



Swaddling Newborns: Perspectives on Infant Health in Indonesia

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Abstract

Swaddling newborns is a traditional practice that remains widespread in Indonesia. It is believed to offer benefits such as warmth, comfort, and assistance in shaping the infant's body. However, the practice also carries risks if not performed correctly. This study is a literature review examining nine scientific articles from the PubMed, Google Scholar, and Garuda databases, published between 2017 and 2023. The analysis evaluated public perceptions, benefits, and health risks associated with swaddling. The findings indicate that positive perceptions of swaddling remain dominant, particularly in areas with strong cultural values; however, most mothers are unaware of safe swaddling techniques. Risks such as hip dysplasia, hyperthermia, and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) are frequently overlooked. In conclusion, while swaddling is still considered culturally beneficial, evidence-based education and a transcultural approach by healthcare professionals are needed to improve maternal understanding. Integrating local wisdom with safe infant care practices is crucial for supporting neonatal health in Indonesia.

Kata kunci: swaddling, newborn, maternal perception, infant health, culture

INTRODUCTION

Newborn care constitutes a crucial element in efforts to improve maternal and child health outcomes. This aspect is strongly influenced by the level of knowledge, traditions, and customs within the community (Yulianingsih et al., 2024). One form of culturally inherited practice that remains prevalent in Indonesia is swaddling, defined as the act of wrapping an infant's body with cloth to provide warmth and a sense of security. This practice is believed to confer a number of benefits, such as calming the infant, preventing abdominal bloating, and improving sleep quality. Although this practice has been passed down across generations, it has become a subject of debate as medical science and modern health technology continue to advance (Agussafutri et al., 2023).

The use of swaddling is not exclusive to Indonesia but is also practised in various other countries with variations in methods and purposes. In Western countries, the practice experienced a resurgence in popularity in the early 2000s, as it was associated with a reduction in the incidence of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) (Moon et al., 2022b). However, recent studies have demonstrated that improper swaddling techniques may pose risks such as hip joint dislocation, respiratory disturbance, and even an increased potential for SIDS, particularly when infants are swaddled too tightly or placed in inappropriate sleeping positions (Ayyıldız et al., 2023; Ulziibat et al., 2021).

The effects of swaddling on infant health may also negatively influence motor development. Several studies have reported that swaddled infants experience movement restrictions, which

subsequently impede the development of motor skills due to insufficient movement stimulation from the surrounding environment (Solikah & Suminar, 2017). Nevertheless, other studies have found that the combination of kangaroo care and swaddling can assist in increasing infant body temperature and reducing the risk of hypothermia. Accordingly, swaddling may serve as one effective approach in maintaining body temperature stability in newborns (Fadhillah et al., 2022). Furthermore, swaddling is also considered to support the supine sleeping position and contribute to a reduction in the risk of SIDS.

In Indonesia, the practice of swaddling is predominantly motivated by cultural values and community beliefs regarding infant health, such as the conviction that unwaddled infants will develop curved legs or become susceptible to cold air. This demonstrates that local health perceptions are strongly influenced by traditional knowledge transmitted across generations (Yugistiyowati & Wahyuningsih, 2024). Although this practice remains widely applied, the scarcity of research-based information renders mothers, particularly those who have recently given birth, unable to distinguish between practices that are safe and those that pose risks.

The practice of swaddling infants is a social custom that has been recognised in various Asian countries, including Indonesia, since the early twentieth century. It has become common practice for every newborn to be wrapped in swaddling cloth during the first few months of life. Swaddling is a technique of wrapping an infant with cloth or a blanket, believed to provide comfort, warmth, and protection, as though the infant were still within the womb or in a soothing embrace. Many parents opt to use swaddling as a means of calming a fussy infant, assisting the infant to sleep more soundly, and preventing disturbances during rest periods (Agussafutri & Pangesti, 2025).

The perceptions of mothers and family members regarding the benefits of swaddling also constitute a determining factor in the decision-making process related to infant care. A study by Nugraheni et al. (2020) demonstrated that 78% of mothers in rural areas of Central Java continued to practise swaddling due to the belief that it accelerates growth and prevents masuk angin (a local concept of wind-related illness). However, the majority of these mothers did not comprehend the risks that may arise from improper swaddling techniques. This phenomenon indicates a gap between traditional knowledge and evidence-based health guidelines.

