Predictors of attachment representations in preschoolers:
The importance of father-child attachment

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IAC 2015 NEW YORK CITY
6 - 8 August 2015

OBJECTIVE

To identify children and fathers' predictors for preschoolers' secure attachment representations

METHOD

Participants
- 18 father – child dyads
- 10 girls and 8 boys
- Children age: M= 58.5 months, SD= 6.6)
- Children birth position: 22% firstborn, 28% middle and 50% youngest child
- Fathers age: M= 35.28, SD= 7.9
- Fathers educational level: 16.7% High school, 22.2% technical career, 33.3% incomplete professional career and 27.8% bachelor degree
- Middle socioeconomic status

Measures
- Attachment Story Completion Task – ASCT (Bretherton, Ridgeway & Cassidy, 1990)
  Inter-rater reliability: .80; α = .79

- Attachment Q Set 3.0 – AQS (Waters, 1995)
  Inter-rater reliability: .81

- Maternal Behavior for Preschoolers Q Sort – MBPQS (Posada, Kaloustain, Richmond & Moreno, 2007)
  Inter-rater reliability: .90

- Adult Attachment Questionnaire "Modeles Individueles de Rélations" - CaMir (Pierrehumbert et al., 1996)

Procedures
- One observation of one hour: Free father-child interaction at home, to asses father sensitivity and child secure base behavior

- Children completed a set of attachment related stories in their homes. Narratives were videotaped and codified with the procedure proposed in Waters, Rodrigues & Ridgway (1998).

- Fathers completed the adult attachment questionnaire in their homes using a Q-sort methodology.

Data analysis

In order to find predictors of attachment representations, we selected variables theoretically related to them according to the literature:
- Children variables: age, sex and attachment security
- Fathers' variables: educational level, sensitivity and paternal attachment security

Regression assumptions were verified.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for children attachment representations and security, father sensitivity and attachment representations

	M	SD	Min	Max
Child attachment representations	1.77	.60	1.00	2.67
The spilled juice story	1.83	.82	1.00	3.00
The hurt knee story	1.67	.45	1.00	2.25
The monster in the bedroom story	1.80	.82	1.00	3.00
Child attachment security	.27	.29	-.40	.60
Father's sensitivity	.50	.23	.04	.79
Father's attachment representations	.48	.22	.03	.83

1. Model to explain the attachment representations from child's variables

a) It was tested with sex, age and child security:

	β	R^2	$F_{(1, 17)}$	p
Child attachment security	.77	.56	23.26	<.001

→ Only attachment security explained 56% of variance of the attachment representations.

b) Birth position of children was introduced in an exploratory way:

	β	p	R^2	$F_{(1, 17)}$	p
Child attachment security	.644	.001	.66	17.63	<.001
Birth position	.354	.033			

→ Attachment security and birth position explained 66% of attachment representations.

2. Model to explain the attachment representations from fathers' variables
It was tested with educational level, sensitivity and attachment representations:

	β	R^2	$F_{(1, 17)}$	p
Father's sensitivity	.433	.14	3.69	.07

→ No father's variables contribute to explain the children representations of attachment. Only sensitivity showed marginal significance.

3. Model to explain the attachment representations from child and father variables

It was tested with child attachment security, birth position and father's sensitivity:

	β	p	R^2	$F_{(1, 17)}$	p
Child attachment security	.728	.001	.66	11.99	<.001
Birth position	.117	.025			
Father's sensitivity	-.176	.36			

→The sensitivity does not contribute to the model.

CONCLUSIONS

- Model 1 best explains child attachment representations: Two variables explained 66% of them. In addition, these two variables refer only to the child variables and not the father's (this does not exclude that there are other variables that also can influence, like mother variables).
- Preschoolers' security in father-child attachment relationship is relevant to their attachment representations (Bretherton, 2010).
- Beyond children characteristics like age and sex, their emotional ties seems to be core aspect for developing secure representations (Grossmann et al, 2002).
- Birth position finding suggest that the child's experience derived from its position within the family structure will influence the security of its representations → Different perspectives in the way a child perceive and internalize its attachment experience (Belsky, 1999; Howes, 1999).
- Considering Peruvian families, children attachment relations network should be considered to explore its influence on children socioemotional development (Howes & Spieker, 2008).