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Transmission of attachment across three generations – continuity and reversal.

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Topic: Research

A low-risk Finnish sample (N total=135) of primiparous mothers, fathers, and maternal grandmothers was followed from pregnancy until the child was 3 years old. The modified Adult Attachment Interview was used to assess the self-protective strategies of mothers during the last trimester of pregnancy, as well as those of the fathers and grandmothers. The Infant CARE-Index was used to assess the sensitivity of mothers and fathers, as the infant was 6-7 weeks and 6 months old. The Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) was used to assess the self-protective strategies of the infants with their mothers, when they were 1 year, and with their fathers, as they were 1 ½ year. The Preschool assessment of attachment (PAA) was used to assess the protective strategies of the children with their mothers and their fathers at the age of 3 years (Hautamäki, Hautamäki, Neuvonen, & Maliniemi-Piispanen, 2010a).

How it used the DMM and what it can contribute to the DMM

The DMM assessment methods were used. There was continuity across three generations in regard to Type B. But reversal patterning could be found in regard to Type C and A. Particularly children of parents with complex self-protective strategies (A3-6, C3-6) may have to organize in a reverse way to the parent's pattern in order to protect themselves. High-subscript classifications were more frequent among grandmothers from the scarcely populated, less wealthy regions in Finland – many of whom had lived through World War II as children. But even in this normative sample a model of secure matches and insecure meshed accounted for transmission of attachment across three generations (Hautamäki, Hautamäki, Neuvonen, & Maliniemi-Piispanen, 2010b).

The results showed the complexity of the transmission of attachment, in particular, if the parents' need for self-protection compromised their ability to protect their child. Interventions should take into account the various, also opposite ways that parents and children may frame their experiences, as they try to protect themselves from threat.