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Discussion

Space, place and the midwife: Exploring the relationship between the birth environment, neurobiology and midwifery practice

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Abstract

Background

Research indicates that midwives and their practice are influenced by space and place and that midwives practice differently in different places. It is possible that one mechanism through which space and place influence midwifery practice is via neurobiological responses such as the production and release of oxytocin, which can be triggered by experiences and perceptions of the physical environment.

Aim

To articulate the significance of space and place to midwifery and explore the relationship between the birth environment, neurobiology and midwifery practice.

Discussion

Quality midwifery care requires the facilitation of trusting social relationships and the provision of emotionally sensitive care to childbearing women. The neuropeptide oxytocin plays a critical role in human social and emotional behaviour by increasing trust, reducing stress and heightening empathy, reciprocity and generosity.

Principle conclusion

Through its role as a trigger for oxytocin release, the birth environment may play a direct role in the provision of quality midwifery care.



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Keywords

Space and place; Midwifery practice; Birth environment; Oxytocin

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