Effect of Prenatal Massage on Confidence Level and Stress Reduction of Pregnant Women in Preparation for Childbirth

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ABSTRACT

Pregnancy is a challenging period for pregnant women, both physically and psychologically. High levels of stress and lack of confidence in facing labor can negatively impact the well-being of both mother and baby. Prenatal massage has been recognized as one of the non-pharmacological interventions that can help reduce stress, improve emotional well-being, and increase maternal confidence in facing the labor process. This study aims to analyze the effect of prenatal massage on the level of confidence and stress reduction of pregnant women in preparation for childbirth through the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. This study used the SLR method by reviewing scientific articles from various relevant databases, such as PubMed, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. Inclusion criteria included studies that addressed the effects of prenatal massage on self-confidence and stress levels of pregnant women published within the last five years. Data were systematically analyzed to identify key findings and trends in related research. The results of the analysis showed that prenatal massage significantly contributed to lowering the levels of stress hormones such as cortisol as well as increasing endorphin hormones that play a role in relaxation. In addition, prenatal massage was also associated with improved psychological well-being and emotional support provided during the therapy, which contributed to the pregnant women's increased confidence in facing labor. Based on the results of the literature review, prenatal massage was shown to have benefits in reducing stress and increasing the confidence of pregnant women ahead of labor. Therefore, this intervention can be recommended as part of prenatal care to support the mental and emotional health of pregnant women.
Kata kunci: *Prenatal Massage, Confidence, Stress, Labor Preparation, Systematic Literature Review*

INTRODUCTION

Pregnancy is an extraordinary journey in a woman's life, filled with physical, emotional and psychological changes. While it is often considered a blissful time, pregnancy can also bring significant challenges to expectant mothers, both physically and mentally. On the physical side, pregnant women often experience discomfort such as back pain, leg cramps, swelling, and fatigue.

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On the emotional side, pregnancy can trigger anxiety, stress, and lack of confidence, especially in the lead-up to labor. Stress during pregnancy can adversely affect the health of both mother and fetus. Research shows that poorly managed stress during pregnancy can increase the risk of complications such as hypertension, gestational diabetes, premature birth, and psychological problems such as postpartum depression. Therefore, it is important for expectant mothers to find effective ways to manage stress and improve their wellbeing in the lead-up to delivery (Aisyah & Prafitri 2024).

One approach that has been shown to provide benefits in managing stress and improving the well-being of pregnant women is prenatal massage. Prenatal massage is a massage technique specifically designed for pregnant women taking into account the physical changes that occur during pregnancy. This massage can help relieve muscle tension, improve blood circulation, reduce swelling, and alleviate pain commonly experienced by pregnant women. In addition to the physical benefits, prenatal massage also serves as a tool to relieve anxiety and stress, as well as improve the emotional well-being of pregnant women (Lubis, et.al. 2023). Physically, prenatal massage helps to relieve muscle tension, improve blood circulation, reduce swelling, and alleviate common pains experienced by pregnant women, such as lower back pain, leg cramps, and tension in the shoulder and neck area. Improved blood circulation due to massage also helps to increase the supply of oxygen and nutrients to the fetus, thus contributing to the overall health of the pregnancy. In addition, prenatal massage also helps stimulate the lymphatic system, which plays a role in reducing fluid retention and swelling (edema), a problem that often occurs in pregnant women especially in the late trimester (Frafitasari et al., 2023)

In addition to the physical benefits, prenatal massage also serves as an effective tool to relieve anxiety and stress, and improve the emotional well-being of pregnant women. The gentle, rhythmic touch in a massage can stimulate the production of hormones that play a role in creating feelings of calm and happiness, such as endorphins, serotonin, and oxytocin. These hormones function as natural mood regulators that help reduce anxiety, mild depression, and insomnia, which are often experienced by pregnant women. Excess levels of cortisol, the main stress hormone, have also been shown to decrease after prenatal massage sessions, helping pregnant women to feel more relaxed and better prepared for labor (Field, 2014). Therefore, interventions such as prenatal massage are important in creating a healthy psychological environment for both mother and fetus.

The gentle, rhythmic touch of massage has been scientifically proven to stimulate the production of hormones that play a role in creating feelings of calm and happiness, such as endorphins, serotonin and oxytocin. Endorphins function as natural pain relievers, which can help pregnant women more easily adapt to physical discomfort during pregnancy. Serotonin plays a role in improving mood and reducing the tendency to depression, while oxytocin, also known as the "love hormone", has a calming effect and strengthens the emotional bond between mother and fetus. However, although these effects are well-documented, the

intensity and duration of the benefits derived from prenatal massage may vary based on the frequency of the massage, the skill of the therapist, as well as the individual response of the expectant mother (Kuswandi, 2014).

