Insecure paternal attachment contributes to childhood anxiety

By Jessica K. Edwards

A recent study has investigated the direct and indirect relationships between parent–child attachment and negative parental behaviours exhibited by mothers and fathers, individually, in a sample of children with clinical anxiety. Sonja Breinholst and colleagues at the University of Copenhagen recruited 54 families to their study. They measured childhood anxiety symptoms (at a mean age 9.6 years) using the Spielberger State-trait Inventory for Children and assessed attachment relationships and parental behaviours using the Security Scale and the Rearing Behavior Questionnaire, respectively. Consistent with previous research1, Breinholst et al. found no evidence to support that child-reported maternal attachment or maternal parenting behaviour could predict child-reported anxiety. Conversely, and in contrast to the researcher’s previous study2, they did find that insecure attachment to fathers contributed to child-reported anxiety and fully mediated the relationship between paternal rejection and child anxiety. As highlighted in an accompanying commentary, these results are surprising as others have reported either the strongest effects for maternal variables3 or equal effects for both parents (Groh 2012) on child anxiety. More research is now needed to confirm whether fathers and mothers do have different roles on child developmental outcomes. Pending replication, the researchers suggest that paternal variables should be included in childhood anxiety assessments and that fathers should be included in the treatment of anxiety.

Referring to:

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References: