

## Editorial

Attachment is an exciting topic where different research traditions, as diverse as psychoanalytic and cognitive psychology, have come together to reinvigorate the field. In the present issue there are two papers that indicate the fertility of this particular research area. The first of these is the paper by McCarthy and Taylor on the role of attachment style as a mediating link between abusive experiences in childhood and adult functioning. They found that avoidance/ambivalent attachment style, but not self-esteem and relationship attributions, mediated the impact of early abusive experiences on later adult functioning. A second paper by Crandell and Hobson also found that an aspect of women's accounts of their own childhood histories (in this case lack of coherence) was related to lower IQs in their children. This difference remains significant even after the influence of maternal IQ, education, and family socioeconomic status were taken into account. There was also some suggestion that the link between maternal "state of mind" and child IQ might be mediated partly by the quality of parent/child interactions. The authors suggest that although it is necessary to be cautious in interpreting the results from IQ tests with children as young as 3 years, the study highlights the need to consider how mother–infant relations may have an effect on young children's cognitive abilities. This result, if it can be replicated, represents a challenge to contemporary theories in developmental psychology that tend to downplay the role of shared environmental factors.

There are two papers from the Christchurch longitudinal study in New Zealand that have also been concerned with the role of mediating factors. The first of these, by Nicholson et al., concerns the impact of the experience of step-parenthood in children on later adjustment. These authors found that when due allowance was made for factors present prior to entry into a stepfamily, there is little evidence to suggest that membership of a stepfamily has a beneficial or detrimental effect on later adjustment. The implications for clinical practice and policy in this are for a focus on events and circumstances predating the transition into a stepfamily. The second paper by Fergusson and Woodward investigates a separate risk factor, namely maternal age. In the sample of approximately 1000 subjects, it was found that children with teenage mothers had a risk of a later adverse outcome that was some two to nine times higher than the risk for offspring of mothers aged over 30 years. In examining possible mediating factors a number were related to maternal age, e.g. more nurturant, supportive and stable home environments were provided by older mothers. It was these factors that explained the association between maternal age and later outcomes. This suggests that the poorer outcomes for children born to teenage mothers may arise from processes whereby those women least equipped for child-rearing tend to give birth

at a younger age. The service implication of such a finding is not the discouragement of early parenthood but rather the development of programmes and interventions that are more generally targeted at the personal and social influences on parenting behaviour.

The testing of such mediational hypotheses requires the use of quite complex statistical procedures. The paper by van den Oord and Rispen also uses complex analytic procedures but what emerge are findings with quite direct practical and clinical implications. This paper uses both social network theory and multi-level modelling to examine the role of school, class, and individual characteristics on adjustment in 4–5-year-olds. Despite this complexity the results are clear. Classroom relationships are important influences on adjustment in this young age group. Such classroom effects may account for about 10% of the variance in adjustment in the children and this is independent of the influence of broader social factors and individual characteristics of the children. One implication of such a finding is that changing the peer networks within preschool groups may have a beneficial effect on the later adjustment of the children.

The literature on the impact of peer relationships on development has tended to centre on older children. This is illustrated by the paper by Edens et al., who were concerned about the impact on the risk of externalising behaviour that stems from differences in the way that the child and peers rate the quality of relationships. The results suggest that when there was a discrepancy, with the child seeing the quality of their relationships being higher than that reported by peers, this represented a risk factor for externalising behaviour. Perhaps surprisingly, therefore, such an overly positive or inflative self-system does not act as a protective factor but rather places such children at greater risk.

The last group of papers on which I will comment are those concerned with post-traumatic stress disorder symptomatology. These three papers illustrate the way in which quite varied experiences may produce rather similar patterns of interference with psychological functioning. The first paper, by Moradi et al., studied subjects who had been involved in road traffic or personal violence incidents in the 2 years prior to testing. These children were found to have poor overall memory performance compared to controls. Walker looked at the symptoms related to post-traumatic stress disorder in patients experiencing liver transplantation. Even several months after the event the symptoms are important and would warrant intervention. The third of the set of the papers is that of Thabet and Vostanis. They studied the post-traumatic stress reactions in 239 Palestinian children aged 6 to 11 years. If treatments can be developed that can remediate these post-traumatic stress responses then such interventions are likely to be of wider applicability

given the wide range of stressors that produce somewhat similar symptomatic responses.

To finish this editorial, I want to draw attention to four other papers that have strong clinical or practical implications. The first of these is the Annotation by Flisher, on mood disorder and suicide in children and adolescents. This ends with a series of clear suggestions for the way in which at-risk children should be managed. Many people, both lay and professional, continue to feel uneasy about the use of electroconvulsive therapy, especially with adolescents. The Practitioner Review by Walter et al. suggests that although information about ECT in this age group is limited, the available evidence suggests that it is safe and effective and usually regarded favourably by recipients and their parents. Given the infrequent use of ECT in this age group, and lingering concerns about the

potential effects of ECT on the developing brain, close attention should be given to assessment, consent, and technical aspects of its administration. The paper by Lauritsen et al. gives a meticulous analysis of the chromosomal aberrations that have been found to be associated with autism. Finally, the paper by Ho et al. provides important indicators of the way in which literacy could be taught more effectively to Chinese speakers. Not many readers of the journal will be involved in that task. However, the paper provided me with an intriguing introduction to the way in which the writing system in Chinese is organised. The paper also has a broader scientific value in suggesting the pervasiveness of the use of analogies in learning to read amongst children in diverse linguistic groups.

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