Seda Ata
Berrin Akman

Adult Attachment Styles Of Mothers In Preschool

Abstract

The aim of this paper was to review previous research/literature that focused specifically on attachment styles of mothers in the effectiveness of preschool. In early childhood, children make transitions into new environments where they meet new and unfamiliar challenges in. So, they need to strong support for have a smooth transition. Especially as facilitator and encouraging mothering has come to important through this transition. Besides this, the power of home and school cooperation plays crucial role in success of preschool education. Thus, mothers are supposed to make a contribution create a supportive network. The most influential theories about developmental and interpersonal relationships is attachment theory. Bowlby (1988, p.5) asserts that "Attachment theory is a way of conceptualizing the propensity of human beings to make strong affectional bonds to particular others and of explaining the many forms of emotional distress and personality disturbance, including anxiety, anger, depression, and emotional detachment, to which unwilling separation and loss give rise".

Many researches have shown that attachment influences processes related to psychosocial functioning, life satisfaction, and well-being (e.g., Cassidy & Shaver, 2008). Secure mothers, are able to be consistent, reliable, and available to their infants and children, effectively attuning to and regulating both negative and positive states of arousal. Mothers with a preoccupied state of mind relative to attachment are inconsistent and unreliable, sometimes overattuning and hyperactivating in response to their infants' negative arousal. Mothers with a dismissing state of mind exhibit a restricted range of emotional expressiveness and a tendency to withdraw from interactions involving negative affect. Preoccupied mothers are those whose own internal working models do not support organized caregiving. In this context this study emphasizes on studies that have examined specific components (e.g., parent involvement in preschool and communication) on mothers role in preschool education. We also provide general conclusions and suggestions for future research.

Keywords: *attachment styles, mothers, preschool*

1. Introduction

Recently, attachment theory, as one of the theories aiming the comprehension of close relationships in childhood and adulthood, has been a guide for theoretic and empirical studies in development psychology, human development and also in education. John Bowlby (1982) has put the mother-child bond as the core of the attachment theory. He has emphasized the importance of a mother-child relationship quality in growing of the child as a healthy individual both in physical and psychological aspects. John Bowlby has further developed the psychoanalytic object relationship theory in accordance with ethology and evolution theories (Ainsworth and Bowlby, 1991).

The conceptual framework of the attachment theory has the three basic features: proximity seeking, safe haven and secure base (Bowlby, 1982). Infant desires to be close to the caregiver when he/she senses a threat or is actually under a threat and danger. Having this proximity provides assurance and comfort for the infant. The infant, who become aware of the convenience of the attachment figure, can develop behaviors like exploring the environment. Because the infant is aware of the secure base to which he can return for comfort and assurance whenever he desires or needs. This study "Mother" was used as a term is the one who mostly takes care for the infant, the attachment figure is usually the mother. It should be noted that attachment does not always need to occur with biological parents; it can occur with multiple caregivers who offer security to the child .

2. The Foundation and Outcomes of Mother-Child Relationships

Attachment theory is initially developed to explain the complex nature of infant-mother relationships. Attachment styles are based on the relationship between mother and child, and they include the behavior of mother to child and child's response to mother. According to the attachment theory, infant needs the devotion and care of the attachment figure to maintain a healthy development (Bretherton, 1992).

One of the significant contributions to the attachment theory is 'Strange Situation', conducted by Ainsworth and her colleagues (1978), which she revealed the individual differences in attachment behavior by observing Ugandan infants and their mothers. The Strange Situation Test includes seven sections consisting of three minutes recording each. To what extent an infant explores the environment when he is alone, or with his mother or with a stranger and what kind of responses he gives when his/her mother returns are recorded. They concluded three types of behavior patterns: secure, insecure/ambivalent, or insecure/avoidance.

———————————————————————————

Correspondence Author: Seda Ata, Hacettepe University Faculty of Education,Department of Early Childhood Education, 85.ataseda@gmail.com
*** Berrin Akman, Hacettepe University Faculty of Education,Department of Early Childhood Education,*

It was observed that securely attached infants explored the environment by using their mothers as a secure base when they are together with their mothers and they showed the signs of stress when they were not with their mothers. This reaction to mothers' leaving lasted until mothers' return. When mothers were back, infants were back to exploring the environment after the contact with their mothers. Insecure/ambivalently attached infants had an intense stress when they were not with their mothers. When they came back together with their mother, they reacted to the separateness and resisted to the comfort provided by mother's return. They explored little in the absence of their mother. Insecure/ avoidantly attached infants showed little stress when they were not with their mothers. They avoid the behavior of proximity seeking and they did not return to exploration when they came together with their mothers (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978).

