

**Mothers with Unresolved Trauma:
Brain Responses to Infant Distress and Intergenerational Effects**

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Sohye Kim is an assistant Professor and member of the Attachment and Neurodevelopment laboratory at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas, USA. For most of the last century attachment studies focused on observed behavior using the Strange Situation procedure and then representations of attachment based on the Adult Attachment Interview. Recent developments in neuroscience together with more sophisticated technology mean we can start examining the signature that environmental trauma leaves on the working of the brain. The Baylor Attachment and Neurodevelopmental Laboratory leads the field in this area and Dr Kim will talk about the impact that unresolved trauma can have on the brain responses of mothers and so on to their ability to respond to the needs of their children.

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Although empirically well demonstrated, the mechanisms by which trauma-related distress is transmitted intergenerationally continue to lack empirical base. Animal work suggests that long-term emotional and behavioral effects of trauma are associated with changes in the amygdala, a neurobiological substrate proposed to mediate long-term socio-emotional sequelae of early-life stress. In her presentation, Dr. Kim will provide a neurobiological account of how mothers with unresolved trauma appear to be less responsive to their infants' distress, rendering their infants psychologically 'alone' in the midst of intense sadness – the phenomenon that has been proposed to epitomize the essence of attachment trauma. Maternal disengagement from infant distress, as captured in an attenuated amygdala signal, will be discussed a potential mechanism that contributes to the intergenerational transmission of trauma.

Objectives

1. Identify one neural mechanism linking the mother's unresolved trauma to her impaired responsiveness to her infant.
2. Understand the importance of the mother's attunement and sensitivity to her infant's distress and why this may be particularly challenging for mothers with unresolved trauma.
3. Discuss ways in which intergenerational transmission of trauma may be halted.