

TALK

EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVES ON PREGNANCY AVERSIONS AND FOOD TABOOS

Kateřina Roberts

Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic

fiuraskova.katerina@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Food aversions during pregnancy are quite common and are hypothesised to work as a protective mechanism for both the mother and the developing foetus. While these aversions manifest as physical sensations, they also intersect with cultural practices. In various societies, there are specific food taboos during pregnancy, where expectant mothers are discouraged from consuming certain foods. These taboos stem from beliefs that such foods could negatively impact the labour process, the health of the baby, or even influence the child's personality. I will present a theoretical exploration of pregnancy food aversions and taboos through an evolutionary framework. This includes an analysis and summary of scholarly articles from countries including Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Fiji, and South India. The study seeks to understand whether these dietary practices during pregnancy-reflected through both biological aversions and culturally specific taboos - can be interpreted as evolutionary adaptations designed to protect the mother and developing foetus from potentially harmful substances. By synthesizing existing literature, this research explores the potential relationship between biological phenomena and cultural practices, assessing their support for adaptive hypotheses. This analytical approach offers valuable insights into the intersection of biological phenomena and cultural practices, setting the stage for discussion and future empirical studies to test these theoretical predictions.