The Berlin Longitudinal Study of Early Adaptation to Novel Situations examined early day-care experiences and the security of infant-mother attachment. Thirty-four infants entering day care before their first birthday and 20 infants entering between 12 and 18 months were compared in their reactions to day care during the first 4 weeks of familiarization with the new setting. Results indicated that one-third of the infants reacted to the new experience with lowered mood and increased irritability, with the reaction more intense but less prolonged in older infants. At 12 months of age, there were no significant differences in quality of attachment between infants with and without day care experience. At 21 months of age, however, children who had entered day care at a later age were more likely to be insecurely attached when they had experienced an abrupt mode of familiarization, while children who had entered late and by a lenient mode of familiarization were more likely to be securely attached at the end of the second year. (MDM)
Day-Care Experience
And Infant-Mother Attachment

Hellgard Rauh, Ute Ziegenhain, Bernd Müller, Sigrid Dillmann, Lex Wijnroks

University of Potsdam and Free University Berlin, Germany

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Abstract

Infants with early day-care experience have been considered to be at risk of developing an insecure attachment to their mothers. The empirical basis for this contention is, however, weak.

In the "Berlin Longitudinal Study of Early Adaptation to Novel Situations" (Rauh et al., 1996), 54 infants, 34 infants entering day care before their first birthday and 20 infants entering thereafter, were compared in their reactions to day care during the first four weeks of familiarization with the new setting.

About one third of the infants reacted to the new experience with lowered mood and increased irritability. This reaction was more intense but less prolonged in older infants. The infants seemed to react less negatively when introduced quite rapidly and abruptly to the new setting. This was particularly true for younger infants. Later quality of attachment differentiated the older infants' reaction to day care, albeit mainly at home: Infants introduced to institutional care in a lenient way were less irritable at home and in higher spirits than were (older) infants with abrupt introduction.

It appears, that these older infants are able to relate experiences from both settings, and only by so doing, their experiences with day care may affect the relationships to their mothers.

Address: Prof. Dr. Hellgard Rauh
Institute for Psychology
University of Potsdam, Campus II
P.O. Box 60 15 53
D-14469 POTSDAM, Germany
Phone: .49-331-977-2862
Fax: .49-331-977-2860
e-mail: rauh@rz.uni-potsdam.de
Introduction

Infants with early day-care experience have been assumed to be at risk of developing an insecure attachment to their mothers (Belsky, 1988). While age at enrollment, duration of daily attendance, and quality of day-care provision have been examined as potentially critical variables, the infants’ actual separation experience, i.e. the kind or mode of introduction into out-of-home care and the infant’s emotional well-being during the accommodation phase, have rarely be considered.

A previous analysis of the Berlin Longitudinal Study on Adaptation to Novel Situations in the First Year of Life (Rauh et al., 1996) has led to the following conclusions:

At 12 months of age there were no statistically relevant differences in quality of attachment (classification according to Main and Solomon, 1990) between infants with and without day-care experience. Nor did mode of familiarization with day care, characterized as lenient or abrupt, make any difference.

At 21 months of age, in contrast, children who had entered late into day care were more likely to be insecurely attached when they had experienced an abrupt mode of familiarization while children who had entered late and by a lenient mode of familiarization were more likely to be securely attached at the end of the second year. This relation was independent of maternal sensitivity prior to day-care experience.

Research Questions

If mode of familiarization affects infant-mother attachment only for infants enrolled into day care after 12 months of age:

◊ How do infants react emotionally to day-care entry during the 4 weeks of accommodation?

⇒ How do they react in the day-care setting and at home? Are there similarities and differences?

⇒ Are their reactions dependent upon pace of accommodation or mode of familiarization?

◊ Are their reactions related to later quality of attachment?

◊ Does the infant's emotional behavior vary in accord with age at day-care entry?
Sample and Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Total Sample and the Subsamples</th>
<th>Total Sample (n=54)</th>
<th>Day-Care Entry Early (n=34)</th>
<th>Day-Care Entry Late (n=20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>Below 10th grade</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qualified 10th grade</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University entrance level</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Birth Order</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>First-born</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later-born</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1 Age at day-care entry** | Early: Before 12 months of age (n=34)  
Late: Between 12 and 18 months of age (n=20) |
| **2 Mode of familiarization to day care** | Lenient = child attends less than 4 hours during the first 2-4 weeks  
Abrupt = child attends at least 4 hours from the first days |
| **3 Infant's emotional reactions to day care:** | a) Caregiver ratings in the daycare setting  
b) Maternal ratings in the home setting  
**Negative Mood**: dichotomized 5-point scale: partly unhappy to very unhappy vs. happy, balanced, content  
**Irritability**: dichotomized 5-point scale: partly to very brittle and irritable vs. stable and robust |
| **4 Quality of attachment** | Ainsworth's Strange Situation at 21 months. Classification acc. to Main and Solomon (1990): secure vs. insecure |

Results (1)

⇒ About one third of the infants reacted with increased irritability and negative mood to their day-care experience, with a peak in the 2nd week in the day-care setting, and increased irritability in the 1st and the 4th week at home.

