AROMATHERAPY IN CHILDBIRTH: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Objective: The purpose of this study was to analyze the current studies and knowledge about aromatherapies used during childbirth, to bring evidence-based recommendations to our countries midwifery care model and to shed light into the fore-coming studies.

Methods: Scopus, PubMed, EBSCO Host, Science Direct ve Ulusal Tez Merkezi, Dergi Park, Ulakbim, Turk Medline, Turkish Citation Index were used to search the current literature and 82 articles were retrieved. The key words used for search included “aromatherapy and labor pain” and “aromatherapy and childbirth”. Articles published within the past 18 years (January 2000 - November 2018) either in Turkish or in English were considered if they were performed as controlled randomized experimental studies.

Results: Thirty studies were excluded due to their unsuitability to the study. The studies were evaluated based on PRISMA (2009) assessment criteria. In the analysis, it was determined that 18 studies were randomized controlled and 6 studies were experimental studies. In addition, 2 systematic reviews, 2 meta-analyses and 1 retrospective, 1 prospective study were also observed. Most of the studies (15) reviewed were from Iran. Only two studies were found from our country.

Conclusion: The aromatherapy used during labor may decrease anxiety, increase relaxation, and ease labor pain. Studies reported positive effects of aromatherapy on exhaustion, labor duration, labor outcomes and the mother’s satisfaction of the birth. In addition, it is our opinion that the authorization of nurses and midwives to use aromatherapy on their patients in our country and further randomized controlled studies are needed to provide more evidence for the use of aromatherapy.

Keywords: Aromatherapy, labour pain, complementary and alternative therapy, nursing midwifery

Abstract

In this systematic review study, 18 randomized controlled, 6 experimental, 2 systematic reviews, 2 meta-analyses, 1 retrospective and 1 prospective study were evaluated in accordance with the keywords. Most of the studies (15) reviewed were from Iran. Only two studies were found from our country.

Introduction and The Aim of This Study

Each woman and child are unique and thus each experienced delivery pain is affected by many factors such as physical, psychological, environmental, psychological, political and emotional conditions of the pregnant woman. Although various methods are used in coping with delivery pain, one of the oldest non-
medication methods is aromatherapy. Studies have shown that aromatherapy is an effective way to manage pain and improve psychological effects at birth. The number of evidence-based aromatherapy studies have been increasing in recent years¹⁻⁷. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to systematically evaluate the current aromatherapies used at birth, present a model based on strong evidence-based studies for the midwifery care practices in our country and lead the research on this subject.

**Study Subject**

Lamadah and Nomani (2016) demonstrated that aromatherapy massage with lavender oil can reduce the pain and anxiety during childbirth, and effectively decrease the duration of labor. In a study carried out in Turkey, Karabulut (2014) evaluated the effect of aromatherapy and found that in the latent phase of labor, there was no significant difference between the groups in terms of the mean pain scores, except in the aromatherapy group which experienced statistically significant reduction in labor pain. However, there is no systematic review article evaluating the recent work in the literature. This study is thus important for providing positive feedback to the literature.

**Method**

In this systemic review study, details regarding about publication selection, categorization, and other criteria were carried out using the guidelines in PRISMA (Systematic Analyzes and Preferred Reporting Elements for Meta-Analyze-2009). The study covered 82 papers which were retrieved from Scopus, PubMed, EBSCO Host, Science Direct and national thesis center, Dergi Park and Ulakbim. Publications of the last 18 years (January 2000-December 2018) were retrieved using the key words e.g., aromatherapy and labour, aromatherapy and labour pain, aromatherapy and birth, aromatherapy and complementary therapies and aromatherapy and clinical studies. Among the retrieved publications, the ones written in English and Turkish with full-text were considered. The first retrieval effort yielded 82 publications but after elimination of the publications that did not meet the selection criteria, only 30 used for the analysis.

**Results and Discussion**

There appeared to be 18 randomized controlled, 6 experimental, 2 systematic reviews, 2 meta-analyses, 1 retrospective and 1 prospective study about the subject matter. The studies were evaluated in this study were carried out in Italy (1), Australia (1), Turkey (2), India (3), Egypt (1), Endonesia (1), Saudiarabia (1), Tayland (1), China (2) and Iran (15). It was determined that the frequently used aromatherapies were lavender, jasmine oil, olive oil, orange, citrus and tangerine oils, various rose oils, Roman and yellow daisy, sage, ak Günlük, indian incense, chamomile oil, almond oil and valerian. These aromatherapies were applied to the pregnant women by the researchers with midwifery education via single inhalation or by massage or with a combination of different methods. Aromatherapy is considered as a non-pharmacological method to relieve pain, and it is widely used by pregnant women because it is safe and cost-effective. In recent years, many researchers in the field of obstetrics and midwifery have been interested in this topic and relevant studies on the subject have been increasing since 2011.

Research has been reported that aromatherapy used at birth not only relieves physical ailments, but also helps to develop a relationship of empathy, love and trust between health care staff and pregnant women when used in conjunction with other methods such as massage. In a study conducted by Saeieh et al with 126 women in 2018, pain intensity was significantly found to be lower in the aromatherapy group. Studies in general have shown that aromatherapy is effective on delivery pain, shorten the time of delivery and also decrease the general anxiety and the anxiety at birth⁷,²⁰,²³,²⁵-²⁶,⁴⁸

**Conclusions**

The aromatherapy used during labor may decrease anxiety, increase relaxation, and ease labor pain. Studies reported positive effects of aromatherapy on exhaustion, labor duration, labor outcomes and the
mother’s satisfaction of the birth. In addition, it is our opinion that the authorization of nurses and midwives to use aromatherapy on their patients in our country and further randomized controlled studies are needed to provide more evidence for the use of aromatherapy.

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