

IASA's 10-Year Celebration

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Is the TCI a valid method of assessing attachment? Comparing the TCI to the PAA.

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Topic: Research.

This small-scale comparative research study is looking at whether adding a frustration task to the Toddler CARE-Index increases its validity as a method for assessing the security of a toddler's relationship with their caregiver. The Toddler CARE-Index was initially developed to assess how sensitive parents were to their toddlers in a 3-5 minute play interaction. Because the procedure is not usually stressful for the child it has not been as reliable a method for assessing security in relationships as the well validated Pre-school Assessment of Attachment (PAA). If the results of the comparison indicate validity of the TCI, the addition of the frustration task may result in the new procedure having greater relevance than the PAA because the focus is on parent-child hierarchy and authority rather than separation. As the TCI only takes five minutes to administer it would also have the added benefit of being significantly easier and quicker to administer than the PAA.

A Children's Services department in the South of England agreed to provide a research team and recruit study participants through one of their state run nurseries. The participants came from a non-risk and risk demographic due to the nursery's location in an area of high deprivation and need. Over the course of three years thirty children and their parents, aged between aged two and five years, were visited at home by a member of the research team who filmed the TCI and made arrangements for them to attend a local Children's Centre for the PAA. The TCIs and PAAs are being coded by separate sets of reliable blind coders for each procedure.

How it used the DMM

If the study finds that the TCI to be valid as a method for assessing attachment it could result in the method and its underlying DMM theory becoming more widely used within child protection and research. This will not only benefit the development of the DMM but it also has the potential to improve the accuracy of assessments in child protection where it is unusual for scientifically reliable methods to be utilised.

What it can contribute to the DMM

The research team all spoke of benefitting from an increase in understanding through their participation in the project. For example, observation of a lack of interaction between one child and his parent was striking in the TCI and PAA. The mother engaged with him in only a very minimal way with no changes of facial expression and discouraged free movement, particularly in the home video where he was put in a 'baby' chair. This helped the nursery worker on the research team to better understand his delayed speech and physical development. They were then able to use this new knowledge to help the child in nursery and changed their approach with the mother.