

EXPERIENCE OF MOTHERS' LEARNING AND DOING INFANT MASSAGE

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ABSTRACT

The practice of infant massage has been reported to give relaxation and enjoyment to mothers and babies. This qualitative study aimed to explore mothers' experience with learning and doing infant massage. Mothers whose babies four to six weeks old were taught the adapted baby massage program over four sessions by a certified infant massage instructor in the selected health centers. They were asked to do infant massage for 15 minutes twice a day. As part of a main study, nine of the mothers were recruited as study participants at the end of the teaching sessions using a purposive sampling procedure. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore their experience with learning and doing baby massage. Mothers' experience with baby's relaxation and sleep, baby-mother bonding, new learnings in term of a helpful baby-care skill, responding to baby cues, establishing new care routine, gaining spousal and other mothers' supports apparently contributed to their positive experience of learning and doing massage with their babies. Findings supplement the evidence base which could influence service provision to include infant massage as part of the maternal and childcare service.

Key words: Experience, infant massage, mothers, qualitative study

INTRODUCTION

Mothering a baby is a happy event for most people. However, it could be challenging for many, especially for the first-time mothers. Baby massage could play a significant role for the well-being of mothers and their babies during the transition state of adapting to motherhood. Baby massage has been reported to be practiced for years as a part of traditional parenting styles in cultures around the world. In the recent years, it has become more popular in the western countries such as the United States and Europe as more findings that support its use have emerged (Caple and Schub, 2016). Locally, the teaching of mothers to practice massage with their babies are relatively new. Besides service provision noted to be run in selected private clinics or settings, infant massage is presently not included as a program in the government maternal and child health clinics.

Recent studies have suggested that infant massage provides benefits for both mothers and babies; these benefits include weight gain for premature babies, relaxation, relief from abdominal discomfort and colic, stimulation for babies and relaxation to mothers (Yılmaz and Conk, 2009; Underdown *et al.*, 2010; Garmy, 2012; Melgosa *et al.*, 2012). A quasi experimental non-randomised study ($n=117$) reports that infant massage is effective in improving attachment and for establishing a sense of touch and eye contact between mothers and babies (Gürol and Polat, 2012). Underdown *et al.* (2010) reports about the apparent effect of infant massage on stress hormones and its positive effect on infants' sleep.

Positive findings of effects of infant massage on state anxiety in mothers of preterm infants prior to hospital discharge has been reported (Afand *et al.*, 2017). Study among Chilean mothers to massage their full-term infants showed positive findings on maternal breast-feeding and infant weight gain at

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