



## Original Research

# Infant Care In The Agricultural Community Of Ethnic Blambangan Banyuwangi

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Data on infant mortality in Banyuwangi shows an increase in the last five years; data on infant breastfeeding has not been achieved either; while Indonesia's history of the Blambangan people, Banyuwangi, is recorded as healthy, strong, and thick with culture, known to be skilled in care, including baby care. Research is needed to find out the culture of infant care in the Blambanga ethnic community so that a good infant care culture can be strengthened to improve health.

**Methods:** The research used an ethnographic research design, with a sample size of 39 people; data were collected through FGDs, in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation and analysed thematically using ethnographic and Colaizzi analysis. Several online applications were used in data processing and diagramming the results, and ethical principles were applied.

**Results:** The themes identified in the culture of infant care in the Blambangan community are cutting the umbilical cord, infant massage, the role of baby shamans, the use of plants as therapy, celebrations for babies, swaddling babies, feeding babies under six months, beliefs related to infant care, and environmental modifications when having children. Some cultures need to be reinforced.

**Conclusion:** The culture of good breastfeeding in the Osing Banyuwangi community, recorded in Indonesian history, must be reconstructed. The culture of good infant care needs to be reinforced to achieve better health, and this research needs to be developed to reconstruct the culture of infant care in the Osing Banyuwangi community.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Blambangan community, often called the Osing ethnicity in Banyuwangi, East Java, is known in the past to have a wealth of traditions and culture, including in healing diseases or maintaining health as a picture of the wealth of ethnic communities with an agricultural background (Nursafitri et al., 2020). In farming communities, it is strongly linked to culture, which is also possibly linked to the health status of the community; there are several health problems in Banyuwangi, one of which is infant health problems. This research was encouraged by an increase in infant malnutrition,

from 8.2% in 2020 to 8.6% in 2021, and a high rate of infant mortality, 6.4/1000 live births, with mortality in low birth weight cases 44/1000 live births, in Banyuwangi, where the Osing community lives (Badan Pusat Statistik Banyuwangi, 2022).

In the last five years, the infant mortality rate has increased; namely, in 2019, it was 4.7 per 1000 live births; in 2020, it was 5.1; in 2021, it increased to 5.8; in 2022, it was 6.4; and in 2023, it increased pretty high, namely to 9.2 per 1000 live births (Badan Pusat Statistik Banyuwangi, 2023). Nur et al., (2023) stated that cultural practices in traditional communities were the cause of high infant mortality in Banyuwangi, such as the culture of visiting babies in the Osing ethnic community in Banyuwangi, "Sambang bayi," which causes babies to be at risk of contracting diseases carried by guests visiting families who have babies. Likewise, Ashari's, (2021) research results in Palu stated that culture is a factor in the failure to provide exclusive breastfeeding.

However, the view that seems to blame the existing culture in the community should be changed because culture is an asset for health workers to be able to get closer to the community and to be able to strengthen healthy behaviour by using appropriate culture and the need to improve cultural behaviour while respecting the values and cultural beliefs that exist in the community (Nyaloko, 2023). Well known, culture is a significant social modality, as values and norms, to individuals or families to make decisions to attain their living needs, which can also shape healthy living behaviours. Although Indonesian people are awarded a plentiful diversity of culture, only a few studies give attention to how culture can influence practices and perceptions of healthy living behaviours, especially those related to infant care.

Whereas inquiry into cultures as community repositories of knowledge and practices on healthy living is significant, as in part, it is discovered by Kane et al., (2023) with their study on how social and cultural factors shape healthcare-related spending within families and households. Many studies in the Osing community about the culture related to the arts, politics, religion, and culinary, but nearly nothing related to healthy living behaviours. As we know, only one study in the Osing community about the culture related to healthy living behaviours (Rasny et al., 2017). Although the study did not focus on infant care exclusively, it found that there were traditional behaviours in the community in the past that can be maintained.

