

Contextual Analysis of the Physiological and Psychological Effects of Kangaroo Care in the NICU



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Introduction

Kangaroo care involves skin-to-skin care for a baby who is often barely clothed except for a diaper and held in an upright position against the mother's chest. The phrase "kangaroo care" (KC) was termed for its similarities to how marsupials carry their young (Atanasopoulou et al., 2014).



Review of Literature

- This literature review explores both the physiological and psychological trauma in the NICU and the positive impacts of kangaroo care on preterm newborns and their biological parents.
- Charpak et al. (2017) and Ropars et al. (2018) showed that kangaroo care improves intellectual and attention functioning in premature babies and that these improvements were still present at the time of re-evaluation, twenty years later.
- In addition, Jones and Samantha (2018) and Cho et al. (2016) reported physiological benefits of KC on factors such as heart rate and blood pressure. Lastly, Xie et al. (2019) showed how KC has yielded positive results in decreasing the risk of late postpartum depression in new mothers.

References

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Methodology

- A comprehensive literature review was performed using multiple databases including CINAHL, Cochrane Library, MEDLINE, via PubMed, and BASE.
- Search terms included kangaroo care, potential risks, physiological and psychological responses, and barriers to kangaroo care. A total of 18 related articles were found.
- The target population includes premature babies weighing less than 5 pounds 8 ounces (2500) grams or less, or babies born before the gestational age of 38 weeks, who are in the NICU, and their biological parents.

Practical Implications

- KC has no economical implication.
- KC is very easy to implement. It does not require the use of any advanced equipment and can be accessed by anyone irrespective of literacy.

Summary

- The positive therapeutic outcomes of kangaroo care range from physiological to psychological, as reported by many studies. Many research studies have documented evidences to support kangaroo care as a therapeutic measure not only to premature babies, but their parents as well.
- The demonstrated effects include decrease in maternal stress, anxiety, depression, and grief, with a higher maternal-infant attachment scores in parents.
- Physiological effects such as maintenance of blood pressure and heart rate within normal ranges, with increased intellectual and attention functioning were also reported.
- Amidst the significant success of kangaroo care, Marin, Valverde, and Cabanas demonstrated that some doubts still exist as to whether this type of intervention can predispose fragile babies to factors such as hypothermia (2013).