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Correlation between Preterm Infants' Illness Severity and Maternal Postpartum Health

Background & Aim: Infants born preterm have variations in their severity depending on the medical and neurophysiological conditions. There is an increased risk of maternal ill-health and impact on quality of life after preterm birth, which in turn influences the infant's development. Occupational therapy is vital in providing early intervention and a family-centered approach to parenthood transition. Hence, the study aimed to determine the correlation between preterm infants' illness severity and maternal postpartum health.

Methods: A cross-sectional study with 82 English-speaking mothers of preterm infants admitted in NICU was done using convenience sampling. After obtaining written informed consent, the investigator administered Neonatal Therapeutic Intervention Scoring System to assess the severity of preterm infants aged between 2 and 6 weeks after childbirth. The mothers were administered with two self-report questionnaires- the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale for measuring the risk of depression and the Maternal Postpartum Quality of Life- to measure the postpartum quality of life. The data was analyzed and interpreted.

Results: R and Jamovi software were used for analysis. The Spearman Rank correlation coefficient test shows a strong positive correlation between NTISS and EPDS scores ($r = 0.679$; $p < 0.001$) and a strong negative correlation between NTISS and MAPP-QOL scores ($r = -0.6408$; $p < 0.001$). The Mann Whitney U test shows a statistically significant difference in the EPDS ($p = 0.269$) and MAPP-QOL ($p = 0.0264$) scores between the type of family (joint and nuclear). No significant difference was found between area of residence (urban and rural) in EPDS ($p = 0.911$) and MAPP-QOL ($p = 0.336$) scores.

Conclusion: There is a strong correlation between the severity of illness of preterm infants and maternal postpartum mental health and quality of life.

Keywords: *NICU, Occupational therapy, maternal postpartum health, postpartum mental health*