

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILDREN'S ATTACHMENT DURING CHILDHOOD

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Abstract. In my article, I choose to speak about children's attachment because I'm a teacher in a primary school from Romania, and often I can see how they are managing this aspect. I've read John Bowlby's studies and Ainsworth's researches which say that, because of the separation between mothers and children, the child attachment can have a troubling development. He proposed the idea that the 12-month-old infant presents attachment behaviours made up of a series of instinctual components revealed in the types of responses he has related to the mother's behaviour against him. The attachment is the child's tendency to seek proximity to caregivers and to feel safe in their presence. Since John Bowlby has developed the attachment theory, two general evaluation instruments have been developed: one consisting in observations and interviews and the other in self-reporting. The first one was used in studies which were investigating the parents - children relationships. And, the second one was mainly used in studies investigating attachment in school age. The aim of this study was to investigate if the attachment's development of the children is related to their growth, but also to the crossing and the graduation of a school year. Results of the current study highlights the need for further research regarding the longitudinal designs, as well as the importance of exploring other factors that are associated with the development of attachment of children and choosing of a specific type of attachment.

Keywords: attachment theory; children's social development

Children with ages between 5-8 years old may present the effects of an insecure attachment to their parents which can develop through various form of anxiety. Therefore, the present study is focused on social anxiety. The connection between these two concepts is explained by the insecure relationship which may occur between the parents and their child which can lead to the development of children's insecurities and troubles as far as the self-confidence and the cognitive abilities are concerned.

I have chosen to study the theories of Bowlby and Ainsworth about the children's attachment and their social development.

Borrowing Freud's notion, namely that human nature's sexuality derives from instinctive components, Bowlby proposed that the 12 months old infant has attachment behaviors made up of a series of instinctive components in the form of responses in order to bind the mother and the infant. In the seminar “Separation

Anxiety” (Bowlby, 1959), built on the observations made by Robertson (1953) and Heinicke (1956), and Harlow and Zimmermann (1958) extracted the innovative work on the maternal deprivation effects in the case of macaques.

Bowlby says that in some cases of separation, anxiety may be excessively low or even absent, giving an erroneous impression of maturity. He attributes the term pseudo-independence to the conditions of the defensive processes. He emphasizes the fact that a well-loved child will be affected by his parents’ separation at first, but later he will be able to develop more self-confidence. Ainsworth’s classifications will rewrite these ideas, and she will talk about avoiding and securitizing them as patterns of mother-child attachment (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978).

Aim of the study

This study propose a closer look on the evolution of primary school children’s attachment styles and how attachment is changing during children’s growth until graduating primary school. Also I want to observe if the parents’ level of anxiety influence children’s attachment style during their development.

Methods

The research was applied to 27 pupils, a mixed group of 11 girls and 16 boys. At the beginning of the research the pupils were between 5-6 years old. Consequently, the same research was applied to the same children a year later.

As research methods, were used the ECR-R – Experiences in Close Relationships Scale – Revised (Brennan 1998, Fraley 2000) for the children and The Spence Child Anxiety for Parents (SCAS-P, Spence, 1999) for the parents.

Results and discussion

At the final point of the study I observed that the particularities of the attachment relationship change as the child grows. The children’s attachment indeed develops as they grow. The results show significant effects in the direction of attachment’s development.

In psychological practice, the study can be a source of understanding the parents’ behavior and their practical methods. The scale’s data shows that the ambivalent attachment was the most correlated with the social anxiety. By measuring the children’s social anxiety only through the eyes of their parents, it was establish the quality of child – parent relationship. Attachment and social anxiety assessments showed that low attachment and higher attachment security were most strongly linked to high social anxiety. The predicted variation of the attachment in social anxiety is highly conditioned by the previous attachment.

In Figure 1 were presented the children’s responses to the ECR-R Scale, both at the beginning and at the end of the current study. The first column contained the result of the first application of the scale and the second column provided the last response of the scale.