In addition to increasing happiness hormones, prenatal massage is also effective in lowering levels of cortisol, a major stress hormone that often rises during pregnancy due to physiological changes, emotional distress, and anxiety leading up to labor. High cortisol levels not only risk causing sleep disturbances, muscle tension and increased blood pressure, but can also affect the development of the fetal nervous system and increase the likelihood of the baby experiencing stress after birth (Ding et al., 2019). A decrease in cortisol levels after a prenatal massage session indicates a significant relaxation response, which allows pregnant women to feel calmer, more in control, and better prepared for labor.

However, while prenatal massage offers many benefits, there are some critical aspects to note. Not all pregnant women can receive massage in the same way, especially those with high-risk pregnancies, such as preeclampsia, blood clotting disorders, or other pregnancy complications. Therefore, consultation with medical personnel before undergoing prenatal massage is necessary to avoid unwanted risks. In addition, the effectiveness of prenatal massage also depends on the quality of the therapy provided, as an incorrect massage or one performed by an untrained therapist may cause discomfort, muscle injury, or even trigger early contractions. Considering these various benefits and cautionary aspects, prenatal massage can be considered as one of the effective non-pharmacological interventions in improving the emotional and physical health of pregnant women. If performed with the right technique, by trained personnel, and taking into account the individual condition of the expectant mother, prenatal massage has the potential to be part of a holistic strategy in supporting a healthy pregnancy and optimal preparation for childbirth.

More than that, prenatal massage also has a positive impact on the social and emotional relationships of pregnant women. When performed by a partner or significant other, massage can help strengthen the emotional bond between the pregnant woman and her partner. A closer relationship with a partner can create a more supportive environment, which is very important in reducing fear and anxiety leading up to labor (Lubis et al., 2023). In a professional context, prenatal massage performed by a trained therapist can also provide additional emotional support, making the mother feel more heard, understood and cared for. With such a wide range of benefits on offer, prenatal massage can be part of a holistic approach to pregnancy care. Not only does it help with physical discomforts, but it also plays an important role in supporting the mental and emotional health of the expectant mother, which will ultimately have a positive impact on preparation for labor and the well-being of the unborn baby. Therefore, prenatal massage can be recommended as a natural and effective method in improving the quality of life of pregnant women during pregnancy (Cahyanto et al., 2020).

Prenatal massage has a positive effect on the balance of hormones in the body, where massage can reduce levels of cortisol, a hormone associated with stress, and increase endorphins, which act as natural tranquilizers. The decrease

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in cortisol levels can help pregnant women feel more relaxed, while the increase in endorphins can improve mood and positive feelings. In addition, prenatal massage also provides important emotional support for pregnant women, as the process involves not only physical touch but also attention and empathy from the therapist. This helps mothers feel more valued and emotionally supported, which in turn can increase their confidence in facing labor (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Self-confidence is an important factor in the labor process, as mothers who feel more confident tend to be better prepared for the challenges of labor and are able to cope better with pain. Lack of confidence is often associated with excessive fear and anxiety leading up to labor, which can hinder the labor process itself. Therefore, improving pregnant women's self-confidence through interventions such as prenatal massage can play a major role in preparing them mentally and physically for the upcoming labor process (Hikmah et al., 2019). Therefore, boosting pregnant women's self-confidence through appropriate interventions is an important aspect of labor preparation, and one method that has proven effective is prenatal massage. Prenatal massage not only provides physical benefits, such as reducing muscle tension, improving blood circulation, and reducing pain, but also provides great psychological benefits. The gentle and rhythmic touch during a massage session stimulates the production of endorphins and serotonin hormones, which play a role in creating feelings of comfort, relaxation and happiness. This condition helps pregnant women feel calmer and more in control, and strengthens their confidence that they can go through the labor process well (Danti, 2020).

In addition, prenatal massage can be part of a social support-based childbirth preparation strategy, especially if performed by a trusted partner or professional. The emotional support provided during the massage can strengthen the relationship between the pregnant woman and those around her, thus creating a sense of security and comfort leading up to labor. When mothers feel supported and understood, their anxiety levels decrease, and their self-confidence increases, which in turn has a positive impact on their mental readiness to face labor (Djuwitaningsih et al., 2023). Thus, prenatal massage can be recommended as a natural and effective method to increase the confidence of pregnant women, helping them to face labor more calmly, positively, and confidently.