Main and Solomon (1986) added the "disorganized" group into the classification established by Ainsworth et al. According to Atkinson (1996) infants in this group mostly show ambivalent behaviors, get close to the mother without looking at her, avoid mother semiconsciously or scream in the first contact. Some of them appeared to be disinterested and showed no sign of a sensation. Disorganized type is observed in neglected infants or infants whose parents or caregivers are emotionally unreachable. With their attachment style, this kind of children faces irreversible paradoxes (Hovve and others, 1999; as cited in Shemmings, 2004: 301).

Relationships experienced in early period do not only affect the attachment but also affect all development aspects of the child (Schore & Schore, 2008). Secure children are able to carry the positive social expectations and skills to new relationships and hence build positive social interactions and relationships. On the other hand, insecurely attached children have less positive expectations and skills that will damage their social success in the future (Yunger, Corby & Perry, 2005: 90-91).

When mother is sensitive and supportive, child develops an intrinsic model of attachment figure in accordance with care-worthy self -model. These kinds of attachments are defined as secure. Otherwise, child feels worthless when maternal reaction is absent or temporary. Such attachment models are defined as insecure (Applegate & Shapiro,2005).

George and Solomon (2008), in their longitudinal research, revealed the intergenerational attachment transfer, as a relationship between attachment styles of family and attachment styles of child. Insecurely attached parents always have trouble with having a sensitive and supportive approach (Lieberman, 2004). Therefore, their child will not have a sensitive care and so he/she will have an emotionally fragile nature in organizing his/her emotions and resisting against stress (Hughes, 2007). Reactions of mother to pay attention to child's behavior or feelings (considering and understanding) are very important as such reactions form the reaction of mother to her baby (Slade, Grienenberger, Berbach, Levy, &Locker, 2005).

Collins and her colleagues (2006) revealed that some personality traits ease the caregiving behaviors and some constitute an obstacle for caregiving behaviors. In

addition, four personal and interpersonal traits have been presented for an ideal parentage: 1. lack of social skills causes misinterpretation of communication requests; 2. inadequacy of psychological sources is an obstacle for giving an effective and planned response to persons seeking help; 3. lack of motivation to help causes reluctance for taking responsibility to make a contribution for the good of someone; 4. reacting selfishly against help requests.

Although secured attachment does not directly determine the care giving behaviors, it provides a psychological infrastructure for motivation to help and for empathy. Securely attached mothers can exhibit such ideal caregiving behaviors easily as they have experienced this ideal caregiving model in their childhood (Collins & Feeney, 2000).

Avoidantly attached individuals tend to avoid from the needs of their children, as they feel uncomfortable with proximity and expressing feelings (Collins et al., 2004; Schachner et al., 2005). Avoidantly attached mothers have a lower motherhood sensitivity (Edelstein et al., 2004; Rholes et al., 1995). The study conducted by Selçuk et al. (2010) is the first study examining the relationship between romantic attachment types and motherhood behaviors. They observed the caregiving (motherhood) behaviors of mothers in home environment. Just like avoidantly attached individuals, ambivalently attached individuals are not sensitive to the signals of the children (cited in Selçuk et al, 2010).

In addition, ambivalently attached individuals have more anxiety about having their attachment needs met than meeting the needs of their partners. They might prioritize their own needs against the needs of their children. Tendency of such mothers to maintain excessive proximity may negatively affect being a secure base for their children to explore the environment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

As a result, generally, sensitivity and responsiveness are necessary to achieving the caregiving system' fulfill an objective (meeting the careseeker's needs). Insensitive caregivers are likely to ignore or misinterpret a careseeker's signals and avoid the caregiving role or are not unable to concentrate on careseeker's needs. Insensitivity and unresponsiveness can cause a careseeker to feel misunderstood and disrespected which causes distress rather providing a secure base (Collins, Ford, Guichard, & Allard, 2006).

3. The Role of the Mothers in Preschool

Parenting has an important role for children development particularly in the first few years of a child's life (Barlow, Smailagic, Ferriter, Bennett, & Jones, 2010).