However, they are almost extinct because they are forgotten and tend not to be done anymore by the community. There is an empty study on healthy living behaviours, particularly related to infant care, that is based on the culture in the Osing community, and about Rasny's study, there are challenges to further exploring and reviving Osing culture to find the significance of values and norms to healthy living behaviours. Identifying cultural values and norms as a basis of healthy living behaviours in the Osing community is significant to developing knowledge and practice and promoting culturally congruent care about infant care.

Health problems in the Banyuwangi community related to the increasing infant mortality rate need to be handled properly, and handling that includes the community actively and describes the community's identity, especially the community's culture. It is necessary to read the historical records of the Banyuwangi community. However, there are almost no documents on the history of health in the Banyuwangi community, but historical records regarding the famous people of Banyuwangi origin, namely the Blambangan people, currently called the Osing ethnicity, are strong, gallant, and have skills in health care, written by Dutch researchers and documents stored in Dutch libraries (De Stoppelaar, n.d.; Scholte, 2009; Stoppelaar, 2009), some of which have

been translated by Banyuwangi culturalists, or by writers in Javanese language magazines published before Indonesian independence, have documented this (Jayanagara, 1934).

The Blambangan people call themselves the Native Javanese. The most appropriate name for them is the Blambangan people. However, the fighting spirit of the Blambangan people has never been extinguished; the descendants who exist today are tribes that are physically strong and have personalities, develop quickly, hold fast to customs, and readily accept new civilizations. Tall body sizes are found in men, striking yellow colour is found in women, and the harmony of the size of their body parts and faces proves their origin as a noble race in ancient times (Scholte, 2009).

Scholte's quote above clearly describes how healthy the Banyuwangi people were in the past—likewise, they stated that the Banyuwangi people have muscular bodies. The existence of a strong, muscular body is recognized as the result of exceptional health care from the Banyuwangi people. It is said in Jayanagara, (1934) and Djajadiningrat et al., (1927) that Blambangan mothers were trusted to be babysitters and even to breastfeed the King's baby.

There has been no research that finds out about the cultural behaviour of infant care in the Blambangan Banyuwangi community to adapt these cultural behaviours according to current healthcare needs and strengthen and improve culture to improve infant health in Banyuwangi, so cultural research is needed in Banyuwangi people who are Blambangan or Osing ethnicity. Regarding that, the ethno-agro-nursing approach is relevant to be implemented for framework research. Ethno-agro-nursing approach is developed on nursing service management, and nursing care is based on cultural values and norms in the community of an agricultural background.

Practically, ethno-agro-nursing means identifying and evaluating cultural values and norms related to nursing care to promote and increase healthy living behaviours in the community. This research has been carried out using a qualitative ethnographic design. Spradley, (1997) in nursing with an ethnographic study (Ariza et al., 2024; McFarland & Alamah, 2015) and agricultural health nursing study (International Labour Office Staff, 2012) or ethno-agro-nursing study, this study was the first to use the term ethno-agro-nursing, namely the study of cultural nursing in a particular ethnic community with agricultural background, namely to explore the meaning and significance of healthcare behaviour practiced by the Osing tribe, based on culture and from a background as an agricultural community (Beseler, 2024).

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The population of this ethno-agro-nursing research is the Osing tribe, Banyuwangi, with a sample size of 39 people, and data collection ends when data saturation is reached. Informants have been selected based on the following criteria: as people who come from Osing ethnic families, are domiciled and are part of the Osing ethnic group directly, and have direct experience with receiving treatment or being an actor in infant care according to Osing tribal culture or experiencing by directly seeing the behaviour of caring for infants. Data collection tools include audiovisual and audio recorders to obtain a complete picture of the results of interviews with informants and the implementation of FGDs or direct involvement of researchers in observing cultural behaviour.

Interview guidelines were used for the objectives of this study. Researchers became skilled tools in efforts to collect data during semi-structured interviews, FGDs,

and documentation reviews carried out during field observations and direct observations of health behaviour in the Osing tribe community. They were involved in direct interactions with the community in Kemiren Village. Data collection began from February to October 2024 using snowball sampling, and the research was conducted in the coverage area of the Singonjuruh, Singotrunan, and Paspan Health Centers for Kemiren Village; the determination of informants started from recommendations from health centre health workers. Subsequent informants were obtained from previous informants, with researchers conveying the informant criteria to them.

