

# Attachment Disorders: Causes and Consequences



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# Attachment theory

- Bowlby (1969) argues that there is a critical period in human development when infants (6 to 18 months) are genetically predisposed to form close attachments to caring adults.
- From 6 months an infant displays attachment behaviours towards a hierarchy of primary caregivers (eg: Smiling, crying, clinging, following and maintaining proximity to mother, father, siblings).
- Parents who consistently responds in a sensitive, responsive, accessible, and accepting manner – promotes a *secure attachment* that favours optimal development of the child.



# CAUSES OF INSECURE INFANT ATTACHMENT

- The quality of infant attachment is dependent on the levels of acceptance, accessibility, consistency, sensitivity and cooperation of the primary caregiver (usually the natural mother).
- Maltreated, abused and neglected children are less securely attached and usually show patterns of insecurity and stranger anxiety
- average across 13 studies showed insecure attachment to the mother in 76% of maltreated samples compared to 34% of non- maltreated samples (Morton & Browne, 1998).



# Attachment Patterns and Internal working model

<b>Parenting</b>	<b>Style</b>	<b>Positive model of self</b>	<b>Positive model of others</b>
<b>Available &amp; co-operative</b>	<b>Secure</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>+</b>
<b>Rejecting &amp; controlling</b>	<b>Avoidant</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Neglecting, unreliable</b>	<b>Ambivalent</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>+</b>
<b>Frightening &amp; unavailable</b>	<b>Disorganised</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

- **New relationships are created in light of internal working model, defined from previous relationships.**



# LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF INSECURE ATTACHMENT

- Early parent - infant relationship is internalised by the child and may be the 'Prototype' or Model to which all future relationships are assimilated and based on.
- Maltreated, abused and neglected children have problems forming relationships with siblings, peers, intimate partners and their own children in future.



## Effects of attachment patterns on development.

- (Erikson, 1965) - Internal working model of the self heavily influences personality formation, especially the growth of autonomy, initiative and self identity.
- George (1996) - the internal model of self formed in childhood guides interactions in adulthood and parenting with own children.
- Bowlby (1980) - claims that insecurely attached children have a greater propensity of psychological and conduct disorder in adulthood.



# Erikson Psycho-social stages of Development (1965)

Year	Stage	Psychological focus
1st	Basic trust v Mistrust	Social support
2nd	Autonomy v Doubt	Independence
3-5	Initiative v Guilt	Self care skills
6-11	Industry v Inferiority	Social skills
14-20	Identity v Role confusion	Definition of self
20-35	Intimacy v Isolation	Meaningful relationships
35-65	Generativity v Self absorption	Caring for others
65+	Integrity v Despair	Self fulfilment



# Adult Attachments (Bartholomew et al, 2001)

- **Dismissing (avoidant):**      **Positive about self**  
   **Negative about others**

Typically hostile and aggressive, they have a need to sense of control over others, which feeds the positive view of themselves. Feelings of being in charge, satisfaction and excitement are required.

- **Preoccupied (Ambivalent):** **Negative about self**  
   **Positive about others**

