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ARTICLE

Child and Adolescent Anxiety Disorders and Early Attachment

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ABSTRACT

Objective

The major aim of this research is to determine whether infants who were anxiously/resistantly attached in infancy develop more anxiety disorders during childhood and adolescence than infants who were securely attached. To test different theories of anxiety disorders, newborn temperament and maternal anxiety were included in multiple regression analyses.

Method

Infants participated in Ainsworth's Strange Situation Procedure at 12 months of age. The Schedule for Affective Disorders and Schizophrenia for School-Age Children was administered to the 172 children when they reached 17.5 years of age. Maternal anxiety and infant temperament were assessed near the time of birth.

Results

The hypothesized relation between anxious/resistant attachment and later anxiety disorders was confirmed. No relations with maternal anxiety and the variables indexing temperament were discovered, except for a composite score of nurses' ratings designed to assess "high reactivity," and the Neonatal Behavioral Assessment Scale clusters of newborn range of state and inability to habituate to stimuli. Anxious/resistant attachment continued to significantly predict child/adolescent anxiety disorders, even when entered last, after maternal anxiety and temperament, in multiple regression analyses.

Conclusion

The attachment relationship appears to play an important role in the development of anxiety disorders. Newborn temperament may also contribute. *J. Am. Acad. Child Adolesc. Psychiatry*, 1997, 36(5):637-644.



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Key Words

anxiety disorders; attachment; developmental psychopathology; temperament

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