Parent-child interactions which are characterized as warm, structured, and emotionally responsive are related to positive cognitive and behavioral gains in children (Connell & Prinz, 2002). Mother– child attachment relationships are broadly implicative for children's social and personality development across the life span (Bowlby,1988). Children who have developed a secure relationship with their par-

ents may depend on their internal working model of the attachment relationship to reframe a stressful situation and regulate their emotions (Cassidy, 1994).

Insecure children had more dependent relationships with preschool teachers and less positive relationships with elementary school teachers than did secure children (Sroufe,Fox and Pancake ,1983 and Sroufe ,1989).

Significant relations between infant attachment and later popularity, behavior problems, and social competence were found for 6-year-old boys. In addition, they were less liked by teachers than secure boys of the same age (Cohn, 1990). Insecure, infants, were found, later on, to be more negative and dependent in relation to teachers, and less likely to turn to teachers for help than were secure infants (Vondra, Hommerding, & Shaw, 1999).

 Parents, the most influential and significant people for children, provide the early learning experiences that promote life skills, abilities, and attitudes that are the foundation to school success. (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Parental involvement is a significant factor that influences student achievement and the educational process for a child (Flynn, 2007). Participating in parent involvement activities can have positive impacts on reinforcing the home learning environment and improving the parent–child relationship (Lamb-Parker, Boak, Griffin, Ripple, & Peay, 1999).

Supporting and training of families during the pre-school education period and provision of their contributions to education is a systematic approach to improve the experiences of children with enhanced communication between their homes and educational institutions and its sustainability, and enriching of programs with the participation and contribution of parents.

Communication is a key component for parent-teacher relationship. Confidence and comfort between the family and school forms a basis for this communication. Parent and teacher learn each other's purposes and expectations from the child. In this way, they can constitute a supportive source for each other. As the parent knows what their child was thought in the school, they can maintain this in home environment and teacher can reflect this to education environment by increasing his/her knowledge on child's attention, needs and opportunities (in existing conditions) (Gelfer, 1991; Maxwell & Eller, 1994).

The support to be given to the parent and to be taken from the parent should have a planned and flexible structure in this period. The extent of this flexibility should be very sensitive to the individual differences of mothers. To support the development of the child, working with mothers who accept support on their behaviors and ready for substantial stimulus they can provide for their children, presents an ideal environment for the progress of the program.

4. Conclusion

Every child becomes emotionally attached to his/her primary caregivers regardless of the quality of bond between caregiver and the child (Cassidy , 2008). Here, we desire mothers to have warm and sensitive behaviors for the benefit of the child. This is vital for the relationship between mother and the child as well as for the child to benefit from this parentage at highest level during his/her life.

Child-family cooperation supports the child for benefitting from pre-school period. Otherwise, the education environment can be challenging for both mother and the child (Shankoff& Philips, 2000).

Ideally before starting preschool education some intervention programs may be used to help insecure mothers prevent the transmission of their own insecurity to their children. Video-feedback Intervention to promote Positive Parenting - Sensitive Discipline (VIPP-SD) and Attachment-based Play (Theraplay) may be applied for these mothers.

Pre-school programs should support mother on both her own attitude and her attitude against child. In this context, such intervention programs to enhance the mother-child relationship should be supported to be able to get the desired results from pre-school education.

In addition, to build and maintain an effective family involvement, the impact of the relationship between the romantic attachments of mothers and mother-child communication based parenting styles on the child should be researched by observations in home environment

References

Ainsworth, M., S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, 5. (1978). Patterns of attach-ment: A psychological study of the Strange Situation. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Ainsworth, M. D. S., & Bowlby, J. (1991), An ethological approach to personality development. .American Psychologist, 46, 331-341.

Applegate, J.S., & Shapiro, J.R. (2005). Neurobiology for Clinical Social Work: the-ory, and practice. New York: WW Norton.

Bennett, C., & Jones, H. (2010). Group-based parent-training programmes for

improving emotional and behavioural adjustment in children from birth to three years old (Review). Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews(3)

Bowlby, J. (1982). Attachment and loss: Vol. 1: Attachment (2nd ed.). New York: Basic Books.

Bowlby, J. (1988). A secure base: Parent–child attachment and healthy human development.New York: Basic Books.

