

## THE INFLUENCE OF RESEARCH INTO ATTACHMENT AND DAY CARE ON CHILD CARE PRACTICES

### Introduction

The word 'influenced' means how research into attachment and day care has *informed* the way that we take care of children. With respect to attachment research, issues relating to **working mothers**, **hospitalisation**, and **adoption policies** are all relevant.

### Working mothers

In the early 1950s, **Bowlby** was the most high-profile critic of day care, arguing that child development, maternal well-being, and human progress in general depended on the mother providing continuous care. The use of day nurseries and crèches was condemned as leading to the long-term emotional damage of future generations. As **Bowlby (1953)** put it: "*We must recognise that leaving any child under three years of age is a major operation only to be undertaken for good and sufficient reasons, and, when undertaken, to be planned with great care. On no account should the child be placed with people he doesn't know.*"

And he issued the following warning to mothers contemplating going back to work: "*If you don't do your five years hard labour when the child is young, you'll do it later.*"

The implication was that women are born and reared to be, first and foremost, mothers. This so-called **motherhood mystique/mandate** reflected the general view of mothers during the 1950s: the mother should stay at home and look after her children, at least until they started full-time education.

According to Bowlby, day care should result in a child either failing to form an attachment (if the care occurs in the first year of life) or experiencing distress/separation anxiety (if the care is given after an attachment has been formed). As we have seen, there is some evidence to support this. Other evidence comes from **Belsky & Rovine (1988)**, who found that insecure attachments were more likely if infants received more than twenty hours day care a week for at least four months before their first birthday.

However, and as we have seen, other research suggests that there are no ill-effects providing the care is **stable** and of **high quality**. For example, **Clarke-Stewart (1989)** found that children who were in day care as babies were just as self-confident and emotionally well-adjusted as those who weren't.

Additionally, if day care was harmful, then the distribution of insecure infants for working and non-working mothers ought to be different. However, it has been found that in the USA 36% of children with working mothers can be classified as insecurely attached. Of these, 22% are Type A and 14% Type C. This is almost identical to what **van Ijzendoorn & Kroonenberg (1988)** found was the worldwide percentage of insecure attachment.

There is also research which indicates that children in day care do not differ from other children on a range of measures of emotional health in a variety of situations. For **Schaffer (2004)**:

*"What can be safely concluded is that, where conditions are optimal, children of employed mothers may actually benefit compared with those of non-employed mothers, largely as a result of extra experiences with other adults and with peers in day-care settings."*

Government, however, has generally accepted **Belsky & Rovine's (1988)** findings and this had led to changes on legislation with respect to extended parental leave, the right to flexible working hours, job-sharing, and paternity leave.

### **Hospitalisation**

As a result of the work of Bowlby and the Robertsons into short-term deprivation and its effect, changes in legislation and hospital policy have been made to allow parents to stay with their hospitalised children and be involved in their daily care. If a hospital is some distance from where a family lives, 'homes from home' for parents may be provided by charities. A good example of this is the CLIC Sargent charity for parents of children with cancer. This recognises the importance to the whole family of protecting attachment bonds and leading as normal a life as possible, especially when under additional stress.

## Adoption

In the past, mothers whose babies were going to be adopted were encouraged to feed them for as long as possible. However, currently 'swift adoption' (i.e. within the first week after birth) is thought to be better for the birth mother, adoptive parents and the infant. The argument is that early adoption provides the best opportunity for the adoptive parent and infant to develop a secure attachment during Bowlby's 'critical period', and avoid the long-term risk associated with failing to do so.

As far day care is concerned, all of the research indicates that **good quality care** is beneficial for infants and children, and that the factors identified by the *National Association for the Education of Young Children* (see earlier table) are associated with positive and long-lasting effects on development, especially for disadvantaged children.