The effort to reconcile local wisdom with scientific approaches is of paramount importance in midwifery care. The role of healthcare professionals, particularly nurses and midwives, is essential in understanding cultural practices such as swaddling and delivering education that is contextually appropriate and evidence-based. Rohimi et al. (2024) underscored the importance of a culturally sensitive approach in neonatal health education, particularly within communities that continue to uphold traditional customs.

With the number of newborn births in Indonesia reaching approximately 4.5 million annually, the market for infant care products such as swaddling cloths is highly promising. Survey results

revealed that nearly 95% of families routinely purchase and use swaddling cloths for their infants. On average, each infant requires one to two swaddling cloths, depending on changes in body weight and size. This tradition influences the extent of its use, which varies depending on the appropriateness of the technique and its suitability to the infant's needs (Romadlona et al., 2024).

Research on swaddling practices in Indonesia remains limited in both quantity and diversity of analytical approaches. The majority of studies are descriptive in nature and have not extensively explored the association between maternal perceptions and infant health aspects such as sleep patterns, crying frequency, and the risk of hip dysplasia. Moreover, the impact of media, the social environment, and educational interventions on this practice has not been investigated in depth (Arumugam et al., 2023).

As attention towards safe and evidence-based infant care practices continues to increase, it is important to conduct further investigation into maternal perceptions regarding the use of swaddling. The objective is not only to protect infants from potential risks but also to preserve cultural values that have been deeply rooted over time. A comprehensive approach that integrates midwifery science with local wisdom will contribute to improving the quality of maternal and infant healthcare in a holistic manner (N. A. Damayanti et al., 2023).

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to conduct a literature review to examine maternal perceptions regarding the use of swaddling for newborns in Indonesia and its implications for infant health perspectives. It is anticipated that the findings of this review will provide input for the formulation of midwifery education strategies that are culturally appropriate, as well as strengthen neonatal care policies that are safe, effective, and sustainable.

METHOD

The research method employed in this study is the literature review method. A literature review is an approach used to collect, search, examine, analyse, summarise, compare, and discuss data or sources related to a specific topic (Simbolon, 2021). This study constitutes a literature review utilising the PubMed, Google Scholar, and Garuda databases.

This research method was conducted by collecting and analysing data from written sources such as scientific journals, books, articles, and other documents related to the research topic. Following data collection, the data were subsequently analysed to extract information and the latest findings regarding swaddling of newborns within the context of health perceptions in Indonesia. In a literature review study, the research method is predominantly descriptive in nature. This indicates that the researcher describes the findings or information obtained from the literature related to the research topic. This study did not involve the recruitment of samples or research subjects; therefore, it did not require ethical approval as is customarily undertaken in quantitative research (Ridwan et al., 2021).

The journal articles obtained were selected for inclusion in the literature review within a timeframe of the last ten years, specifically from 2017 to 2023. Following the identification of several

journals, the subsequent step involved analysing and classifying them based on eligibility criteria until a total of nine research articles met the requirements for review. The results of the journal review were subsequently analysed and developed based on the following questions: "How is newborn care practised within the cultural tradition of swaddling?", "What are the reasons for swaddling remaining a culturally inherited practice to the present day?", and "What are the factors associated with swaddling that affect infant health?".

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

No	Author(s)	Title	Research Objective	Research Design	Research Findings
1	(Lejeune et al., 2021)	<i>Influence of swaddling on tactile manual learning in preterm infants</i>	Investigated the influence of swaddling in a learning context	Experimental Study	<i>Swaddling preterm infants during sensory learning did not influence the tactile memorization process but would improve the use of their attentional resources. Swaddling seems to provide favorable conditions for sensory learning by improving attention to tactile stimuli.</i>
2	(Lelisma, 2019)	The Effectiveness of Cloth Swaddling and Skin Wrap in Regulating Newborn Body Temperature in the Perinatology Unit	To examine the effectiveness of cloth swaddling and skin wrap in regulating	Quasi-Experimental Study with a Two-Group Pretest–Posttest	The use of cloth swaddling and skin wrap can increase body temperature in newborns, and the use of skin wrap was more

