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SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION OF ECZEMA IN NEONATES

Thesis

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INTRODUCTION AND AIM OF THE WORK

The skin occupies a powerful position as an organ of communication and plays an important role in socialization through the life cycle. It is considered to be the largest organ of the body and thus has the largest representation in the brain. Embryologically, the skin together with the senses of taste, smell, sight, hearing, touch and the nervous system are derived from one and the same origin and that is: the ectoderm. This common origin is the beginning of a complex interlacing relation binding the skin to the psyche (**Rasmussen, 1990**).

The first of the senses to develop in an embryo, is the sense of touch, long before ears or eyes develop. It is the humanizing sense which puts human beings in contact with each other. The repeated contractions of the uterus upon the baby's body during the process of birth, produce massive stimulation of its skin which in turn stimulates the various organ systems of the body through the neuroendocrine system. Thus the baby's organs are prepared to assume their proper postnatal functions (**Pauk et al., 1986**).

The skin remains the principle communication system for the newborn in spite of the fact that he can see and hear quite well. He clearly understands the messages conveyed to him through the skin such as those he receives when he is held or cuddled. Touching (cuddling, patting, and so on) can also help to calm distressed infants (**Harris, 1986**).

After delivery and during the ensuing days, visual and physical contact between mother and baby triggers a variety of mutually rewarding and pleasurable interactions. The characteristic pattern of interlocking maternal and

infant behaviors often includes the mother's touching the infant's extremities and face with her fingertips and encompassing and gently massaging the infant's trunk with her hands. The infant's crying elicits the maternal response of touching the infant and speaking in a soft, soothing, higher-toned voice (**Behrman and Vaughan, 1992**).

Klaus and Kennell (1982), proposed that the mother was especially sensitive during the hours immediately after delivery to establishing an emotional bond to her newborn infant. They recommended that the newborn infant be given to the mother and skin- to-skin contact maintained for 30 to 60 minutes immediately after birth, with the goal of enhancing the later caregiving relationship of the mother and child.

Eczematous eruptions are the most common skin problem affecting infants specially during the neonatal period (**Rook et al., 1986**). In many common dermatologic disorders, such as eczema, genetic, environmental, and psychosocial factors contribute to the pathogenesis of the disorder in varying degrees (**Koblenzer, 1983**). Eczema is significantly associated with behavioral changes (**Cotterill, 1990**). It may be a physical sign of impaired parent - child relationships and consequent psychological developmental arrest (**Koblenzer and Koblenzer, 1988**).

The aim of this study is to evaluate different social, psychological and environmental factors which may affect the development of eczema in neonates. Proper studying of these factors may help in a better understanding of the underlying pathophysiology of eczema in this particular age group and hence a better management could be afforded.