The results of the FGD and interview recordings were changed into transcripts using the online pinpoint application, while the observation results were manually transcribed into data. The data set has been analyzed using the ethnographic stage and Colaizzi's method, namely marking words or sentences that are meaningful or have meaning, then grouping them into levels of theme, sub-theme, sub-sub-theme, and category. After that, the results of forming the theme for the category were validated by the informants by conducting a small dissemination, and from the validation results, they were re-analyzed and re-analyzed related to the completion of the theme for the categories.

The researcher has also made a diagram to facilitate understanding of the presentation of research results using the help of the online application draw.io. This research has received an ethical certificate from the Faculty of Dentistry, University of Jember, Certificate No. 2594 / UN.25.8 / KEPK / DL / 2024, by carrying out research ethical values.

## RESULTS

The informants are members of the Osing Banyuwangi ethnic community who are traditional community figures, well-known Osing cultural practitioners, scientists of the Osing Banyuwangi ethnic group, and traditional health practitioners and health cadres. Most of the participants are older and predominantly female—most work as self-employed individuals, with only a tiny portion employed in government or private sectors. The participants are relatively evenly distributed across the three areas of Kemiren, Singonjuruh, and Singotrunan.

**Table 1.** Demographic profile of the participants

Description	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
Less than 50 years old	17	44%
More than 50 years old	22	56%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	13	33%
Female	26	67%
<b>Job</b>		
Government Officials	3	8%
Private Workers	2	5%
Self Employed	34	87%
<b>Residence</b>		
Kemiren	12	30%
Singonjuruh	13	33%

Description	Frequency	Percentage
Singotrunan	14	36%

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The culture of infant care in the Osing Banyuwangi community begins with newborns. It continues throughout the infant's life, from traditional umbilical cord care, the role of traditional midwives in infant care, the presence of social joy in supporting the presence of new members in the community, the use of natural resources for infant care, as well as swaddling care and feeding with cultural beliefs for infant health, as well as the involvement of the entire family, including in environmental modification.

### **Theme 1: Umbilical Cord Cutting**

Based on interviews during FGDs, it was found that the Osing community believes that cutting the umbilical cord is more hygienic using “*welat*” (bark of bamboo) rather than a knife. The informant's statements support this:

“The umbilical cord cut with the bark of bamboo is cleaner than using scissors”. - Informant 2

“The umbilical cord is not cut with a knife because knives can rust; hence, it was cut with the bark of bamboo in the past. Then turmeric is applied to prevent infection”. - Informant 3

### **Theme 2: Infant Massage**

FGD results also emphasize preventing and treating minor ailments, such as fever, starting from the first month of a baby's life and continuing up to one year. The massages focus on specific areas like joints and muscles rather than the entire body.

“*Heeh*, Yes, my first child was like that, so from him (shaman) I was told; anyway, I was taught to hold the child's armpit; yes, the first one was hot (fever). If your child is like this, do not get too tired. So if it is the first child, it is routine if I have a little fever; I (go) run there like that, so finally “*Alhamdulillah*,” until now I have never known a doctor. - Informant 1.

“Every month (massage), before one every month before 1 year, I still use baby massage, starting from the age of 1-month-old children, who are also one month and every month (massaged)”. - Informant 3

“On the joints, not all massages; if you meet it, the whole body is massaged; if the masseuse in my place only gets a massage, the joints...”—Informant 4

“The message in my place is instead only *the* veins (muscles) that might cause heat where it is slightly massaged until now Mom until my third child...” - Informant 5

### **Theme 3: Role of Traditional Healers**

FGD results also indicated that the Osing community still trusts traditional healers (*dukun*) to treat infants. Informants stated:

Infant massage by elders is good because they massage the legs with the baby lying prone. After such a massage, the baby with headaches and bloating recovers quickly. Previously, massage used onions, but now it uses hand lotion. - Informant 2

*Santet* (black magic) itself, which we thought could make people sick or even kill, here is related to health, including baby healers and massage therapists, - Informant 35

