

Discuss and Evaluate Research into the Importance of Early Childhood Attachment

John Bowlby (1907-90), who was one of the leading psychologists in childcare believes, when a baby is born it is important for it to form a close bond to someone to ensure its survival. The need for warmth safety and food are the first things any living being needs. Babies have an inbuilt ability to promote care from the people around them; according to Bowlby they do this by smiling, crying, gazing, grasping, clinging and babbling. He also believed that this is a two-way relationship, as the mother also has a need to feel close to her child.

John Bowlby did a lot of work with children. He felt that it was important for the newborn baby to form an attachment to their mother or the main caregiver. If an attachment was not made he believed that this would lead to adverse effects in later life; the child could have problems developing educationally and socially, and so would have problems throughout its life in making friends and forming intimate relationships.

Mary Ainsworth was another psychologist who believed it was important for a baby to make an attachment to its main caregiver. She defined attachment as 'an affectional tie or bond that an individual...forms between him self and another individual'.
(Ainsworth)

In the mid-1970's Marshall Klaus and John Kennel carried out an experiment with a group of new mothers. They wanted to see if the amount of time that a mother and baby spent together immediately after the birth had any bearing on the child's attachment later in life. They studied twenty-eight mothers who were about to give birth. They divided the mothers into two groups; the first group would follow the normal hospital routine; they saw their babies for a few minutes after the birth and then did not see the babies until six to twelve hours later, after they had been

cleaned up and had a sleep. The second group would have contact with their babies for an additional sixteen hours, over the usual time. A month later Klaus and Kennel went to see all the new mothers and filmed them when they were feeding and changing their babies. After observation they felt that the mothers who had had extended contact with their babies, while convalescing in hospital, seemed to have an emotionally closer bond with their child. Klaus and Kennel observed that these mothers cuddled the babies more, held them closer when feeding and had better eye contact. They visited both groups of mothers again eleven months later, and found there was still a closer bond within the extended contact group; they also observed that these babies were physically bigger and stronger. Klaus and Kennel visited five of the family groups from the two original groups two years later. They found the differences were still there and that the mothers from the extended contact group spoke more to their children and the children seemed to respond better. This experiment has been replicated by other psychologists, but they have not all produced the same findings and so the debate still goes on. However, mothers do now spend more time with their new born babies in hospital.

In 1964, Rudi Schaffer and Peggy Emerson carried out a study of sixty Glasgow children, aged between birth and eighteen months. They wanted to find out if a child could attach to more than one carer. The parents were asked questions about the child's social relationships; who do they smile most at? who do they seem to want to be with when they are happy? And who when they are sad? It seemed that the children went through distinct stages. The first stage was up to about six weeks. In this stage the baby did not mind who looked after him. Over the next twenty-four weeks the baby became more and more sociable and responded well to strangers. But by seven months the child was showing signs that it liked to be with a main carer. The child was becoming wary of strangers. Schaffer and Emerson felt that by this time they were forming their first attachments. Over the following months the child would slowly start to trust other people again. Schaffer and Emerson felt that the child would eventually prefer different carers to meet its different needs, for instance it might want to be with its mother when it needed to be comforted, but its father when it wanted to play rough and tumble. The findings of the Glasgow report did not agree with Bowlby's claims that a child could only attach to one main carer. Schaffer

and Emerson's study showed that the child could attach to several people, quite often not the mother at all; some of the children preferred the company of an older sibling. By eighteen months thirty-six of the babies from Glasgow had formed an attachment to two people and twenty-five of them had formed an attachment with up to five caregivers. This seems to show that babies can form an attachment to several people at the same time. This study does not say however what the children were like in later life, i.e. if they developed well educationally or socially.

