

The Impact of the Parent-To-Parent Peer Support Program on the Disenfranchised Grief Severity of Mothers with Preterm Infants

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Aims

A preterm infant's birth and admission to the Newborn Intensive Care Unit (NICU) cause parents to experience the loss of their 'ideal' child and reactions of grief, which are known as disenfranchised grief. The incidence of grief reactions in parents makes them susceptible to mental disorders. This reaction to grief and loss is considered an emotional crisis and can persist even after discharge from NICU to home. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of a peer support program on the disenfranchised grief severity of mothers with preterm infants.

Methods

This study was a quasi-experimental quantitative study, which was conducted by convenient sampling on 108 (45 control and 45 intervention) Iranian mothers with preterm infants admitted to the NICU. Sampling was done first in the control group and then in the intervention group sequentially. The control group did not receive any training. However, the intervention was carried out in the intervention group. The intervention included accompanying and empathizing with mothers with preterm infants and supporting them in accepting the conditions by peer-supportive parents in a period of two weeks. Peer-supportive parents were selected from experienced volunteer mothers with preterm babies hospitalized in the NICU. The mental health of peer-supportive parents was checked and confirmed using the GHQ28 questionnaire, and then they underwent eight hours of training to implement the intervention. Study data were collected using a researcher-made, valid, and reliable demographic and grief questionnaire. The participants in both groups completed the pre-test and post-test questionnaires immediately before and after the intervention. Data were then analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics such as paired t-tests, Wilcoxon, and Mann-Whitney tests, using SPSS software version 16.

Results

The results of the Wilcoxon test revealed that in the control group, there was no significant difference in the average scores of grief of mothers of preterm infants before and after the intervention. However, in the intervention group, the

paired t-test showed that the difference between the mean scores of grief before and after the intervention was significant ($P < 0.001$). In addition, the results of the Mann-Whitney test indicated that before the intervention, there was no significant difference in the mean scores of grief between the control and intervention groups. However, after the intervention, the results of the Mann-Whitney test showed that the difference between the mean scores of grief between the control and intervention groups was significant ($P = 0.001$).

Relevance to NIDCAP

The Newborn Individualized Developmental Care and Assessment Program (NIDCAP) is one of the current priorities of the Neonatal Health Office in the Ministry of Health in Iran and many other countries that emphasize the increasing presence of parents in NICUs and support them by staff. Infant and family-centered developmental care is one of the core principles of the NIDCAP Model. Mothers, as an essential component of the NIDCAP Model, need emotional and empathetic support when they are grieving for their ideal child.

Conclusion

The findings of the current research showed that parent-to-parent peer support intervention was an effective program to decrease grief severity in mothers with preterm infants. Therefore, researchers emphasize the importance of receiving support from a parent who shares similar experiences and providing emotional and psychological support by maintaining respect and confidentiality and without prejudice to help mothers with premature babies admitted to the NICU. Furthermore, they recommend the implementation of the parent-to-parent peer support program as a part of infant and family-centered developmental care/NIDCAP care to decrease the preterm infants' mothers disenfranchised grief severity that this may result in increased secure mother-infant attachment.

Keywords: *Preterm Infant, Disenfranchised grief, Preterm Infant's Mother, Prematurity grief, Parent-to-Parent Peer Support Program, Neonatal Intensive Care Unit*