Bretherton, I. (1992). The origins of attachment theory: John Bowlby and Mary

Ainsworth. Developmental Psychology, 28, 759-775

Cassidy, J. (1994). Emotion regulation: Influences of attachment relationships. In N. Fox (Ed.), The development of emotion regulation: biological and behavioral con-siderations (pp. 229-249). Monographs of the Society for Research on Child Devel-opment Monograph, 59 (Serial Nº. 240).

 Cassidy, J., & Shaver, P. (Eds.). (2008). Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Cohn, D. (1990) Child-mother attachment of six-year-olds and social competence at school, Child Development, 61, 152–162.

Collins, N. L., & Feeney, B. C. (2000). A safe haven: Support-seeking and

caregiving processes in intimate relationships. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1053-1073.

Collins, N. L., Ford, M. B., Guichard, A. C., & Allard, L. M. (2006). Working models of attachment and attribution process in intimate relationships. Personality and So-cial Psychology Bulletin, 32, 201–219.

Connell, C. M., & Prinz, R. J. (2002). The impact of childcare and parent–child interactions on school readiness and social skills development for low-income Af-

rican

American children. Journal of School Psychology, 40(2), 177–193.

Pelletier, J. & Brent J. (2002). Parent participation in children's school readiness:

The effects of parental self-efficacy, cultural diversity and teacher strategies. International Journal of Early Childhood 34(1)

Maxwell, K.L. & Eller, S.K. (1994). Childrenís transition to kindergarten. Young Children, 49(6), 56-63.

Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2007). Attachment in adulthood: Structure, dynamics,and change. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Gelfer, J.I. (1991). Teacher-parent partnerships: Enhancing communications.

Childhood Education, Spring, 164-168.

George, C., & Solomon, J. (2008). The caregiving behavioral system: A behavioral system

approach to parenting. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), Handbook of attachment:

Theory, research, and clinical applications (2nd ed., pp. 833-856). New York, NY: Guilford Pres

Hughes, D. A. (2007). Attachment-focused family therapy. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

Lamb-Parker, F., Boak, A., Griffin, K., Ripple, C., & Peay, L. (1999). Parent-

child relationship, home learning environment, and school readiness. School Psychology Review, 28(3), 413-425.

Lieberman, A. F. (2004) Traumatic stress and quality of attachment: reality

and internalization in disorders of infant mental health. Infant Mental Health Journal, 25, 336-351.

Flynn, G. (2007). Increasing parental involvement in our schools: The need to

overcome obstacles, promote critical behaviors, and provide teacher training. Journal of College Teaching & Learning, 4(2), 23-30.

Selcuk, E., Günaydin, G., Sümer, N., Harma, M., Salman, S., Hazan, C., Dogruyol, B.,

& Ozturk, A. (2010). Self-reported romantic attachment style predicts everyday maternal caregiving behavior at home. Journal of Research in Personality, 44, 544-549. Shonkoff, J., Phillips, D. (Eds.). (2000). From neurons to neighborhoods:

The science of early childhood development. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Schore, J. R., & Schore, A. N. (2008). Modern attachment theory: The central role of affect regulation in development and treatment. Clinical Social Work Journal, 36(1), 9-20.

Shemmings, D. (2004). Researching relationships from an attachment perspective: The use

Of behavioural, interview self-report and projective methods. Journal of Social Work Practice,18(3), 299–314

Slade, A. , Grienenberger, J., Bernbach, E., Levy, D., & Locker, A. (2005) Maternal Reflective Functioning and Attachment: Considering the Transmission Gap. Attachment and Human Development, 7, 283 292.

Sroufe, L.A., Fox, N.E., & Pancake, V.R. (1983). Attachment and dependency

in developmental perspective. Child Development, 54. 1615-1627.

Sroufe, L. A. (1989). Relationships, self, and individual adaptation. In A. J. Sameroff & R.

N. Emde (Eds.), Relationship disturbances in early childhood: A developmental approach (pp. 70-94). New York: Basic Books.

Vondra, J. I., Dowell Hommerding, K., & Shaw, D.D. (1999). Stability and change in infant attachment in a low-income sample. Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, 64 (3, Serial No. 258).

Yunger, J. L., Corby, B. C., & Perry, D. G. (2005). Dimensions of attachment in middle childhood. In K. A. Kerns &R. A. Richardson (Eds.), Attachment in middle childhood . New York: Guilford.