

African childbirth traditions

Life



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In the majority of African communities birth is a meaning-laden event both for the parents and the community as a whole. Children are viewed as a blessing from God. However, despite this, very little preparation will be made prior to the birth itself as it is believed that performing acts such as naming a child, buying clothes or preparing food is overly optimistic.

For this reason pregnancy will not be mentioned until the point at which it becomes noticeable. In addition to this, the women themselves will continue to work throughout their pregnancy as this is deemed a sign of their strength and suitability for motherhood. Hot mustard will not be eaten during pregnancy as it is widely believed that it can cause the mother to miscarry.

Warm foods, however, will be consumed due to beliefs that they assist with the healing process after the birth of the child. Many women will refrain from taking vitamins or other supplements during their pregnancy as they believe that such nutritional supplements will cause the baby to grow larger and thus make delivery more painful.

In African society the birth itself will generally take place in the house of the parents, or, in the case of the first born child, the house of the Mother's or Father's parents. In some communities there are special birthing houses that are created for the purpose of childbirths but these are relatively rare.

Although, in some cases, a trained specialist will usually deliver the baby it is not uncommon for an elderly woman or traditional healers to act as a midwife. This can threaten the health of both the mother and the baby and concerns over this tradition are well documented.

During the labor stage of delivery men are not allowed in the room. The woman will generally give birth in a squat position or on a birthing stool surrounded by her close friends and family who will burn incense and drink fresh coffee.

In some African communities the mother will be permitted some pain relief during the later stages of delivery and this will generally be administered in the form of herbal remedies. However, many people in Africa view pain as a compulsory part of giving birth and view it as a reminder of their basic human weakness.

Many women treat childbirth as a test of their own self worth and will refrain from crying out in pain during the process in order to retain dignity and moral virtue.