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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF RELAXATION THERAPY: POSTNATAL EXERCISE IN REDUCING POSTPARTUM DISCOMFORT

Eka Fitria Sari[1], Parmilah[2], Retno Lusmiati Anisah[3]

[1,2,3]Al Kautsar Nursing Academy Temanggung, Srimpibaru, Madureso, Temanggung, 56251, Indonesia
*Eka Fitria Sari, Al Kautsar Nursing Academy Temanggung, Srimpibaru, Madureso, Temanggung, 56251, Indonesia
Email: ekafitriasari279@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Postpartum discomfort is a common condition affecting mothers after childbirth, involving symptoms such as perineal pain, uterine contractions, breast engorgement, sleep disturbances, and emotional distress. This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of relaxation therapy in the form of postnatal exercise in reducing postpartum discomfort among mothers with normal delivery. A qualitative method with a descriptive case study approach was applied. Two postpartum mothers were selected based on inclusion criteria, including the experience of discomfort. The study was conducted in Selopampang Public Health Center, Temanggung Regency. Postnatal exercise intervention was carried out once daily for three consecutive days (±15 minutes/session) following standard procedures: breathing exercises, abdominal muscle contraction, pelvic floor muscle exercises, and body stretching. Data were collected through interviews, direct observations, and physical examination, and were assessed using the Indonesian Nursing Outcome Standards (SLKI). Descriptive narrative analysis was conducted to compare conditions before and after the intervention. The results revealed significant improvement in both subjective and objective aspects, including pain reduction, improved sleep quality, lower pulse and blood pressure, and emotional relaxation. This study concludes that postnatal exercise is an effective, simple, and home-based relaxation therapy to alleviate postpartum discomfort and support community nursing practices.

Keywords: postpartum discomfort; postnatal exercise; relaxation therapy; nursing care; maternal recovery

INTRODUCTION

Postpartum discomfort is a common health issue experienced by mothers after childbirth. Symptoms may include perineal pain, uterine contractions, breast engorgement, sleep disturbances, and emotional conditions such as anxiety and irritability. This discomfort not only affects the mother's physical state but also interferes with psychological adaptation during the puerperium period. According to WHO (2018), over 80% of births are normal, yet postpartum complications including discomfort are still prevalent and require appropriate management to prevent long-term consequences.

Conventional nursing care typically emphasizes pharmacological approaches and basic hygiene education [10]. However, non-pharmacological strategies such as relaxation techniques, including postnatal exercises, are emerging. These exercises aim to accelerate uterine involution, reduce muscle tension, improve circulation, and support

postpartum recovery [2]. Prior studies have shown positive contributions of postnatal exercise to physical recovery and emotional stability [3-5].

Nevertheless, implementation and evaluation of structured postnatal exercise programs remain limited, especially in primary health care settings. This study aims to bridge that gap by evaluating the effectiveness of postnatal exercise as a relaxation therapy to reduce postpartum discomfort. The objective is to assess its impact through a case study approach among mothers in the Selopampang area, Temanggung.

METHODS

This research utilized a qualitative method with a descriptive case study approach. The subjects were two postpartum mothers on day one after spontaneous delivery, who reported experiencing postpartum discomfort. Inclusion criteria included stable postpartum condition, no obstetric complications, and willingness to participate through informed consent. The study was conducted in the Selopampang Public Health Center area, Temanggung Regency, Central Java. The intervention involved guided postnatal exercise sessions conducted once daily for three consecutive days, each lasting approximately 15 minutes. The sessions included deep breathing exercises, abdominal muscle workouts, pelvic floor exercises, and upper-lower body stretching. Exercises were performed at home in a comfortable and calm environment under the researcher's supervision.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, direct observations, and physical examination. Instruments used were postpartum discomfort assessment sheets and physiological observation forms, adapted from the Indonesian Nursing Outcome Standards (SLKI). Data were analyzed narratively and descriptively by comparing pre- and post-intervention conditions, applying data triangulation techniques to ensure validity, and referencing relevant theories and previous research.

The study was ethically approved by the researcher's affiliated institution. Ethical principles such as informed consent, data confidentiality, and participants' right to withdraw were upheld.

RESULTS

The following tables present the observation results related to postpartum discomfort and vital signs of each respondent after performing postnatal exercise for three consecutive days:

Table 1. Postpartum Discomfort Indicators – Respondent 1

Day	Perineal Pain	Uterine Contraction	Breast Engorgement	Sleep Difficulty	Emotional State
1	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Anxious, Fatigued
2	Reduced	Present	Subsiding	No	Calmer

3	None	Mild	None	No	Relaxed

Table 2. Postpartum Discomfort Indicators - Respondent 2

Day	Abdominal Pain	Sleep Difficulty	Fatigue	Emotional State	Sleep Quality
1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Irritable	Poor
2	Reduced	No	Reduced	Calmer	Fair
3	Minimal	No	None	Relaxed	Good

Table 3. Vital Sign Changes and Subjective Complaints – Respondent 1

Day	Subjective Complaints	Pulse (bpm)	Blood Pressure (mmHg)
1	Perineal pain, uterine contraction, breast engorgement	98	130/90
2	Pain reduced, contractions present, improving breast condition	90	120/80
3	Minimal pain, reduced contractions, more relaxed	84	110/80

Table 4. Vital Sign Changes and Subjective Complaints - Respondent 2

Day	Subjective Complaints	Pulse (bpm)	Blood Pressure (mmHg)
1	Abdominal pain, sleep difficulty, fatigue	96	128/88
2	Slept well, reduced pain	88	118/80
3	Calmer, minimal pain	82	110/78

These results demonstrate a significant improvement in postpartum discomfort indicators, both subjectively and objectively. Respondents reported improved comfort and reduced pain, supported by measurable decreases in vital signs.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that postnatal exercise is effective in reducing postpartum discomfort in mothers who had a normal delivery. The reduction of symptoms such as perineal pain, uterine contractions, and breast engorgement, along with

physiological improvements like decreased pulse rate and blood pressure, are indicators of a positive response to relaxation-based exercises. Furthermore, enhanced sleep quality and subjective comfort reflect the intervention's psychological benefits.

These results support previous studies, including one by Pujiningrum [3], which found that postnatal exercise reduced perineal pain and anxiety in postpartum mothers. A similar conclusion was drawn by Winkyana [6], who highlighted that postnatal exercise contributes to physical and emotional recovery. This effectiveness is linked to improved circulation, accelerated uterine involution, and the release of endorphins, which have analgesic and relaxing effects.

Postnatal exercise also enhances a mother's sense of bodily control and her perception of recovery. Active mothers tend to have better adaptation during the puerperal period. This aligns with Roy's Adaptation Model, which emphasizes nursing interventions to support adaptive coping mechanisms.

However, this study has limitations, including a small sample size and short intervention duration. The results cannot be generalized. Further research using quantitative approaches with larger populations is needed to strengthen and validate these findings. Despite the limitations, this study provides early evidence that postnatal exercise can be a practical, low-cost, and home-based nursing intervention in community health services.

CONCLUSION

Postnatal exercise is proven to be an effective intervention for reducing postpartum discomfort, both physiologically and psychologically. It alleviates pain, uterine contractions, and breast engorgement, while also improving sleep quality and promoting a sense of relaxation in postpartum mothers. This intervention is simple, requires no special equipment, and can be performed independently at home. It is therefore recommended as a community and independent nursing practice. Further studies are encouraged to validate these findings through a quantitative approach and broader sample.

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