

## ATTACHMENTS IN DEVELOPMENT

### 1. What is meant by the terms ‘Secure attachments’ and ‘Insecure attachments’? (6marks)

The term ‘secure attachments’ is where the infant stays close to the caregiver and is distressed by their departure but easily comforted on return.

Here, a stranger could give limited comfort to the infant. Approximately 70% of all infants are securely attached to their caregiver.

The term ‘insecure attachments’ is subdivided into two types of attachments: the ‘insecure-avoidant’ and the ‘insecure-resistant’.

The insecure-avoidant infants are indifferent to their caregiver – they are unconcerned if the caregiver is present or absent.

They show signs of distress when left alone but could be comforted by either a caregiver or stranger. Here, the percentage of infants that are the insecure avoidant is 20%.

The other type, the insecure resistant is where the infant is ambivalent (stressed, showing conflicting attitudes/ feelings) to the caregiver – both being close and resistant at times.

Also, the infants here are anxious of the environment/ surroundings around them and resistant to strangers. Approximately 10% of infants have this type of attachment with their caregiver.

### 2. Outline one explanation of attachment (6marks)

Bowlby’s explanation of attachment represents the most comprehensive theory of human attachment formation. Bowlby, 1969/1973, argued that because new-born human infants are entirely helpless, they are genetically programmed to behave towards their mothers in ways that ensure their survival.

Bowlby argued that the mother also inherits a genetic blueprint, which programmes her to respond to the baby. There is a critical period during which the synchrony (coincidence in time) of the action between the mother and infant produces an attachment.

In Bowlby’s view, mothering is useless for all children if delayed until after 2-3 years, and for most children if delayed until after 12 months.

Bowlby believed that infants display a strong innate tendency to become attached to one particular adult female (not necessarily the natural mother), a tendency he called monotropy. This attachment to the mother figure is qualitatively different (different in kind) from any later attachments. Bowlby stated, 1951:

‘mother love in infancy is as important for mental health as are vitamins and proteins for physical health’.

### 3. Give two criticisms of the explanation of attachment outlined in part (2). (6marks)

Bowlby’s views on monotropy have been criticised. For example, infants and young children display a whole range of attachment behaviours (sucking, cuddling, looking, smiling, and crying) towards a variety of attachment figures other than the mother (i.e. brother, sister), that is, the mother is not special in the way the infant shows its attachment to her, Rutter, 1981.

Another piece of criticism is that although Bowlby did not deny that children form multiple attachments, he saw attachment to the mother as being unique: it is the first to develop and is

the strongest of all. However, Schaffer and Emerson's 1964 study showed that multiple attachments seem to be the rule rather than the exception. They concluded that,

- At 7 months, 29% of infants had already formed several attachments simultaneously,
- At 10 months, 59% had developed more than one attachment,
- By 18 months, 87% had done so.

4. "One problem with any theory of attachment is that it suggests that all children develop in similar ways all over the world".

To what extent do cross-cultural variations affect the development of attachment? (12marks)

Cross-cultural variations affect the development of attachments in a large extent. Different cultures have different social norms and accepted ways of doing things. Cross-culturing variations occur in many aspects of behaviour including child rearing. This difference may result in differences in attachments.

One study surveyed the results of the 'Strange Situation' in many countries. Whilst all countries had secure attachments coming out top, there were marked differences between the countries. This study was carried out by van Ijzendoorn and Kroonenberg, 1988.

Infants raised in Japanese homes and in Israeli kibbutzim show high levels of insecure-resistant attachment. These being close environments with the primary caregiver always present and few strangers around could explain this.

German infants appear to be particularly insecure-avoidant in their attachments, although their parents were attentive to their children and sensitive to their needs. However, the parents considered some of the 'secure' behaviour to be too 'clingy' and discouraged it.

These findings suggest that the American criteria used in the 'Strange Situation' are not appropriate for other cultures: It would be wrong to suggest that the cultures with high levels of insecure attachments were raising children wrongly.

This shows that cross-cultural variations exist and do affect the development of attachment.

Vaughn et al, 1980, showed that attachment type may change depending on variations in the family's circumstances. Children of single parents living in poverty countries were studied at 12 and 18 months. Significantly, 38% were classified differently on the two occasions, reflecting changes in the families' circumstances, particularly changes in accommodation and the mothers' degree of stress. This suggests that attachment types are not necessarily permanent characteristics.

This also shows that cross-cultural variations exist in affecting the development of attachment.

However, a study carried out by Tronic et al, 1992, shows that cross-culture variations do not affect the development of attachment.

This study recorded observations of an African tribe in Zaire, the Efe, who lived in extended family groups. The infants were looked after and even breast-fed by different women, but usually they slept with their own mother at night. Despite contact with many different caregivers, the infants still, by the age of 6 months, did show one primary attachment.

This not only shows that cross-culture variations do not affect the development of attachment, but also supports Bowlby's concept of monotropy, as explained earlier.