Bowlby believed that the reason a child would develop anti-social behaviour may be related to the attachment it had made with its main carer. He did a study on forty-four patients at the north London clinic where he worked. All of the patients were emotionally disturbed and had been thieves. He noted that seventeen of them had been separated from their mothers for six months or more before they reached five years of age; this he felt was the reason for their anti-social behaviour. He also did a study on forty-four disturbed children in London; these children were not known to be thieves. Bowlby found that only two of the second group of children had been separated from their mothers. From this study Bowlby concluded that maternal deprivation contributes to delinquency. Bowlby seems to have overlooked several factors which may have had an effect on the child's life. For instance, if the child was never attached to its mother it may not have been upset when she left it for six months. If the mother was removed because she was unfit it might not be the separation, which had caused the child to be a delinquent. He does not mention if the children were brought up in a specific area, which may have had bad influences on them. Many children are separated from their mother, but not all become delinquents; as Bowlby only studied thieves he could not say if other children who had suffered the loss of their mothers would become delinquents.

Bowlby's findings, are disputed by the findings of Michael Rutter, who did a study on a group of nine to twelve year olds who lived on the Isle of Man, and a group of children from London. Rutter was trying to find out what was the cause of anti-social behaviour. He was looking to see if the separation of a child from its parents had any influence. Rutter could not find a connection, however he did find a connection between how much stress a child has in early childhood and its behaviour. Rutter

found that if a child came from a poor home where the parents fight all the time, the child is more likely to get in trouble with the police and become a delinquent in later life.

Evidence shows that poor attachment can have a detrimental effect on children, but it seems the effects of poor attachment it seems can be improved, if attachment can be promoted at a later stage in the child's life. This is shown in the study carried out by Jarmila Koluchova in 1972. Koluchova reported on the case of identical twins from Czechoslovakia who had suffered the most severe deprivation. The mother of the boys had died and the father could not look after them. He put them in a children's home until he remarried when they were eighteen months old, the boys returned to live with their father and his new wife. The father had to work away from home quite a lot and so the boys were left to be looked after by their stepmother. Although she had four children of her own, she had no interest in the welfare of the twins; she was an extremely cruel woman who would beat the children and lock them in their room or in the cellar for long periods of time, they were also very poorly fed. The twins lived like this until they were discovered when they were five and a half years old; they were severely physically and mentally retarded. They were covered in scars, had rickets and so could not stand straight, walk or run; their coordination was also very poor. They had not been taught to speak, were afraid of strangers and also scared of the dark. When tested they were found to have an IQ of about forty and their stage of development was that of a three year old. The boys spent a short time in hospital and then in a special school for mentally disadvantaged children. They were later fostered by a very experienced, kind and loving woman and who lived with her sister. The atmosphere at this new home was warm and friendly. By the time the children reached eleven years old their speech was normal for their age, they could read and write and play the piano. By the age of fifteen their IQ was average for their age and their emotional state had improved greatly. The twins were last reported on in 1991, it was found that they had made a full recovery from their early life experiences. This study shows that it is possible to overcome deprivation if the right care is offered in later life. However the report does not say whether the twin boys from Czechoslovakia were ever in trouble with the police at any time after they had reached their teens. By the time Koluchova made his final report in 1991 the twins

would have been thirty-one years old. The report does not mention if they had formed good relationships. According to the studies carried out by Bowlby, the deprivation which the twins had suffered would mean that they were unable to form close relationships in their adult life .

These studies show that it is important for a child to form an attachment to someone for the child to grow into a stable adult, but it is also important that the home in which the child lives is stable and happy. Several psychologists have worked in the field of child development and investigated the need for early attachment. Not all have come to the same conclusion; there are still lots of questions unanswered. Many of the early findings in the field of child development have now been disputed. The work done by Bowlby and many other psychologists have brought about important changes in the way we view childcare, for instance mothers or carers are now allowed to stay with their a sick child in hospitals. Families with difficulties are given support in their own home wherever possible. Bowlby claimed that 'a bad home is better than the best institution'; If a child must be removed from its home, it is placed with a foster family rather than in a children's homes if at all possible.