

Abstract

Background

Parents of newborn babies hospitalised in a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) undergo a variety of emotions and challenges that can lead to stress, anxiety, depression or even post-traumatic stress disorder (Gooding & Trainor, 2017).

After a premature delivery, parents find themselves in an unfamiliar environment with a baby in serious danger. They witness their infant undergoing painful medical procedures and life-threatening experiences that can lead to a myriad of mood, anxiety and depression disorders if they are not well addressed and mediated. Moreover there is a limited amount of time they can spend with their baby. This complex situation could have an impact in the quality of their interactions with the newborn (Loewy, 2015; Haslbeck, 2012; 2014). Lack of emotional support is a source of stress to a baby and often disrupts the development of a secure attachment with the parents (Shoemark et al., 2018; Haslbeck and Bassler, 2018; Ettenberger and Beltran, 2018). The parents' ability to regulate emotions in such a critical situation will determine how each family will deal with and overcome the adversity.

Music therapy and especially the use of voice has been found to inhibit stress and fear responses and encourage social behaviour (Porges 2017). Providing stable and appropriate responses to the infant's needs is essential for a secure attachment to occur and for the child's optimal neurodevelopment (Shoemark et al., 2018; Ettenberger & Beltrán, 2018; Haslbeck, 2014; Loewy, 2011; Nöcker-Ribaupierre, 2011).

Method

I have chosen to take a phenomenological approach to my research, as I hope to evoke the lived experience of the circumstances arising during the music therapy sessions. I wondered about the different layers of this experience and the significance of each feature that I encountered, hoping to uncover unnoticed events that may be relevant for the ongoing development of the discipline of music therapy.

Results

This research shows that music therapy interventions at NICUs strongly supported parents' resilience and the development of attachment with the newborn. Music therapy sessions were ultimately experienced as very positive and welcome activities, unanimously described as enabling moments of peace, joy, relief and achievement.

Keywords

music therapy, caregivers, neonates, attachment, stress