

Effects of massage on pain and anxiety during labour: a randomized controlled trial in Taiwan

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Abstract

Aims. To investigate the effects of massage on pain reaction and anxiety during labour.

Background. Labour pain is a challenging issue for nurses designing intervention protocols. Massage is an ancient technique that has been widely employed during labour, however, relatively little study has been undertaken examining the effects of massage on women in labour.

Methods. A randomized controlled study was conducted between September 1999 and January 2000. Sixty primiparous women expected to have a normal childbirth at a regional hospital in southern Taiwan were randomly assigned to either the experimental ($n=30$) or the control ($n=30$) group. The experimental group received massage intervention whereas the control group did not. The nurse-rated present behavioural intensity (PBI) was used as a measure of labour pain. Anxiety was measured with the visual analogue scale for anxiety (VASA). The intensity of pain and anxiety between the two groups was compared in the latent phase (cervix dilated 3–4 cm), active phase (5–7 cm) and transitional phase (8–10 cm).

Results. In both groups, there was a relatively steady increase in pain intensity and anxiety level as labour progressed. A *t*-test demonstrated that the experimental group had significantly lower pain reactions in the latent, active and transitional phases. Anxiety levels were only significantly different between the two groups in the latent phase. Twenty-six of the 30 (87%) experimental group subjects reported that massage was helpful, providing pain relief and psychological support during labour.

Conclusions. Findings suggest that massage is a cost-effective nursing intervention that can decrease pain and anxiety during labour, and partners' participation in massage can positively influence the quality of women's birth experiences.