While many studies have explored the benefits of prenatal massage in reducing stress and improving the physical well-being of pregnant women, few have examined in depth how prenatal massage can improve maternal self-confidence ahead of labor. The confidence of pregnant women is not only related to physical readiness, but also to mental and emotional readiness in facing the challenges of labor. With increased understanding of the relationship between prenatal massage, stress reduction, and increased self-confidence, it is hoped that this intervention can be applied more widely in prenatal care as a comprehensive approach to supporting pregnant women (Nuryati, 2020).

This study aims to analyze the effect of prenatal massage on the level of confidence and stress reduction of pregnant women in preparation for childbirth.

Through the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, this research will identify and evaluate various relevant studies that have been conducted previously regarding the benefits of prenatal massage on pregnant women. By reviewing the existing literature, it is hoped that stronger evidence can be obtained regarding the effectiveness of prenatal massage in reducing stress, increasing self-confidence, and providing other psychological benefits for pregnant women.
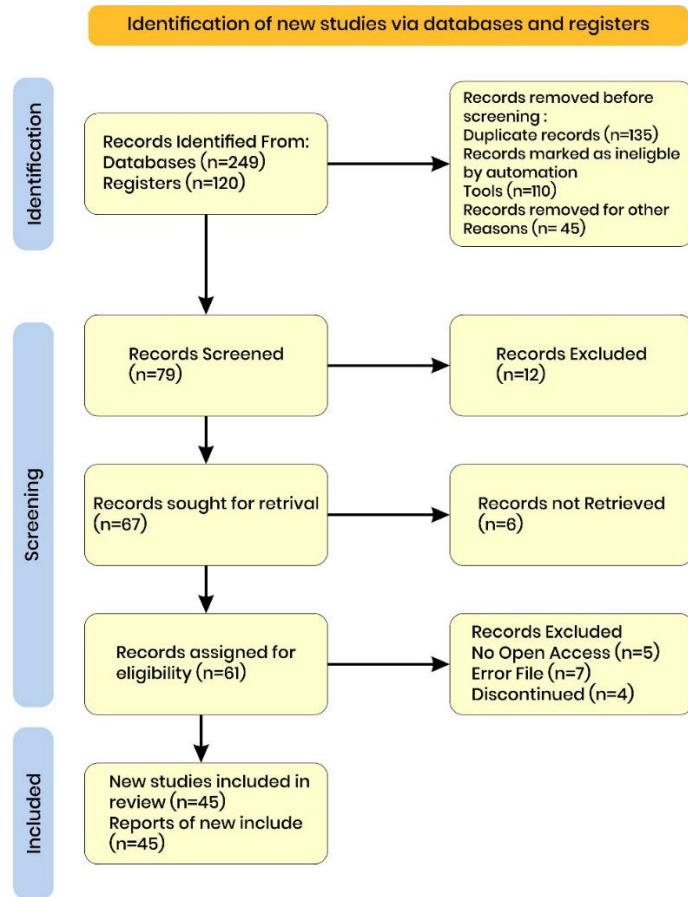
The importance of this study lies in the ability of prenatal massage to reduce anxiety, improve the quality of life of pregnant women, and provide much-needed emotional support during pregnancy. If prenatal massage is proven to be effective in increasing self-confidence and reducing stress, this can be an important recommendation in the practice of prenatal care that is more holistic and focused on the well-being of pregnant women. Therefore, the results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of more inclusive prenatal care guidelines, which pay attention not only to the physical but also the psychological aspects of pregnant women, so as to better prepare them to undergo the labor process with high self-confidence and stable emotional conditions.

