

Letter to the Editor

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Unraveling 'Khanni': A Socio-Cultural Misbelief and Practice in Neonatal Care Across Karnataka's Malenadu Region

SIR, — Understanding newborn care practices is imperative due to their cultural significance and alignment with traditional beliefs, particularly during the childbirth period. Effective development of behavior change strategies hinges on this comprehension. In India, where religious, cultural, regional, and socio-economic diversities abound, the adaptation of interventions becomes paramount¹⁻³. It is noteworthy that numerous harmful practices pervade neonatal and child care around the world, spanning from unhygienic cord cutting and delayed breastfeeding to the application of branding marks for treating diseases⁴⁻⁶. I am writing to bring to your attention to one such belief and practice prevalent in the Malenadu and coastal regions of Karnataka. This belief locally referred to as "Khanni" in Kannada language revolves around a misconception regarding the suture lines on a newborn's head and its potential implications for the child's health.

In this region, it is believed that in this disease the newborn's head enlarges if not treated promptly, the infant's skull will split – referring to the suture lines, leading to dire consequences, including the death of the newborn. As a remedy, individuals resort to a traditional practice of administering small pin- head sized burns at the juncture of the metopic suture on the infant's forehead, using materials such as mud bangles or pins. It is imperative to highlight that this belief and practice are not only based on unfounded medical reasoning but also pose significant risks to the health and well-being of newborns. The application of burns, albeit small, can lead to infections, scarring, and other complications, thereby exacerbating rather than alleviating any perceived issues with the infant's suture lines.

As advocates for evidence-based medical practices and the promotion of community health, it is essential to address and dispel such misconceptions. Educating communities about the normal anatomy of a newborn's skull and the importance of seeking medical advice from qualified healthcare professionals for any concerns regarding infant health is paramount. I urge the medical community to collaborate with local healthcare providers, community leaders, and educators to implement targeted educational campaigns aimed at dispelling myths like "Khanni" and promoting safe, evidence-based practices for newborn care in the Malenadu region and beyond. By raising awareness and fostering informed discussions, we can work towards ensuring the health and well-being of all individuals, especially the most vulnerable members of our communities.

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How to cite this article : Unraveling 'Khanni': A Socio-Cultural Misbelief and Practice in Neonatal Care Across Karnataka's Malenadu Region. Gadageesh PB. *J Indian Med Assoc* 2025; **123(9)**: 60.