⇒ Only in the 1st week the ratings in the two settings, day care and home, correlated. Irritiation and low mood in the institution did not predict low emotions at home in the following weeks.

| Correlations Between Settings |
|---|---|---|---|
| Week | Negative Mood | Irritability |
| 1 | .33* | .41** |
| 2 | .07 | .04 |
| 3 | -.08 | .16 |
| 4 | .17 | .12 |

⇒ There was moderate individual stability between weeks in emotional reactions, but mainly in the day-care setting.

| Stability between the weeks within the settings (Kendall's tau) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Day Care** | **Home** |
| weeks | Negative Mood | Irritability | Negative Mood | Irritability |
| 1-2 | .33* | .37** | .51*** | 29 |
| 2-3 | .50*** | .54*** | .15 | 25 |
| 3-4 | .29 | .47** | .06 | -.03 |

⇒ 42% of the infants experienced an abrupt mode of familiarization with day care. In the day-care setting they tended to react with less irritability and less negative mood (in 4th week sign.), at home they were less irritable only in the 2nd week.
The Emotional Reaction to Day-Care-Entry (Total Sample)

in the Day-Care Setting

in the Home Setting

Mode of Familiarization
abrupt vs. lenient

in the Day-Care Setting

in the Home Setting
Results (2)

52% of the infants were rated insecurely attached at the age of 21 months (classification according to Main and Solomon, mostly of the D category).

In the day-care setting, infants rated as insecurely attached at 21 months of age tended to react with less irritability and less negative mood than did infants later rated securely attached.

There was little change over time in the group of insecurely attached infants. Securely attached infants showed an increase in irritability to the 3rd week (significant group difference) and a decrease thereafter.

At home, in contrast, securely attached infants were markedly less irritable, notably in the 2nd and 3rd week (sign. group difference).
Early vs. Late Enrollment

- In the day-care setting, infants enrolled after 12 months of age (late) reacted with more irritability during the first 3 weeks of the accommodation period and with more negative mood in the 2nd and 3rd week than did infants enrolled before the age of 12 months (early).
- At home, late-entry infants also reacted with more irritation and lowered mood in the first weeks than early-entry infants with some adaptation towards the 3rd week, but an increase again thereafter.

Early/Late Enrollment x Mode of Familiarization

- Early-entry infants seemed to react less negatively in both settings when introduced to day care abruptly.
- Late-entry infants reacted more positively in the institution only in the 1st week when introduced leniently, but more negatively thereafter. At home, however, leniently introduced infants had more positive spirits and were mostly less irritable.

Early/Late Enrollment x Quality of Attachment

- Early-entry infants did not differ in their reactions in the day-care setting as an indicator of later quality of attachment. At home, however, later insecurely attached, but not securely attached, infants tended to show increasingly more negative mood over the weeks.
- Late-entry infants appeared to adapt to the day-care setting by the 3rd week. Later securely attached infants reacted more positively in the 1st week, and later insecurely attached infants more positively and less irritable in the second week. At home, however, only the later securely attached infants appeared to be of good spirits and low irritability.
Discussion

As previously observed by caregivers and researchers, infants who passed the first year of life react to separations from their attachment figures and to strange environments more intensively than do younger infants. Younger infants seem to “prefer” clearly marked settings as indicated by “abrupt” introduction to day care. There is little indication that they attribute their day-care experiences to their relationship to their mothers.

In contrast, infants enrolled into day care after the age of one year seem to react in a much more differentiated and variable way. The new situation may at first suit their exploration interests. The exploration-attachment balance appears to be expressed in their swings in mood and irritability over the weeks. Furthermore, these older infants seem to react negatively to abrupt day-care enrollment, but mainly at home and towards their mothers. This is particularly true for infants with (later) insecure attachments. Only in this older group, infants with abrupt day-care introduction changed in attachment quality clearly from secure to insecure, as our previous analyses showed. It seems that around the age of one year, infants begin to relate settings, and by so doing may attribute their separation experiences in the day-care setting to their relationships with their mothers - quite independently of previous maternal sensitivity experiences.

These findings suggest that quality of attachment may be a valid index of the infant’s day-care experiences only in a very restricted way: for older infants and with respect to the major separation experiences during the period of accommodation to the new and strange setting.

References:


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I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

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<th>Day Care Experience and Infant-Parent Attachment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Author(s):</td>
<td>Rabin, H., Segal-Buim, J., Adler, S. L., Lerman, E.</td>
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Signature: Hesegul, B.  
Printed Name/Position/Title: Rabin, Helga, Prof.  
Organization/Address: Institute for Psychology, University of Poznan, D-61-400 Poznan, Germany  
Telephone: -48-53-3272862  
Fax: -48-53-3272860  
E-Mail Address: rabin@psy.uni.poznan.pl  
Date: 20-3-82

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