METHODS

This study used the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to analyze the effect of prenatal massage on the level of confidence and stress reduction of pregnant women in preparation for childbirth. The SLR method was chosen because this approach makes it possible to collect, assess, and synthesize existing evidence from various studies in a systematic and transparent manner, thus providing a clearer and more comprehensive picture of the topic under study. A literature search was conducted through several academic databases, including PubMed, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and ProQuest, using keywords such as "prenatal massage", "stress reduction", "self-confidence", "pregnant women", and "childbirth preparation". Articles included in this review were studies published within the last five years, used a quantitative or qualitative research design, and focused on the effects of prenatal massage on reducing stress and increasing self-confidence of pregnant women leading up to labor. Articles that were not relevant or did not provide appropriate data were excluded from this review. Article selection was performed by two independent researchers to minimize bias, and where there was disagreement, discussions were held to reach consensus. Once articles that met the inclusion criteria were found, data from each article were critically analyzed to identify key findings and emerging trends related to the influence of prenatal massage. The analysis process was conducted narratively and thematically to identify patterns, similarities, and differences between studies, focusing on the effects of prenatal massage in reducing stress and increasing the confidence of pregnant women. The quality of each study was assessed using quality assessment tools appropriate to the research design used, to ensure that the results obtained were reliable and valid.

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Table 1. Inclusion Criteria for Literature Review

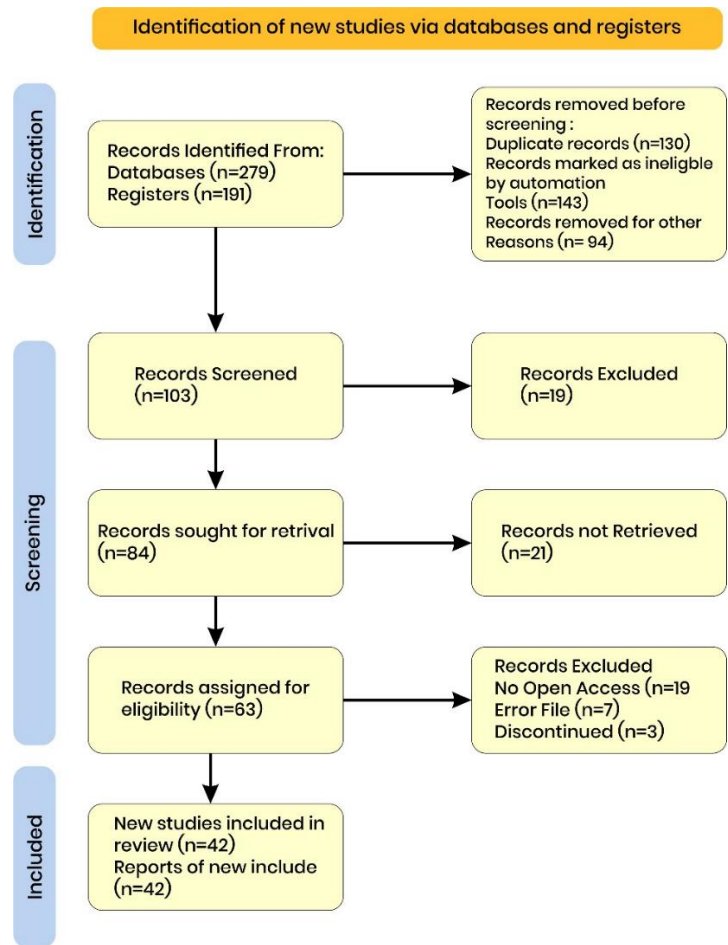| Category	Inclusion Criteria
Publication Type	Scientific articles published on Google Scholar, PubMed, ScienceDirect, and other leading academic databases
Journal Specifications	Top international journals and national journals related to health, education, and social sciences in the last 6 years
Journal Index	Google Scholar, SINTA 1-6, Scopus Q1-NonQ, GARUDA, Crossref, dan ICI
Year of Publication	2018-2024
Research Country	Indonesian dan Foreign
Variables	The effect of prenatal massage on pregnant women's confidence level and stress reduction before childbirth
Field of Science	Health, Public Health, Social Sciences, Early Childhood Studies, and General Health Research
Type of Research	Theoretical and empirical
Keywords	Prenatal massage, confidence of pregnant women, stress reduction, labor preparation, prenatal massage, self-confidence, stress reduction
Subject	A study involving pregnant women, prenatal massage therapists, and their effect on maternal confidence and stress before childbirth.

