

Danijela Korom

American, Dutch, and Spanish mothers' ethnotheories about infant stimulation

Danijela Korom, Rucha Londhe, Marjolijn Blom, Blanca Huitron, Sara Harkness

This study explores the American, Dutch and Spanish mothers' ethnotheories about stimulation and its role in the development of their infants. The data were collected as a part of larger study of the cultural regulation of early development in the three cultures. Mothers (n=20 per site) of 2- and 6-month-olds were interviewed about their infants' daily activities, their conceptions and strategies related to infant stimulation. In addition, participants completed a questionnaire providing information about their infants' social and physical stimulation over one week. Thematic analyses of the interviews focused on the differences and similarities in activities between American, Dutch and Spanish infants, mothers' ideas about stimulation, and strategies used by mothers to regulate their infants' states. Preliminary analyses suggest that all mothers provide a variety of growth-promoting activities in everyday interactions with their infants and use a number of strategies to provide optimal (and culturally specific) level of stimulation, but there are systematic group differences. American mothers tended to emphasize the importance of cognitive and perceptual stimulation in infants' development more often than the Dutch and Spanish mothers. In particular, Dutch and Spanish mothers focused more often on their infants' social stimulation and interactions, while American mothers focused on their infants' play with toys. Preliminary analysis of the environmental stimulation form indicates that American infants have more toys, and different kinds of toys, in their cribs than do the Dutch and Spanish infants.