

ATTACHMENT AND ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR



SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY

DOCTORATE IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

MAJOR RESEARCH PROJECT

Title: The Relationship between Maternal Sensitivity in Infancy, and Actual and Feared Separation in Childhood, on the Development of Adolescent Antisocial Behaviour

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Statement of academic probity and professional practice:

“I certify that all material in this assignment which is not my own work has been identified and properly attributed. I have conducted the work in line with the BPS DCP Professional Practice Guidelines.”

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Abstract

Background: Research exploring the developmental of adolescent antisocial behaviour suggests that a secure attachment style is a protective factor against problem behaviour (Bowlby, 1969). It is theorised that disruptions in the attachment relationship can increase the likelihood of adjustment difficulties in adolescence, including antisocial behaviour (MacDonald, 1985). Such relationships have been inferred by cross-sectional research studies, but have yet to be tested in a longitudinal sample.

Aims: This research is a secondary data analysis, using data from the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children cohort study, to explore the relationship between attachment and adolescent antisocial behaviour at age 15.5 years. Attachment was measured using three component measures; maternal sensitivity in infancy (sample 1), separations from main caregiver in early childhood, age 3-5 years (sample 2) and the presence of separation anxiety in middle childhood, age 81 months, 6.75 years (sample 3).

Results: Logistic regression analyses were used to explore the relationships. Using available data, in sample 1 (n=456 complete cases) no evidence was found to support an association between non-positive maternal sensitivity in infancy and an increased incidence of adolescent antisocial behaviour (OR=0.79 [CI=0.42-1.48], p=0.46). In sample two (n=3,961), the number of separations in infancy were not found to significantly increase the risk of adolescent antisocial behaviour (OR=1.26 [CI=0.94-1.71], p=0.17). Separation anxiety in middle childhood was not found to have an effect on adolescent antisocial behaviour (OR=1.01 [CI=0.80-1.26], p=0.96).

Conclusions: The findings suggest that although components of attachment, as measured in this study, were hypothesised to be associated with an increased risk of adolescent antisocial behaviour, this was not statistically supported in this study. In this study effects may be limited due to attrition, leading to the loss of antisocial adolescents from the study, creating a bias in the sample studied.

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Keywords: Adolescent antisocial behaviour, Maternal sensitivity; Separation from caregiver; Separation Anxiety; ALSPAC; Longitudinal

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