

The role of electroconvulsive therapy in the treatment of postpartum psychosis: a systematic review

Scarlett Pygott (Year 3 medical undergraduate); Dr Declan Hyland MBChB BMedSci (Hons.) MRCPsych PGDip PGCert MAcadMed SFHEA
School of Medicine, University of Liverpool, Cedar House, Ashton Street, Liverpool, L69 3GE

Introduction

- Postpartum psychosis is a syndrome of mental and behavioral symptoms (delusions, hallucinations and other psychotic symptoms) that presents with depressive or manic mood within the first 6 weeks postpartum. (1)
- Postpartum psychosis has a prevalence of 0.089-2.6 per 1000 births. (2)
- It is a psychiatric emergency, with the most severe cases resulting in suicide and infanticide.
- Both the treatment and the pathophysiology of postpartum psychosis are under researched areas and subsequently there are no definitive guidelines on the management of postpartum psychosis.
- Previous literature reviews on the management of postpartum psychosis have highlighted the need for further research in the form of randomized control trials and prospective studies in this area. (3)
- Many case studies have demonstrated electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) as a highly effective treatment for refractory postpartum psychosis or postpartum psychosis with catatonic symptoms, however there is no current guidelines around ECT as a treatment for postpartum psychosis. (4-6)

Aim

- To systematically review the literature to establish whether ECT has a valid role in the treatment of postpartum psychosis in the present day.
- To identify which patient subgroups benefit most from ECT.

Methods

- A systematic review of the literature on the use of ECT as a treatment for postpartum psychosis was conducted using Web of Knowledge, SCOPUS and PubMed. See Figure 1.
- 5 articles were included in the final review of
 - 1 case series (USA)
 - 1 population-based study with a matched comparison group (Sweden)
 - 1 register-based case-control study (Sweden)
 - 1 retrospective chart review (India)
 - 1 naturalistic prospective study (India)

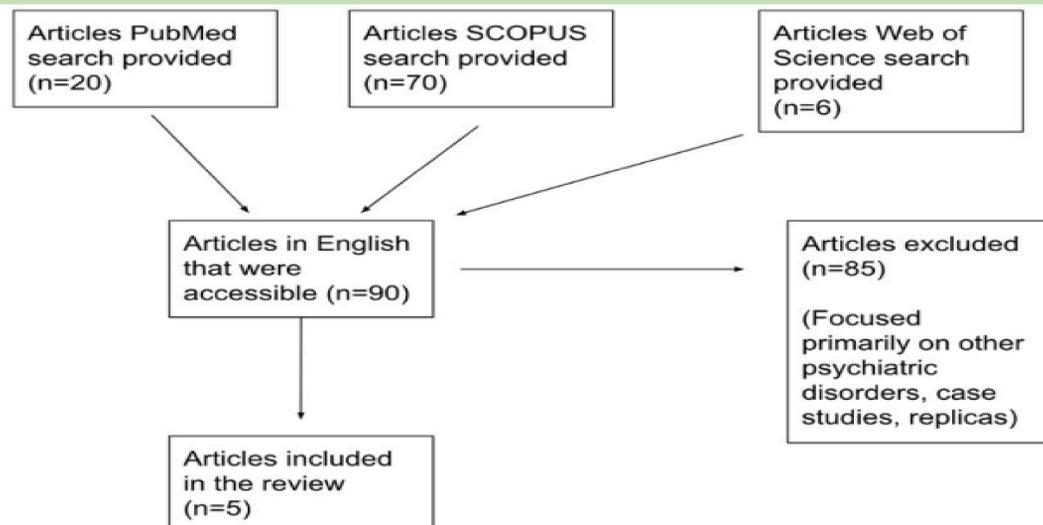


Figure 1

Results

| Name, Year, Journal | Sample size | Results |
|---|-------------|---|
| Rundgren et al (2018), Journal of Affective Disorders | 48 | 94.2% of those with postpartum psychosis responded to ECT treatment. 48.3% of those with postpartum psychosis achieved remission. |
| Forray et al (2007), The Journal of ECT | 5 | All patients were treated to remission. |
| Babu et al (2013), Archives of Women's Health | 34 | Patients who were given ECT had significantly improved at the time of discharge. |
| Nahar et al (2017), General Hospital Psychiatry | 19 | ECT resulted in 100% resolution of catatonic and postpartum psychosis. |
| Rönnqvist et al (2019), The Journal of ECT | 83 | The risk of relapse in those women treated with ECT for a puerperal disorder is lower than those treated with ECT for a non-puerperal disorder. |

- All the studies demonstrated that ECT is an effective treatment for postpartum psychosis.
- Two of the studies highlighted the efficacy of ECT as a treatment for postpartum psychosis that either presents with catatonia or has failed to respond to pharmacological treatment.
- Two of the studies demonstrated that the use of ECT for psychosis within the postpartum period is more effective than the use of ECT for psychosis outside of the postpartum period.

Conclusion

- All five studies demonstrated that ECT can be a highly effective treatment for postpartum psychosis, resulting in significant symptom improvement and remission.
- Despite this, due to a lack of large, diverse sample sizes across all the studies, currently there is not enough robust evidence to make definitive recommendations regarding the role of ECT in postpartum psychosis.

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