Identification of new studies via databases and registers

Identification

Records Identified From:
Databases (n=249)
Registers (n=120)

Records removed before screening :
Duplicate records (n=135)
Records marked as ineligble by automation
Tools (n=110)
Records removed for other Reasons (n= 45)

Screening

Records Screened
(n=79)

Records Excluded
(n=12)

Records sought for retrival
(n=67)

Records not Retrieved
(n=6)

Records assigned for eligibility (n=61)

Records Excluded
No Open Access (n=5)
Error File (n=7)
Discontinued (n=4)

Included

New studies included in review (n=45)
Reports of new include (n=45)

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Image 1 PRISMA Flow Diagram

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results

Based on a literature review conducted of various relevant scientific articles, prenatal massage has been shown to provide significant benefits in reducing stress levels as well as increasing the confidence of pregnant women ahead of labor. Several studies that have been examined show that prenatal massage plays an important role in lowering the levels of stress hormones such as cortisol, which is directly linked to the reduction of anxiety and tension experienced by pregnant women. This reduction in cortisol levels is very important, as excessive stress during pregnancy can risk causing serious complications such as hypertension, gestational diabetes, and premature birth (Field, 2014). On the other hand, prenatal massage also increases the levels of endorphins, which function as chemicals that produce happiness and feelings of calmness. Higher endorphin levels are associated with feeling happier, more relaxed, and more confident. In addition, uncontrolled stress in pregnant women can also have an impact on the psychological state after delivery, increasing the risk of baby blues syndrome or even postpartum depression. Thus, prenatal massage not only has a short-term effect in reducing pregnancy anxiety but also has a positive impact

on the emotional well-being of postpartum mothers.

Prenatal massage also increases levels of endorphins, which act as feel-good chemicals. Higher endorphin levels are associated with feeling happier, more relaxed, and more confident in the face of labor. These hormones also contribute to increased pain tolerance, so pregnant women who regularly undergo prenatal massage tend to experience decreased fear and anxiety of pain during labor (Hernandez-Reif et al., 2015). Furthermore, prenatal massage can help increase pregnant women's body awareness, which in turn has a positive impact on their confidence in dealing with physical changes during pregnancy. When a mother feels more comfortable with her body and better understands her body's natural responses during the pregnancy process, she will be better mentally prepared for labor. In addition, prenatal massage performed by a professional or partner can also create a stronger emotional bond, both with the baby in the womb and with the partner, which ultimately contributes to creating a more supportive psychosocial environment.

Considering these benefits, prenatal massage can be recommended as part of a holistic childbirth preparation strategy, which focuses not only on the physical but also on the mental and emotional aspects of pregnant women. Therefore, the integration of prenatal massage therapy in pregnancy care programs may provide long-term benefits in improving the quality of maternal and infant health, as well as ensuring a more positive and less stressful childbirth experience.

The reduction in stress levels recorded in this study not only impacted the physical condition of the mothers, but also affected their mental well-being. Many pregnant women reported feeling calmer and more emotionally prepared for labor after receiving prenatal massage. The psychological effects of prenatal massage are considerable, as it not only relieves anxiety, but also strengthens expectant mothers' sense of confidence in their bodies and the birth process. Research by Field et al. (2012) showed that pregnant women who received massage felt more prepared for labor and had lower anxiety levels compared to those who did not receive massage. In addition, prenatal massage was also reported to assist pregnant women in improving their sleep quality, which is directly related to stress reduction and feeling more refreshed and fit.

Furthermore, prenatal massage was also found to have benefits in addressing physical symptoms often experienced by pregnant women, such as low back pain, cramps, swelling, and muscle tension. This is in accordance with the findings obtained by Smith et al. (2019) who stated that prenatal massage can improve blood circulation, reduce swelling, and relieve muscle tension, which overall makes mothers feel more comfortable. With the reduction of bothersome physical symptoms, pregnant women have more opportunity to focus on mentally preparing for labor, which in turn contributes to boosting their confidence. This decrease in physical discomfort also allows moms to feel more relaxed, which has an impact on their readiness to face birth.

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Discussion

Prenatal massage has been shown to have extensive benefits, both physically and psychologically, that support expectant mothers in having a healthy pregnancy and preparing for labor (Osborne et al., 2021). One of the main benefits of prenatal massage is stress reduction. Pregnancy is a challenging time, both physically and emotionally. Expectant mothers often face high anxiety regarding the labor process and the health of their baby. High stress during pregnancy can affect the health of both mother and baby, increasing the risk of medical complications, such as preeclampsia, hypertension and premature birth (Hughes et al., 2015). Decreasing levels of stress hormones such as cortisol through prenatal massage helps to lower such risks, by improving the hormonal balance of mothers which can affect their overall physical and emotional state.

