

SINGING AND LISTENING TO MUSIC WITH INFANTS: AN INTERVIEW STUDY WITH CANADIAN MOTHERS

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Background

For many centuries, parents and caregivers across the world have been singing to their babies. The way parents and caregivers sing to their infants is distinct from other performances and is often called infant-directed-singing or IDS. Lullabies and playsongs are often cited as the two most common forms of infant-directed-singing. The literature suggests infant-directed-singing to be important in the development of attachment between infant-caregiver dyads, and also in the reduction of infant stress levels. Nowadays, listening is also said to be part of infant-mother routines. Despite the growing interest for music in early infancy, little is currently known about the uses of music in the lives of infants and their caregivers in naturalistic settings.

Aims

The aim of this study was to investigate the current status of musical practices of infant-mother dyads, including a full report of singing and listening activities.

Method

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 100 mothers of infants aged between 7 and 9 months in Montreal, Canada. Interviews were conducted in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. Mothers answered questions on their educational and musical background, musical preferences, beliefs regarding the uses of music with infants, singing and passive listening behaviors with their infants.

Results

Most mothers reported singing and listening to music with their infants, although singing was more popular than listening. Occupation, previous musical experiences, and culture emerged as determinant factors in mothers' uses of music with their preverbal infants. Lullabies and playsongs emerged as the favorite styles sung and heard by mothers and their babies.

Conclusion

Contrary to the notion that the overuse of background music, modernization, and changes in lifestyles have reduced maternal singing activities to infants (see Papousek, 1996), this study found singing to be the preferred musical activity of infant-mother dyads. Overall, maternal beliefs and uses of music with infants seemed to be quite stable and stereotyped, as well as dependent upon mothers' previous musical experiences, occupation and cultural background. Early childhood music educators could consider these issues to prepare their lessons more adequately.