

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Remaining or Becoming Secure: Parental Sensitive Support Predicts Attachment Continuity From Infancy to Adolescence in a Longitudinal Adoption Study

Beijersbergen, M. D., Juffer, F., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., & van IJzendoorn, M. H. (2012). Remaining or becoming secure: Parental sensitive support predicts attachment continuity from infancy to adolescence in a longitudinal adoption study. *Developmental Psychology*, 48(5), 1277-1282. doi:10.1037/a0027442

SUMMARY: Secure attachment is important for parent-child relationships and children's development. To better understand the continuity of attachment, researchers followed 125 early adopted adolescents from one to 14 years old. Results revealed that both early and later parental sensitive support were important for the continuity of secure attachment.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Mothers of securely attached adolescents showed more sensitive support during a conflict than mothers of insecurely attached adolescents.
- Consistent maternal sensitive support predicted continuity of secure attachment in the first 14 years of children's lives, whereas the increase of maternal sensitive support from low to high levels predicted children's change from insecure attachment in infancy to secure attachment in adolescence.
- Stressful life events and children's temperament did not predict the continuity of attachment in adopted children.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Educate military parents on how to give their children sensitive support and form secure attachment
- Participate in professional trainings to learn more about parenting challenges associated with adoption and how these relate to military families

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop workshops for military parents to foster secure parent-child attachment in military families
- Offer support groups for military adoptive parents so that they can communicate parenting challenges in a safe environment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Raise awareness of the importance of secure attachment on the development of military children and adolescents
- Continue to support programs aimed at promoting parent education in military families

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited through adoption organizations.
- The attachment style and maternal sensitive support were assessed at 12 months and 14 years of age; mothers also rated their children's temperament at 12 months and 14 years of age, and reported stressful life events when the children were seven and 14 years old.
- The assessments were conducted both at home and in the laboratory.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 125 internationally adopted adolescents (mean age = 14.4 years, SD = 0.52, 55% female); they were adopted before the age of six months.
- Most of the adolescents were adopted from Sri Lanka (N = 68), followed by South Korea (N = 38) and Colombia (N = 19).
- The adoptive mothers and fathers were on average 32.7 and 34.9 years old, respectively, at the birth of the children.

LIMITATIONS

- Attachment was only measured when children were one year and 14 years old; the lack of attachment measure at seven years old leaves a gap between infancy and adolescence, and makes it hard to study continuity and change of attachment.
- All the participants were international adoptees, so the results may not be extended to domestic adoptions.
- Other parenting practices and styles that may potentially lead to secure attachment were not examined, which limited the scope of the study.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Study the continuity of attachment with families that adopted domestically
- Examine the effects of both paternal and maternal sensitive support on children's attachment
- Investigate other parenting practices or parenting styles that may contribute to secure attachment

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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