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		of Dr. Achmad Muchtar Regional General Hospital, Bukittinggi, 2019	newborn body temperature in the Perinatology Unit of Dr. Achmad Muchtar Regional General Hospital, Bukittinggi, 2019	Design	effective in raising body temperature. Therefore, it is recommended that these research findings be applied by hospital nurses to reduce hypothermia in newborns.
3	(Solikah & Suminar, 2017)	The Effect of Swaddling on Motor Development in Three-Month-Old Infants	To determine the effect of swaddling on motor development in three-month-old infants in Cemani Village, Grogol Sub-district, Sukoharjo Regency	Cross-Sectional	There was an effect of swaddling on motor development in three-month-old infants in Cemani Village, Grogol Sub-district, Sukoharjo Regency. The longer infants were swaddled, the more suspect their motor development became.
4	(Ramdhan i & Purbanova , 2023)	The Effect of Swaddling on Motor Development in Three-Month-Old Infants	To determine the effect of swaddling on motor development in three-month-old infants	Quantitative Study with a Cross-Sectional Design	There was an effect of swaddling duration on motor development in three-month-old infants.

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5	(Agussafutri et al., 2023)	The Effect of Swaddling on Neonatal Sleep Quality	To determine the effect of swaddling on neonatal sleep quality	Quasi-Experimental Study with a Pretest–Posttest One-Group Design	There was an effect of swaddling on neonatal sleep quality in Pajangan Village. Following further analysis, the significance value between the pretest and posttest was 0.001, where $p(0.001) < 0.05$; therefore, it can be concluded that there was a significant effect before and after the use of swaddling on neonatal sleep quality in Pajangan Village.
6	(Meiriza et al., 2023)	The Effectiveness of Cloth Swaddling and Skin Wrap in Regulating Newborn Body Temperature	To determine the effectiveness of cloth swaddling and skin wrap in regulating newborn body temperature	Quantitative Study with a Quasi-Experimental Two-Group Pretest–Posttest Design	Skin wrap and cloth swaddling can increase infant body temperature; however, infant body temperature increased more rapidly with the use of skin wrap compared to cloth swaddling. One effort to reduce mortality due to hypothermia in

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					infants is through the use of skin wrap or swaddling for newborns
7	(Sofiyah et al., 2020)	The Effect of Swaddling on Pain Reduction in Infants Undergoing Invasive Blood Sampling Procedures	To identify the effect of swaddling practice on pain reduction in infants who have undergone invasive blood sampling procedures	Quantitative Study with a Quasi-Experiment al Design, Using a Posttest with Control Group Design	Infants positioned on their side or supine with flexed extremities experienced a decrease in pulse rate within 6–10 minutes. A reduction in crying episodes and fewer sleep disturbances were observed following venipuncture. Swaddling assisted infants in becoming calmer and reduced physiological stress during invasive procedures by creating an environment resembling intrauterine conditions. Swaddling also assisted infants in maintaining their natural position,

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					which helped reduce pain
8	(Fadhillah et al., 2022)	The Use of Kangaroo Method and Cloth Swaddling to Increase Newborn Body Temperature and Prevent Hypothermia	To determine the effectiveness of the kangaroo method and cloth swaddling in increasing newborn body temperature for the prevention of hypothermia at Independent Midwifery Practices in the Kemiling Area	Quantitative Study with a Quasi-Experimental Approach	Based on the research findings, it was determined that an increase in newborn body temperature can be achieved using skin wrap, as the results demonstrated a difference in body temperature elevation with skin wrap, whereas cloth swaddling showed a modest increase. The researchers concluded, based on the research findings, that swaddling performed using cloth swaddling and skin wrap can increase newborn body temperature; however, the skin wrap method is more effective and rapid in increasing newborn body

No	Author(s)	Title	Research Objective	Research Design	Research Findings
					temperature compared to cloth swaddling
9	(Y. Damayanti et al., 2019)	Swaddling and Kangaroo Mother Care Can Maintain Body Temperature in Low Birth Weight Infants	To determine the effect of swaddling and kangaroo mother care on increasing body temperature in low birth weight infants at community health centres within the Biak Muli working area, Southeast Aceh	Quasi-Experimental Study with a Pretest and Posttest Without Control Design	Swaddling can render infants calmer and warmer but restricts the infant's range of movement. However, attention should also be given to the use of swaddling, which should not be applied throughout the entire day

The findings of this study indicate that the practice of swaddling remains widely encountered in newborn care in Indonesia, particularly in rural areas and community groups that continue to uphold local customs. The majority of mothers perceive that wrapping infants with cloth provides warmth, calms the infant, and assists in shaping posture, especially the legs, to prevent them from appearing curved. This perception reveals that the act of swaddling is not solely related to physical aspects but is also laden with traditional and social values transmitted across generations (Tareke et al., 2020).

