

Poster presentation

Postpartum cultural practices: a systematic review of the evidence

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Background

This review identifies common rituals across cultures associated with the postpartum period and the evidence for either a positive or negative effect on maternal mental health.

Materials and methods

MEDLINE, CINAHL, PsychINFO, EMBASE, Proquest, and the WHO Reproductive Health Library were searched (1966 to July 2006) for qualitative and quantitative studies that focused on traditional practices and rituals in the postpartum period (i.e. within the first year following childbirth). The first review identified commonalities across cultures and the second review examined postpartum practices and their relationship to postpartum psychiatric illness.

Results

The first review resulted in over 44 articles being evaluated. Common themes exist across cultures and include: Organized support, rest period, restricted activities, hygiene practices, diet, infant care, breastfeeding, childbirth ceremonies, naming the infant, and practices to promote health. Eleven studies met the inclusion criteria for the second review. Data were identified relating to 1) organized support, 2) diet, and 3) other or multiple postpartum practices and organized according to evidence for or against a protective effect.

Conclusions

As Canadian society is multicultural, it is important for clinicians to be cognizant of common cultural practices and the perceived consequences of not observing them. These practices can both facilitate perinatal healthcare and impede it in unknowing clinicians. Although common rituals exist, the limited research on the relationship between postpartum rituals and PPD does not clearly answer the question as to whether these practices actually decrease or increase the risk for PPD

References

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