Figure 1. *The children's responses to the ECR-R scale*

Question	Never	Almost never	A few times	Sometimes	Almost all the time	Always
1. I'm afraid that my mother will stop loving me.	22,2%	14,8%	14,8%	11,1%	18,5%	11,1%
	75,9%	13,8%	-	-	-	-
2. I don't like to tell my mother how I really feel.	14,8%	-	22,2%	14,8%	14,8%	-
	37,9%	-	13,8%	17,2%	-	-
3. I'm worried that my mother could leave me sometimes.	22,2%	7,4%	18,9%	11,1%	22,2%	7,4%
	89,7%	-	-	-	-	-
4. It's easy to tell my mother what I think and what I feel.	-	18,5%	14,8%	37%	14,8%	18,5%
	-	37,9%	-	35%	20,7%	37,9%
5. I'm worried that my mother could not love me truly.	26,9%	11,5%	11,5%	19,2%	23,1%	-
	88,7%	-	-	-	-	-
6. I feel good when I'm not near mom.	18,5%	37%	22,2%	-	-	11,1%
	75,9%	-	-	-	-	-
7. I'm worried that mom doesn't love me as much as I do love her.	25,9%	29,8%	14,8%	-	22,2%	-
	86,2%	-	-	-	-	-
8. I feel comfortable when I'm near mom.	7,4%	-	14,8%	11,1%	14,8%	44,4%
	-	-	-	-	-	75,9%
9. I wish that mom loves me as much as I love her.	11,1%	11,1%	-	-	-	55,6%
	-	-	-	17,2%	-	69%
10. It's not easy to tell mom a lot of things about me.	18,5%	-	18,5%	44,4%	-	7,4%
	34,5%	20,7%	13,8%	17,2%	-	-
11. I'm worried about the relationship between me and my mother.	18,5%	11,1%	18,5%	22,2%	11,1%	18,5%
	82,8%	-	-	10,3%	-	-
12. I prefer not to be too close to my mom.	44,4%	22,2%	11,1%	-	-	-
	79,2%	-	13,8%	-	-	-
13. When I don't see mom, I'm worried that she doesn't love me.	25,9%	18,5%	11,1%	11,1%	25,9%	-
	86,2%	-	-	-	-	-
14. I don't feel good when my mom is hugging me too much.	25,9%	11,1%	22,2%	25,9%	-	-
	82,1%	-	-	-	-	-
15. When I show my feelings for mom, I'm afraid that she won't feel the same about me.	29,6%	11,1%	11,1%	14,8%	25,9%	-
	93,1%	-	-	-	-	-

16. It's easy for me to be close to mom.	-	-	11,1%	19,6%	11,1%	48,1%
	-	-	-	-	-	75,9%
17. I don't worry that mom could abandon me.	25,9%	29,6%	14,8%	18,5%	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-	86,2%
18. It's not difficult for me to feel close to mom.	11,1%	22,2%	11,1%	11,1%	14,8%	25,9%
	55,2%	-	-	-	-	17,2%
19. The things that mom says and does make me feel insecure.	18,5%	22,2%	29,8%	15,9%	-	-
	82,8%	-	-	-	-	-
20. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my mother.	-	14,8%	-	40,7%	18,5%	18,5%
	-	-	-	10,3%	34,5%	41,4%
21. It helps to turn to my mom in times of need.	-	-	11,1%	14,8%	29,6%	33,3%
	-	-	-	-	10,3%	69%
22. I feel that my mom doesn't want to get so close as I would like.	37%	18,5%	11,1%	11,1%	14,8%	-
	86,2%	-	-	-	-	-
23. I tell my mom almost everything.	-	-	11,1%	33,3%	25,9%	18,5%
	-	-	-	14,8%	24,1%	41,4%
24. Sometimes I think mom changed her feelings for me for no reason.	33,3%	14,8%	7,4%	37%	-	-
	86,2%	-	-	10,3%	-	-
25. I speak honestly and openly with my mother.	-	7,4%	-	29,6%	29,6%	22,2%
	-	-	-	13,8%	24,1%	51,7%
26. I'm afraid that I want to be too close to mom and she doesn't like this.	37%	11,1%	11,1%	22,2%	11,1%	-
	93,1%	-	-	-	-	-
27. I'm nervous when my mother wants to talk about intimate things.	29%	12%	18%	12%	28%	-
	55,2%	-	20,7%	13,8%	-	-
28. I'm afraid that once my mother gets to know me, she won't like who I really am.	23,1%	23,1%	15,4%	23,1%	-	-
	93,1%	-	-	-	-	-
29. It's easy to ask for help from my mother.	-	-	11,5%	32,3%	15,4%	26,9%
	-	-	-	-	10,3%	72,4%
30. I'm worried that my mom could abandon me.	37%	11,1%	11,1%	33,3%	-	-
	94,3%	-	-	-	-	-
31. I'm nervous because my mother doesn't give me enough help and affection.	34,6%	23,1%	-	11,5%	19,2%	-
	75,9%	10,3%	-	-	-	-

32. It's easy to count on my mother's support.	7,7%	-	11,5%	34,6%	11,5%	34,6%
	-	-	-	-	-	79,3%
33. I'm afraid that my mother thinks more about other children than about me.	34,6%	11,5%	15,4%	-	19,2%	11,5%
	82,8%	-	-	-	-	-
34. It's easy to show my mother that I love her.	-	7,7%	15,4%	-	33,8%	30,8%
	-	-	-	10,3%	13,8%	62,1%
35. I think that my mother gives me attention when I make noise.	26,9%	-	15,4%	42,3%	11,5%	-
	75,9%	-	-	-	-	-
36. I feel that my mother really gets me.	-	-	15,4%	34,6%	19,2%	26,9%
	-	-	-	13,8%	17,2%	58,6%