#### **Theme 4: Use of Plants as Medicine for Infants**

The Osing community believes that certain wild plants, such as the “*awar-awar*” (leaves fern-like plant), can reduce infant abdominal heat, supported by informant responses:

Usually, “*awar-awar*” leaves are placed on the baby's abdomen to reduce heat, - Informant 2

After bathing, the baby is rubbed with chewed *beras kencur* (rice rhizome kencur) all over the body except the face to keep the baby warm. - Informant 35

#### **Theme 5: Celebrations for Infants**

Birth is one of three important events in the human life cycle. For the Osing people, birth should always be accompanied by traditional rituals full of symbolism and can symbolize various things ranging from good wishes to morality lessons.

##### **Subtheme 1: Newborn Celebrations**

Pregnancy and childbirth are considered stages of life that must be experienced worldwide, so many community groups focus on the cultural aspects of these two events. One of the Osing people's traditions that are believed to accompany a person's birth is holding a “*syukuran*” or “*slametan*” (celebration with means of praying) with “*jenang abang*” (soft candy made from brown sugar).

“*Jenang abang* is the definition of mother Adam and Hawa; if there is a *slametan* there must be *jenang abang*. The white flower shows honesty and intelligence; the yellow symbolises beauty; the *abang* (red) represents life force; the ring (black) provides guidance from God; the blue rank, and the brown means a lot of knowledge and experience. It means living in harmony with the neighbors' differences; it builds unity, not conflict, right? Well, that's name *mawa tunggal dados*, presents *tumpengan*, flowers, and *jenang abang*. Well, there is *tumpengan* (cone-shaped rice). *Tumpeng peteteng* (chicken straddling), *pitik dibeleh* (*pecel pitik*) (chicken dish with young coconut). So every ritual of *jenang abang* is not left out...” (Informant-9)

The Osing people believe that there are rituals that can cure the baby of an illness, so *slametan* (celebration as an expression of gratitude for being spared from bad things) is a repelling of lousy luck, as stated by the following informant:

“...*slametan jenang abang* is done so that the baby will recover from *timbelen* (runny eyes)...” - Informant 35

##### **Subtheme 2: Seven-month Celebrations**

The Osing community also believes in a seven-month *slametan* (celebration), which signifies that the baby is ready to learn about life. This is evidenced by information from the following informant:

After 7 months, the baby starts *mudun lemah* (learn to walk by getting down on the floor), meaning that the baby can sit up, then there is a ritual called *Jenang Lintang* (star



porridge) with the hope that the child will become a star. *mudun lemah* means that it is time for the baby to learn to know the world, learn to crawl, and stand up - Informant 2

### **Theme 6: Swaddling Infants**

According to the Osing community, newborn babies are swaddled immediately and can cause the shape of sturdy legs. This is evidenced by the answer from the informant, who said that:

“...newborn babies are immediately swaddled so they will have sturdy legs...”

Baby swaddling is done so that the baby's body has a sense of security, comfort, and warmth. This feeling of security can help the baby sleep soundly and reduce the baby's sense of shock. The statement that babies who look thin and have legs like the letter O can be straightened by swaddling is a myth.

### **Theme 7: Feeding infants under six months**

The Osing community has a habit of feeding newborns, as evidenced by the informant's statement that:

“...people often feed bananas to newborn babies...”

“After the newborn is born, they are feeding a banana stew that has been mashed; if it has been a few days, the banana will be mixed with mashed rice as well. - Informant 2.

“...people often feed bananas to newborns...”

Parents from Osing ethnic families give the mother chewing soft food to infants under 6 months by chewing first. This is supported by the informant's answer, which states that:

“...in the past, to provide a smooth texture of food, the mother usually chewed the food first and then gave it to the child...”

### **Theme 8: Beliefs Related to Infant Care**

The Osing ethnic group believes a child's intelligence depends on their parents' teaching. This belief aligns with the statement made by an informant as follows:

A baby has no thoughts yet; it is still empty, or called *suwung* (empty, pure, white), and what it will be filled with in the future depends on who fills it, namely the parents. That is why the *suwung* ceremony is a ritual to fill the baby with prayers for safety. - Informant 2.