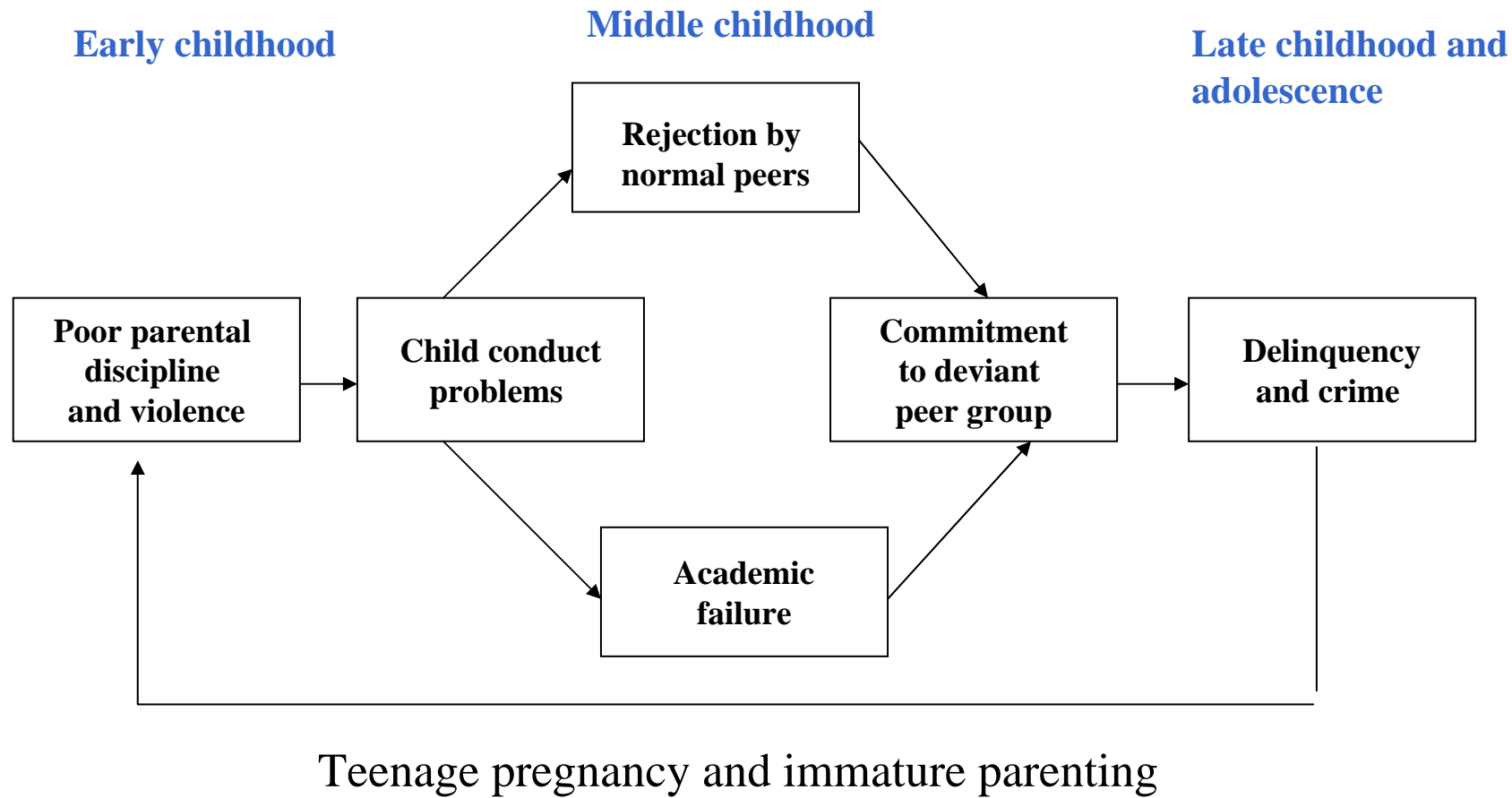
Fear abandonment as they are dependent on others because they view themselves as worthless. Threat of abandonment heightens their attachment behaviours. They will try to control their partner to reduce the chances of them leaving.

- **Fearful (disorganised):**      **Negative about self**  
   **Negative about others**

Close relations are typically conducted in a volatile, even violent manner. There is an anxious need to be in control of events and other people in order to feel safe. They have learned as children that if they are not in control terrible things will happen.



# Cycle of violence (Patterson et al, 1989)





## History of victimisation experiences in anti-social teenage offenders (N=77)

<b><u>Victimisation type</u></b>	<b>% male (n=58)</b>	<b>% female (n=19)</b>	<b>% Total (n=77)</b>
<b>No victimisation</b>	25.9	5.3	20.8
<b>Single victimisation</b>	3.4	10.5	5.2
<b>Multiple victimisation</b>	0.0	5.3	1.3
<b>Repeat victimisation only</b>	8.6	21.1	11.7
<b>Revictimisation only</b>	8.6	0.0	6.5
<b>Both repeat and revictimisation</b>	53.4	57.9	54.5



## Patterns of maltreatment: statistical significance

	<b>Violent/sexual offences (n=62)</b>	<b>Non-violent offences (n=12)</b>
<b>No revictimisation</b>	25.8%    16	66.6%    8
<b>Revictimisation</b>	74.2%    46	33.3%    4

**$p < 0.05$ ,  $df=1$ , chi-square**



## Conclusions

- Victims of abuse and neglect in childhood are more likely (10 to 20%) to commit violent and/or sexual offences compared to non-maltreated teenagers (0.5 to 1%).
- Young people who have experienced some form of assault by someone outside the family (extrafamilial) are the most likely of all to commit violent and/or sexual crimes (90%). Those previously maltreated in the family under 5 years are more at risk of extrafamilial physical and sexual assault in later life.
- Implications for identification and treatment of child victims who have the potential to commit serious violent/sex offences in adulthood. 80% of antisocial young offenders have a history of abuse and neglect.



# Intervention

- **Repeat victimisation:** results in victim self-blame and a sense of betrayal of trust.
  - *Work with family (offender, non-abusing parent and victim to reduce vulnerability)*
- **Revictimisation:** feeling of general vulnerability / inability to prevent victimisation;
  - *Work with victim to promote self-esteem, strategies for protection.*



## Reference

- Hamilton, C.E., Falshaw, L. & Browne, K.D. (2002). The Link between recurrent maltreatment and offending behaviour. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 46(1), 75-97