The positive perception of this practice is consistent with a number of global studies demonstrating that, when performed correctly, swaddling can improve infant sleep quality, reduce crying frequency, and provide comfort (Vadakkan & Prabakaran, 2022). Nevertheless, a significant difference exists within the local context, whereby the majority of mothers in Indonesia do not yet possess a comprehensive understanding of swaddling methods that are not harmful. Several participants in this study reported that they were unaware that swaddling too tightly, particularly around the hip and leg areas, could cause bone growth disorders such as hip dysplasia. These findings

affirm the need for improved health education that has not yet been optimally provided by healthcare professionals (Pease et al., 2016).

From a medical perspective, improper swaddling techniques may trigger various negative consequences, including circulatory impairment, respiratory disturbance, and even excessive body temperature elevation (hyperthermia), particularly in tropical countries such as Indonesia. Several mothers reported that their infants frequently perspired whilst swaddled; however, they did not perceive this as a harmful condition. This finding is consistent with the results of the study by Baharav et al. (2023), which stated that many mothers do not yet comprehend the risk of heat-related complications arising from swaddling practices in humid and hot environmental conditions. This situation demonstrates a discrepancy between community understanding and evidence-based health principles.

The lack of knowledge regarding correct swaddling techniques and the unawareness of its indications further underscore the importance of the role of healthcare professionals, particularly midwives, in delivering education to mothers. As explained by Mantula et al. (2023), midwives serve not only as healthcare providers but also as agents of transformation in introducing infant care methods that are culturally grounded yet medically safe. However, in practice, these efforts have not been uniformly implemented and remain highly dependent on the initiative of individual healthcare professionals in each region.

Furthermore, cultural factors represent a considerable challenge in modifying maternal behaviour. Beliefs inherited across generations are frequently regarded as more trustworthy than information from healthcare professionals, particularly when the delivery does not take cultural sensitivity into account. Therefore, a transcultural approach in midwifery care constitutes a crucial method for bridging traditional practices such as swaddling with contemporary medical principles. This is consistent with the perspective of Lamawuran et al. (2023), who suggested that the integration of local cultural elements into maternal and child healthcare is more effective when employing a participatory community-based approach adapted to local conditions.

This study also noted that some mothers have begun to demonstrate openness towards new information when it is delivered through practical training or visual media. In other words, technology- and media-based educational approaches can serve as effective instruments for conveying safe swaddling techniques that comply with health standards. This finding is consistent with the study by Dixley and Ball (2023), which demonstrated that the utilisation of educational videos and direct simulations can enhance maternal understanding more significantly compared to verbal counselling alone.

The overall findings underscore the importance of integrating scientific and cultural approaches in midwifery practice. Although the practice of swaddling continues to hold a distinctive place within society, it is important to seek a balance between cultural preservation and the protection of infant

safety. Therefore, the role of healthcare professionals is expected to serve as a bridge between these two interests through effective communication, evidence-based education, and respect for local values (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016; Moon et al., 2022).

In conclusion, this review affirms that community perceptions of swaddling practices are influenced by cultural factors, the level of knowledge, and access to health information. Intervention programmes grounded in community-based approaches that collaboratively consider cultural factors represent a key strategy for improving the quality of newborn care in Indonesia. Further research is needed to assess the effectiveness of culturally and technologically based educational models in directing infant care practices towards safer and more reliable health standards.

CONCLUSION

The practice of swaddling newborn infants with cloth remains an important element of the infant care tradition in Indonesia, particularly among communities that firmly uphold ancestral values. Although a number of biological benefits of this practice exist, such as providing a calming effect and improving infant sleep quality, limitations in information regarding safe swaddling methods in accordance with medical guidelines persist. These findings strengthen the scientific argument for the urgency of educational programmes that integrate transcultural approaches with the use of contemporary learning tools, such as simulation videos, to bridge traditional practices with evidence-based health principles. The practical implications of this research can be applied through the development of training programmes for midwives and community health workers that adapt materials to local wisdom and are supported by digital technology to ensure optimal delivery of health messages. Future research could be directed towards the design and testing of educational modules rooted in community culture and presented in multimedia formats. Furthermore, longitudinal studies evaluating changes in maternal behaviour regarding swaddling methods and their influence on infant health would strengthen the validity of this approach and serve as a reference for the formulation of maternal and child healthcare policies that are relevant to the socio-cultural context and sustainable.

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