For the parents have been applied the “Spence Children’s Anxiety Scale – the variant for parents”. The results were presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. *The parents’ responses to the Spence Child Anxiety Scale – the variant for parents*

Question	Never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always	Other
1. My child is worried about differnt kinds of things.	17,2%	79,3%	-	-	-
2. My child is afraid of darkness.	48,3%	41,4%	-	-	-
3. When my child has a problem, he says that he feels something strange in the stomach.	65,5%	24,1%	-	-	When we are in the car My child is not complaining.
4. My child complains about being afraid.	31%	58,6%	-	-	-
5. My child would be afraid to stay home alone.	55,2%	31%	-	10,3%	-
6. My child is afraid of a paper test from school.	41,4%	55,2%	-	-	-
7. My child is afraid to go to a public toilet.	79,3%	-	-	-	-
8. My child is afraid to be apart from me/us.	41,4%	51,7%	-	-	-
9. My child is afraid not to be embarrassed in front of the others.	34,5%	58,6%	-	-	-

10. My child is afraid that he won't make it at school.	41,4%	51,7%	-	-	-
11. My child is afraid that something terrible will happen with someone in our family.	62,1%	37,9%	-	-	-
12. My child is complaining that he can't suddenly breath, although there is no reason to feel that.	93,1%	-	-	-	-
13. My child has to check a few times if he does the things properly	51,7%	34,5%	-	-	-
14. My child is afraid when has to sleep alone	48,3%	31%	13,8%	-	-
15. My child is afraid to go to school in the morning because he is nervous or scared	86,2%	13,8%	-	-	-
16. My child is afraid of dogs	44,8%	48,3%	-	-	Only of those bad dogs.
17. My child can't get the bad thoughts out of his mind	34,5%	55,2%	-	-	He doesn't have bad thoughts.
18. When my child has a problem, he complains about his fast pulse.	75,9%	-	-	-	He doesn't have this kind of problems.
19. My child suddenly starts to tremble.	86,2%	-	-	-	-
20. My child is afraid that something bad will happen.	65,5%	31%	-	-	-
21. My child is afraid of doctors.	37,9%	44,8%	17,2%	-	-
22. When my child is having a problem he starts to tremble.	69%	20,7%	-	-	-
23. My child is afraid of heights.	62,1%	17,2%	-	-	True.
24. My child has to think about a special thing to prevent something bad from happening	93,1%	-	-	-	-
25. My child is afraid when he is in a car, bus or train.	82,8%	-	-	-	-

26. My child is worried about what other people think about him	37,9%	41,4%	20,7%	-	-
27. My child is afraid of crowded places.	89,7%	-	-	-	-
28. My child is suddenly afraid for no reason	89,7%	-	-	-	-
29. My child is afraid of insects or spiders	31%	44,8%	20,7%	-	-
30. My child complains that he is suddenly feeling dizzy without a reason	89,7%	-	-	-	-
31. My child is afraid when it's his turn to speak in front of the class	55,2%	34,5%	-	-	-
32. My child is complaining that for no reason his heart starts beating really fast	86,2%	-	-	-	-
33. My child is afraid that suddenly he will feel afraid for no reason	82,1%	-	10,7%	-	-
34. My child is afraid to be in small closed places	72,4%	17,2%	-	-	I don't know.
35. My child feels that he has to repeat some activities like washing hands	51,7%	37,9%	-	-	-
36. My child is disturbed by bad things and bad images that suddenly come to his mind	48,3%	44,8%	-	-	-
37. My child has to do some activities in the right way because he is afraid that something bad will happen	69%	20,7%	-	-	No way.
38. My child will be afraid if he stays far away from home at night	55,2%	34,5%	-	-	-
39. Are there any other things that scares your child?	-	-	-	-	Yes. No. I don't think so. Not to happen something bad with his mother
40. Please, write those things.	-	-	-	-	My child is afraid of being rejected by his

					classroom mates. Blood, zombies, ugly characters. To be sick his family. Bees. To happen something bad with dad or mom.
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Conclusions

The current study highlights the need for further longitudinal research designs in this field, as well as the importance of exploring other factors that are associated with the development of the children's attachment and their precise type of attachment.

Limitations of this study:

- the low number of participants in the study;
- there could be a potential bias of the results;
- the difficulty of gaining access to questionnaires;
- the lack of the possibility to give a psychological diagnosis;
- the limited time for running the study.

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