"Music is Considered my Skin-to-Skin with her"

Music Therapy with parents and their extremely preterm infants in the NICU

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What is Music Therapy?

"Music Therapy is an established health profession in which music is used within a therapeutic relationship to address physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs of individuals." (AMTA, 2023)

4 music therapy methods

• Receptive
• Recreational
• Compositional
• Improvisational
Literature Review

• Parent experience in the NICU
  • Emotions ranging from guilt and worry to joy
  • Increased stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms
  • Loss of parental role

• Music Therapy in the NICU
  • Increased confidence, decreased anxiety, improved bonding
  • Intimacy and exclusivity
  • Empowerment

• Other Methods of bonding and attachment support
Parent Identity, Bonding, and Attachment

• Bonding and attachment
  • Attachment is infant to parent
  • Bonding is parent to infant
  • Physical closeness, reassurance, and exclusivity

• Parent role/identity
  • Parents searching for purpose and role in NICU
  • Kangaroo care/skin-to-skin contact
  • Musical caregiver
Background and Purpose

• Clinical experience with music therapy for parent anxiety, emotional expression, and involvement in cares
• Music is a unique space for premature infants to be invited to interact and self-regulate
• Research gap with infants under 28 weeks gestational age
• Parent experiences in music with their baby in a qualitative process
• Purpose: to learn about how parents experience their relationship with their extremely preterm infant during music therapy and NICU admission
Method

• Qualitative phenomenological approach

• Data collection occurred between June and September 2021
  • Families recruited within 3 weeks of birth
  • All sessions and interviews audio recorded
  • Sessions at least 1x/week with parent actively engaged in music therapy session
  • Exit interview 1 week prior to d/c or when infant is 40 weeks corrected gestational age
Method cont.

- **Inclusion criteria**
  - Infant born under 28 weeks gestational age
  - Infant enrolled in micropreemie care based on micropreemie protocol (under 26 weeks OR under 800 grams at birth)
  - Parents open to and willing to be present for music therapy session 1x/week

- **Exclusion criteria**
  - Infant not appropriate for music therapy within the 1st 3 weeks of life
  - Both caregivers non-English speaking
  - Infant expires prior to 40 weeks gestational age and/or discharge from hospital
Participants

• Family B
  • Middle Eastern
  • Parents married with hx of infant loss
  • 27 week twins
    • Girl twin A born under 800 grams
  • Both parents present for final interview

• Family C
  • Latino family
  • Parents engaged, first baby
  • Born at 25 weeks and 5 days GA
  • Only mom present for final interview
Results

• All audio recordings were transcribed
  • Coded and compared to identify commonalities or themes
  • Quotes grouped and themes identified
• 2 themes with 3 subthemes each were identified
  • **Making it Through the Journey**
    • Emotional Rollercoaster
    • Ways of Coping
    • Music as an escape
  • **Redefining Role as a Parent**
    • The NICU Parent
    • Moments of Connection
    • Creating Memories
Theme I: Making it Through The Journey

“There's a sense of relief when music [therapy] comes.”

Emotional Rollercoaster
- Stress, guilt, overwhelm, nervousness, sadness, and fear
- Emotions connected to infant's medical status
- Music therapy supported positivity

Ways of Coping
- Inability to rely on typical supports (i.e. family and friends)
- Faith and positivity
- Music therapy supported relaxation and helped overcome fear and anxiety

Music as an Escape
- Escape from the medical environment
- Moment of exclusivity
Theme 2: Redefining Role as a Parent

"Music is considered my skin to skin with her."

The NICU Parent
- Physical separation impacted attainment of parental role
- Uncertainty of how to be involved
- Growing confidence and role in music

Moments of Connection
- Physical interactions (holding hands, changing diaper)
- Music unique space for support, response, and success
- Exclusive connection

Creating Memories
- Memories of NICU to share
- Future memories to create
Discussion

• Music therapy is prevalent throughout the NICU parent experience
• Two important uses of music and music therapy:
  • Music therapy to escape stressors
  • Music to provide moments of closeness and intimacy
• Limitations
  • Small sample size
  • Small research team with potential bias
• Implications for future research
• What does this mean for the nursing staff?
  • Finds ways to reconnect parent and baby after separation
  • Advocate for involvement of your supportive services team
References


McLean. (2016b). Fostering intimacy through musical beginnings: Exploring the application of communicative musicality through the musical experience of parents in the neonatal intensive care unit. Voices: A world forum for music therapy, 16(2). Doi: 10.15845/voices.v16i2.874

References cont.


Questions?

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