

### The Myths Pertaining to The Beautiful World of Cleft Deformities

*“Beauty is not in the face; Beauty is a light in the heart”*

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#### COLUMN ARTICLE

Physical attractiveness is highly regarded in many societies. The earliest documented history of (Cleft lip and Palate) CLP is based on a combination of religion, superstition, invention and charlatanism. While Greeks ignored their existence, Spartans and Romans would kill these children as they were considered to harbour evil spirits. Facial deformities were most condemned and the infants were “removed from the tribe or cultural unit and left to die in the surrounding wilderness”, a practice that still prevails today in certain African tribes. In Sparta, the unfortunate newborns were abandoned on Mount Targete, while in Rome they were drowned in the Tiber River or thrown off the Tarpeian rock. The noted philosopher Plato, far from opposing this practice, justified it in one of his dialogues in the Republic, explaining that it was a means of removing evil omens and preserving the soundness of the race.

The incidence of CLP in India was found to be 1.09 in every 1,000 live births. Many believed that CLP is due to the “act of fate” and some believe that CLP was a punishment due to a previous sinful act. Various studies highlight the perceived causation as a solar eclipse occurring during pregnancy and starvation in the village during pregnancy. It was found that the parents blamed the birth of a CLP child on a curse or an act of evil spirits and similarly, retribution for past sins. There are always raised anxieties and unique concerns when exposing the child to a new environment

such as a new school.



There are also families who choose to isolate their children, perhaps as a way of protecting them. Some extreme examples include parents abandoning the child and leaving them to be raised by the grandparents.

Around the world, the myths and beliefs of people from different cultures with regards to CLP may differ and there is potential for research to increase the existing knowledge of CLP individuals in different cultures. A better understanding of CLP patients with respect to their different cultural backgrounds can improve future efforts to help these patients. Perhaps even more importantly, there will be a greater sensitivity in handling the psychological needs of these patients and their families, apart from attaining medical success in treatment.

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