### **Theme 9: Environmental Modification When Having a Baby**

The Osing community holds several beliefs that are thought to protect babies from spells or supernatural influences. As stated by an informant:

After birth until *selapan dino* (nine days), there must be a fire using wood that does not extinguish for 24 hours a day in front of the house. At dusk, dry coconut leaves are burnt around the house to ward off mystical disturbances because babies are "sensitive"—Informant 2.

The category of leaving a baby while sleeping by placing a *kinangan* (betel box) and a *penebah* (thresher from broomstick) beside them – Informant 2.

To put the baby to sleep, if you want to leave, place *kinangan* and *penebah* beside them for protection. That is what the elders say—Informant 3.

Besides the baby's bed, there must be a *penebah*, which is said to protect from evil spells - Informant 35.

Wrapping a black cloth around the headboard of the baby's bed.

A black cloth is wrapped around the headboard of the baby's bed to ward off evil spells - Informant 35.



**Scheme 1.** This scheme illustrates the key topic of infant care, which is divided into nine interconnected themes and two sub-themes on the celebration of infant themes

## DISCUSSION

Birth is one of three important events in the human life cycle (Hannum, 2023). For the Osing people, birth should always be accompanied by traditional rituals full of symbolism and can symbolize various things ranging from good wishes to morality lessons (Nyaloko, 2023). Pregnancy and childbirth are considered stages of life that must be experienced worldwide, so many community groups focus on the cultural aspects of these two events. Growth and development will increase individual abilities. Brain development at an early age increases children's skills to remember things and analyze problems (Syahailatua & Kartini, 2020).

The infancy period is a golden and critical phase of a person's development (Syahailatua & Kartini, 2020). It is considered a critical period because infants are

susceptible to their environment, and it is regarded as a golden period because it is brief and cannot be repeated. A child's growth and development are influenced by temporary and permanent environmental factors, affecting their growth and development speed and quality. Adequate caregiving necessary for a child's physical growth includes providing sufficient nutritional intake, protecting the child from infectious diseases, and safeguarding against early and advanced symptoms of health disorders (Hanifah & Farida, 2023).

Baby massage in the Banyuwangi community is an effective and reliable external therapy for treating various diseases. Touching the baby can cause various positive changes in the baby. Touch can cause the baby to calm down and be comfortable. Proper massage can help improve a baby's appetite and enhance the quality of their sleep. Massaging babies will accelerate motor development because baby massage is a touch or stimulation therapy useful for stimulating motor development (Merida & Hanifa, 2021).

Touch will also stimulate blood circulation so that more fresh oxygen will be delivered to the body's brain and throughout the body so that there will be a balance between the limbs and the brain, which helps accelerate motor development in babies. Infant massage stimulates the release of hormones in the body, which regulate various functions such as appetite, sleep, memory and learning, body temperature, mood, behaviour, blood vessel function, muscle contraction, and the endocrine system (including metabolism, growth, and puberty), as well as helping manage depression. Infant massage can begin right after birth and be performed daily until the baby is 6-7 months old. World Health Organization, (2022) recommends gentle whole-body massage, which may be considered for healthy newborns for its possible benefits to growth and development.

According to the Osing community, newborn babies are swaddled immediately and can cause the shape of sturdy legs. Baby swaddling is done so that the baby's body has a sense of security, comfort, and warmth. This feeling of security can help the baby sleep soundly and reduce the baby's sense of shock (Agussafutri et al., 2023). The statement that babies who look thin and have legs like the letter O can be straightened by swaddling is a myth. Swaddling has been done since infancy, just born, but so far, the benefits of swaddling have not been scientifically proven.

When the fetus is still alive, breathing movements dominate in the abdominal area, and after birth, the dominant breath is still in the stomach. Over time, the dominant breath movement will become established in the chest cavity. Especially when using swaddles, anything too tight will make the baby uncomfortable and uncomfortable to breathe. Baby swaddling should not be done firmly and tightly because it can cause the baby to have difficulty breathing and overheating. Therefore, try to swaddle the baby using a thin swaddle that is warm enough for the baby.

