).

He added that even if some people chose not to practise, they still had knowledge about the customs. He claimed that for the new generation, however, cultural transmission from parents had become relatively less important and they no longer faithfully followed old customs and beliefs. It seems that exposure to different ideas from mingling with their neighbours, the Malays, has had an impact on adherence to traditional Temiar customs and beliefs.

The majority of participants at the most urban location, Batu 12, Gombak, agreed that they no longer obey the traditional restrictions usually followed during pregnancy. The Temiar here are no longer in close contact with the forest for their sustenance, and they have the opportunity to mingle with other ethnic groups besides their own community. They are becoming more exposed to other people's beliefs and customs. It appears that it is increasingly rare for the Temiar in Batu 12, Gombak to retain traditional food taboos during pregnancy.

One of the limitations of this study is that the implications of the food taboos during pregnancy on the nutritional status of Temiar women was not attempted because it was not a research objective and also due to time and resource constraints. It is suggested that future studies use a combination analysis of dietary intake such as food frequency questionnaire, food diary and 24-hour dietary recall in determining the actual nutrient intake and nutritional status of the women.

## CONCLUSION

Prohibitions placed upon women during pregnancy function not only to govern their condition but also that of the unborn baby. Both parents-to-be were obliged to follow numerous food taboos and other

prohibitions to ensure that the mother would not have a problem or die in childbirth, and the baby would be born physically perfect and lacking any undesirable character traits. It was found that pregnancy-related dietary restrictions and other taboos are still prevalent in the traditionally oriented locations of Pos Simpor and Pos Tohoi, and to a lesser extent in RPSOA Kuala Betis and Batu 12, Gombak. Apparently, though traditional avoidances and dietary restrictions are slowly diminishing, they are still practised.

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