Prenatal massage also has a significant impact on the psychological well-being of pregnant women. Many mothers reported feeling calmer and more confident in facing labor after receiving prenatal massage (Aswitami et al., 2022). This suggests that prenatal massage can be a very effective intervention in lowering anxiety and increasing confidence in pregnant women. For example, research by Field (2014) showed that pregnant women who received prenatal massage felt more valued, more cared for, and more connected to their bodies, which strengthened their confidence ahead of labor. Prenatal massage provides a sense of well-being that helps pregnant women feel more physically and emotionally prepared to face the challenges of labor. The endorphin hormones released during the massage not only provide a sense of comfort but also reduce pain and improve the mother's overall mood (Field, 2014).

In addition, prenatal massage also provides very important physical benefits. During pregnancy, the mother's body undergoes various physical changes that can cause discomfort, such as back pain, swelling of the legs, and muscle cramps. The decrease in muscle tension that occurs during prenatal massage helps relieve lower back pain and muscle tension, which often plague expectant mothers, and increases blood flow throughout the body (Smith et al., 2019). This increase in blood circulation is very beneficial, as it can help reduce swelling and increase the levels of oxygen carried to the body's tissues, which in turn can reduce fatigue and improve the mood of the expectant mother. With reduced physical discomfort, expectant mothers can feel more relaxed, which contributes to a reduction in stress and an improvement in their sleep quality.

Better sleep quality is another important benefit of prenatal massage. Pregnant women often experience sleep disturbances due to physical discomfort, anxiety, or hormonal changes that occur during pregnancy. Prenatal massage helps reduce anxiety and tension, which contributes to improved sleep quality for pregnant women (Cohen et al., 2012). Better quality sleep is very important, as it can improve the well-being of both mother and baby and reduce feelings of anxiety and stress. Pregnant women who sleep better tend to feel more refreshed, fitter, and better prepared to face the challenges of pregnancy and labor. Good quality sleep also supports the body's recovery process after physical activity and reduces the negative impact of long-term stress.

Although prenatal massage has many benefits, it is important to remember that the effectiveness of prenatal massage may vary depending on the individual condition of the expectant mother. Several factors, such as the mother's comfort level with the massage, personal preferences and the mother's health status, may affect the extent to which prenatal massage can provide benefits. Pregnant women with certain medical conditions, such as high-risk pregnancies or physical abnormalities, may need to consult with medical personnel before attempting prenatal massage (Hughes et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important to conduct regular monitoring and evaluation to ensure that prenatal massage is applied safely and according to each pregnant woman's condition.

Overall, prenatal massage can be considered a non-pharmacological intervention that is highly beneficial in improving the physical and emotional well-being of expectant mothers. Not only is prenatal massage effective in reducing stress and boosting self-confidence, but it also serves to improve the mother's physical comfort during pregnancy. This intervention can be an integral part of a more holistic prenatal care, which supports the mental and physical health of pregnant women in the lead-up to labor. Although further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of prenatal massage across different pregnancy states, the findings from this literature review suggest that prenatal massage has great potential in supporting pregnant women to have a healthier, happier pregnancy, and be better prepared physically and emotionally for labor.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the literature review, prenatal massage has been shown to have a positive influence on the confidence level and stress reduction of pregnant women in preparation for childbirth. Prenatal massage not only provides physical benefits, such as reducing muscle tension, improving blood circulation, and reducing pain and swelling, but also plays an important role in stabilizing the emotional state of pregnant women. By lowering the levels of stress hormones such as cortisol and increasing the production of relaxation hormones such as endorphins, oxytocin, and serotonin, prenatal massage significantly helps pregnant women feel calmer, happier, and ready for the labor process. In addition to the physiological benefits, prenatal massage also has an impact on increasing the mother's confidence in facing labor. The gentle, soothing touch helps to create a feeling of comfort and self-control, which is crucial in mentally preparing the expectant mother. When anxiety is reduced and confidence is increased, pregnant women are better able to face the challenges of labor with a more positive and proactive attitude. In addition, prenatal massage performed by a partner or professional can also increase social and emotional support, which plays a role in reducing stress and building stronger mental readiness. Considering these benefits, prenatal massage should be part of a holistic prenatal care program that focuses not only on the physical health but also on the mental and emotional well-being of pregnant women. The implementation of this therapy in prenatal care

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programs at hospitals, maternity clinics, or independently with the guidance of professionals can help pregnant women have a more comfortable pregnancy, smoother delivery, and an overall more positive experience. Therefore, prenatal massage can be recommended as an effective non-pharmacological method to improve the quality of life of pregnant women and support optimal labor preparation.

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