The Osing community has a habit of feeding newborns, and proper feeding is essential to achieve optimal growth and development and prevent malnutrition in infants and young children. We recommend breastfeeding alone for the first 6 months and giving solid or complementary foods when the child is 6 months old. Breast milk is the best source of nutrients that can improve the health of mothers and children. Breastfeeding in infants is very important, especially in the early period of life (Carretero-Krug et al., 2024; Jayanti et al., 2024; Panjkota Krbavčić & Vukomanovic, 2021; UNICEF, 2018).

Therefore, infants are exclusively breastfed for the first 6 months without adding and/or replacing with other foods or drinks. Babies over 6 months old already have a chewing reflex, so they can be given complementary foods. Unlike babies who are less than 6 months old (UNICEF, 2018; Weber et al., 2023), babies will be at risk of digestive disorders and infectious diseases that result in growth development with poor nutritional status if forced to be given complementary foods before 6 months of age as well as providing support from peer groups for exclusive breastfeeding. Breast milk is an important food source for babies, as it is the complete nutrition needed for baby growth. The nutrient content of breast milk is better and sufficient for the baby's growth needs than formula milk (Aryani et al., 2021; Kemenkes, n.d.; UNICEF, 2019).

This study found that the Osing community believes cutting the umbilical cord is more hygienic using a slice of bamboo than a knife. However, improper umbilical cord care can have a negative impact. The impact is that the baby will experience neonatal tetanus, which can result in death. Tetanus can occur due to umbilical cord care that does not meet hygiene requirements, such as cutting using unsterilized bamboo or scissors.

The use of bamboo is not appropriate because bamboo can be a medium for transmitting germs that can cause infection (Silaban et al., 2023). The principle of open technique cord care is clean, dry, and not covered with anything, after which the baby is immediately wrapped in cloth. How to care for a dry umbilical cord is by cleaning and caring for the umbilical cord and wrapping it with sterile gauze, keeping the umbilical cord clean and dry to prevent infection until the cord is dry and detached by itself (Silaban et al., 2023).

This is in contrast to the results of this study, which still uses traditional healers to assist in infant care. Giving support may be an important component of interpersonal relationships with considerable value to health and well-being. Kartika et al., (2019) carried out empowerment with a cultural approach related to efforts to increase exclusive breastfeeding; giving, rather than receiving, promotes longevity. Interventions designed to help people feel supported must be redesigned to emphasize what people do to help others (Ulferts, 2020).

It is miserable that the introduction of the culture of infant care in the Osing ethnic group, especially those rooted in the history of the Banyuwangi community, has almost disappeared, even in the community itself. This researcher had difficulty tracing the type of plant that is believed to increase breast milk, known as the purple leaf in historical records, or records on how infant self-care, such as how shamans can massage babies, are not yet clearly known, including the reasons for the cultural behaviour of cutting the umbilical cord, swaddling babies, or feeding babies too early; even the picture of the superior culture of breastfeeding is not traced in this study so that further development of this cultural research is needed (Yadollahi et al., 2020). There are several limitations in the study that has been conducted, namely: insufficient time for data collection, especially the time used for observation; almost no references regarding the health behaviour of the Osing Banyuwangi community; and the lack of researcher ability in the Osing Banyuwangi language.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Osing ethnic community has a rich culture that supports health maintenance, including infant care. Traditional health behaviours need to be preserved, and some need to be improved by proven modern health science. This study found that there are

several infant care behaviours in the Osing community, namely umbilical cord care, baby massage, baby shamans involved in baby care, use of plants for baby medicine, a celebration to welcome the baby, baby swaddling, baby feeding for babies less than 6 months, beliefs based on traditional customs regarding baby care, and environmental modifications that support baby care.

Infant care behaviours in the Osing community, in general, can support health and show family and community involvement in infant care, which shows a sound support system in the community; it is a strength that needs to be maintained in this modern era. There is a need to develop this research by researching baby care behaviour that supports health, such as massaging babies or providing good breast milk, to be reconstructed in society.

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