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Why Did Mothers with Unresolved Trauma Fail to Benefit from an Attachment Based Intervention? Correlates of Unresolved Status in a High Risk Sample

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WHY DID MOTHERS WITH UNRESOLVED TRAUMA FAIL TO BENEFIT FROM AN ATTACHMENT BASED INTERVENTION? CORRELATES OF UNRESOLVED STATUS IN A HIGH RISK SAMPLE

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With more than a little assistance from...

- Sandi Bento, Research Coordinator
- Carey Anne DeOliveira (CPRI, London)
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...and others, including countless London area mothers and their babies

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The Western Adolescent Parenting Study
Determinants of Intervention Outcome

• The Risks of Adolescent Parenthood
  ▪ Jaffe (2001) New Zealand study on developmental outcome for children of adolescent mothers

• Study Objectives
  • Identify factors related to intervention success and failure
The Intervention Study - Goals

• Improve the security of the attachment relationship by supporting the mother’s sensitivity
  ▪ Build rapport with mother
  ▪ Affirm parenting strengths while viewing a 5-minute videotape of the mother and infant at play
  ▪ Augment mother’s awareness of infant signals
Maternal Sensitivity Over the First Year (MBQS scores)
Study Design

- Adult Attachment Interview at 6-months
- Maternal sensitivity assessed in home visits at:
  - 6-months - baseline,
  - 12-months - post-intervention
  - 24-months - follow-up
- Strange Situation at 12-months
- Comparison and Intervention Groups
  - 8 home visits between 7 & 12 mos
Maternal Sensitivity by Intervention and Age

- **Maternal Sensitivity**
- **Intervention**
- **Comparison**

Age:
- 6 Months
- 12 Months
- 24 Months

Maternal Sensitivity
- 0.0
- 0.1
- 0.2
- 0.3
- 0.4
- 0.5
- 0.6

Intervention
Comparison
Attachment Classifications
Intervention and Contrast Groups

![Bar chart showing the comparison between intervention and contrast groups for attachment classifications. The chart represents the percentage of individuals in each group categorized as Avoidant, Secure, and Ambivalent.](chart)
Maternal Sensitivity Related to Intervention and Unresolved Adult Attachment Interview Classification

6-months 12-months 24-months
With Success, a New Challenge

• A developmentally based home visiting program that encourages young mothers’ skills supports sensitivity and security
• This interaction-focused intervention appears to be most effective with mothers who are not Unresolved
• A distinct approach seems necessary with mothers with Unresolved states of mind and a history of trauma - but what sort of approach???

Where Next!?
• Pursue a better understanding of the psychological consequences of physical and sexual abuse
Unresolved Attachment and Trauma Symptoms

- Questionnaires:
  - Trauma Symptom Inventory (TSI)
  - Borderline scale of Personality Assessment Inventory (PAI)

Unresolved Mothers reported MORE:

- Dissociative Symptoms
- Identity Confusion
- Relationship Problems*

*Unresolved Mothers reported MORE:
Unresolved Attachment and Trauma Symptoms

The Problem:
- Self-report measures are limited by people’s limited awareness.
- Unresolved mothers: limited awareness.
- -> Assessment validity?
Assessing Relational Processes: Projective Techniques

Transference Themes

Perception of Infant Emotions
Assessing Transference

Karin Gleason, Ph.D., C.Psych.
Assessing Transference

Previous experience with relationships

↓

Cognitive representations of relationships

↓

Expectations for a new relationship

↓

Behaviour in relationship
Core Conflictual Relationship Themes
(Luborsky et al., 1986)

- **Within each narrative:**
  - wishes, needs or intentions
  - response of the other
  - response of the self

- **Overall scores:**
  - identify repeated themes,
  - their congruence,
  - their inflexibility
• Do you see [your parents] very much?
• I see my dad more than I see my mom. And I didn’t get to see them till B was 3 months old. (wish to be close)
• What happened when you told them about the pregnancy?
• They told me not to call them back. (other rejecting)

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• And how was that for you?
• I don’t know, I have (partner’s) family so it wasn’t that bad. (self response: comfortable)
Recurring CCRT Themes: Rejection from Other Adults

**Unresolved**: others were Rejecting: 94%

**Not Unresolved**: others were Rejecting: 58%

Autonomous: others as understanding, helpful
Relationship Themes with Infants: Response of Self

Unresolved: self as Disappointed and Depressed (28%)

Not Unresolved: self as Respected and Helpful (39%)
Congruence: Wishes & Others’ Response

Unresolved: 42% congruence

Not Unresolved: 51% congruence
Inflexibility: Response of Others

Unresolved: 71% inflexibility

Not Unresolved: 56% inflexibility

Overall, wishes of adolescent mothers were rigid and inflexible
Transference: Implications for Intervention

• Unresolved mothers:
  ▪ themes of rejection, disappointment
  ▪ lack of flexibility

• How will this affect:
  ▪ Expectations for mother-infant relationship?
  ▪ Interpretation of infant’s behaviour?
  ▪ Ability to benefit from intervention?
Assessing Mothers’ Perceptions of Infant Emotions

Carey Anne DeOliveira, Ph.D., C.Psych
Mothers’ Perception of Infant Emotions

Experience of emotions in early relationships

- Perception of own and others’ emotions
- Perception of their infant’s emotions
- Response to their infant

Lack of understanding of emotions

Expectations of others’ responses

Projection of own feelings
IFEEL Pictures
(Emde, Osofsky, & Butterfield, 1993)
Perceived Emotions

**Unresolved** Mothers perceived **LESS:** Content

**Unresolved** Mothers perceived **MORE:** Surprise
Shame/Guilt
Passivity
Perceived Emotions: Atypical Responses

- Used by <5% of the reference sample (Emde et al., 1993)

Unresolved Mothers reported MORE: Atypical Responses
Perception of Emotions: Implications for Intervention

• Unresolved mothers:
  ▪ perceive different emotions (more passive, shame, surprise)
  ▪ have atypical perceptions of infant emotions
• How will this affect:
  ▪ behaviour toward infant?
  ▪ awareness of distortions?
Summary: Implications for Intervention

• Assess relational processes using:
  ▪ self-report and projective techniques
  ▪ behavioural observations
• Interventions to address:
  ▪ attributions and expectancies within mothers’ awareness, and
  ▪ automatic/implicit responses within interactions and to emotion cues