Kangaroo Care and Postpartum Depression: The Role of Oxytocin

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Background

- Postpartum depression (PPD) occurs in about 10–15% of women after birth.
- PPD adversely affects their health and the health of their newborn.
- Kangaroo care (KC) is known to have many health-related benefits for both mother and newborn; however, a systematic review of its effects in reducing PPD has not been done.

Purpose

The aim of this review was to gather the evidence linking the effects of KC on PPD, specifically focusing on the proposed underlying mechanism involving the release of oxytocin.

Methods

- The review included studies published between 1995 and 2015.
- Data sources were: PubMed, and Google Scholar.
- Search terms included: postpartum depression, postnatal depression, oxytocin, oxytocin hormone, central oxytocin, postpartum depression, kangaroo care, and skin-to-skin contact.

Results

- Twenty studies met the search criteria and were included in this review.
- Most of the studies used descriptive correlational designs; four involved randomized controlled trials.
- Other studies were quasi-experimental, qualitative, or involved meta-analysis.

Implications

- KC can be used as a non-pharmacological intervention to reduce maternal stress and to prevent or decrease the risk for PPD.
- Mothers at risk for PPD should be encouraged to use KC. However, evidence-based practice requires additional research, including more studies to explain the physiological mechanisms underlying KC in relation to maternal stress and depression, particularly studies with large, diverse samples involving more rigorous designs and analysis.

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