

Consumption of bangun-bangun leaves (*Coleus amboinicus* Lour) to increase breast milk production among Batakneese women in North Sumatra Island, Indonesia

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Bangun-bangun leaf (*Coleus amboinicus* Lour; CA) is an herb that is traditionally consumed by Batakneese women in North Sumatra Island Indonesia whilst nursing. Batakneese women believe that this herb can stimulate the production of their breast milk. The present study aimed to gather information about the beliefs and experiences of Batakneese women in consuming this herb, using a focus group discussion method.

Sixty Batakneese women, who used CA leaves whilst nursing, were invited to participate in focus group discussions conducted in three villages of Simalungun District in North Sumatra Island, Indonesia. One half of the participants were recent mothers (aged 35–51 yr) and the other were elderly mothers (aged 51–91 yr). Each discussion group consisted of 6–12 participants, either recent or elderly mothers, and was moderated by midwives (ND, SS) from the district hospitals. Topics included the knowledge about CA leaves and experience in consuming CA leaves. The duration of each discussion was about 60–90 minutes and it was recorded audio-visually.

'Bangun-bangun' is the name given by Batakneese people, especially in Simalungun, for the *Coleus amboinicus* Lour plant. In the Simalungun language, 'bangun' means 'wake-up'. Traditionally, women who have just given childbirth are given this plant in order to recover. It is believed that delivery upsets the balance achieved during pregnancy and brings about weakness. A special diet of bangun-bangun soup, considered nourishing, is given to the mother 'in order to return her to a state of balance'. The diet is also intended to ensure that the mother can take care of the newborn properly, especially by breastfeeding. All participants considered the effects of consuming bangun-bangun soup during their nursing period to have been beneficial. In general, the women felt fit (not tired but, rather, fresh) and healthy after consuming CA leaves. They felt their breasts become full with breast milk. Moreover, most participants found that consuming CA leaves helped control postpartum bleeding and 'acted as a uterine cleansing agent'.

All participants commenced CA consumption on the second day after giving birth, and most of them consumed a bowl of bangun-bangun soup three times a day for 30–40 days, whilst others did so for only 14–21 days. To make the soup more delicious, slices of chicken meat or fish are added. According to the elderly mothers, there was no restriction to or required frequency with which to consume this soup. The husband or the mother or mother-in-law usually cooks the soup at home. They obtain the CA leaves from their home garden or the local market.

The focus group discussions indicated that Batakneese people consider that the consumption of CA leaves can stimulate the production of the breast milk whilst nursing. CA leaves may be consumed at any time and as much as possible without known adverse effects.

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