

REVIEW DERLEME

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A Review for Father-Infant Attachment: Traditional Compilation

Baba-Bebek Bağlanması Üzerine Bir İnceleme: Geleneksel Derleme

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ABSTRACT Attachment is defined as feeling a deep emotional bond due to the need to trust primary caregivers and has an important place in developmental periods in human life. The fact that in most societies, infant care is a role attributed to the mother leads to a relatively small number of attachment studies on fathers. Over time, cultural influences and changes in social values have led to a differentiation of roles within the family and necessitated the father to take an active role in caring for the infant and meeting its needs. It develops over time with the increasing sharing between father and infant, continues throughout life, and is a process whose effects are seen throughout the child's life. In addition to the personal and psychological characteristics of the parents, the characteristics of the infant, stress factors, and support mechanisms can be effective in the formation of positive attachment between parent and infant. Considering that developing appropriate attachment behaviour is one of the key determinants of a baby's long-term development, fathers have just as important a role as mothers. Nurses have important responsibilities in guiding and encouraging fathers about attachment and fatherhood roles. In this review, the importance of father-infant attachment, the factors affecting the attachment process, and the development of positive attachment behaviour are discussed in line with the current literature.

Keywords: Father; infant; nursing

ÖZET Bağlanma, primer bakım vericilere güven duyma ihtiyacı sebebiyle derin duygusal bağ hissetmek olarak tanımlanmaktadır ve insan yaşamında gelişimsel dönemler içinde önemli bir yere sahiptir. Çoğu toplumda bebek bakımının anneye atfedilmiş bir rol olması; babalara yönelik bağlanma çalışmalarının göreceli olarak daha az ele alınmasına sebep olmaktadır. Zaman içerisinde kültürel etkiler ve toplumsal değerlerin değişmesi, aile içi rollerde farklılaşma yolunu açmış, bebeğin bakım ve ihtiyaçlarının karşılanmasında babanın aktif rol almasını zorunlu kılmıştır. Baba ve bebek arasında artan paylaşımla birlikte zaman içinde gelişir, yaşam boyu devam eder ve etkileri çocuğun yaşamı boyunca görülen bir süreçtir. Ebeveyn ve bebek arasında olumlu bağlanmanın oluşmasında, ebeveynlerin kişisel ve psikolojik özelliklerinin yanında bebeğin özellikleri, stres faktörleri ile destek mekanizmaları etkili olabilmektedir. Uygun bağlanma davranışının gelişiminin bebeğin uzun vadeli gelişiminin temel belirleyicilerinden biri olduğu düşünüldüğünde, babaların da anneler kadar önemli bir rolü vardır. Babaları, bağlanma ve babalık rolleri konusunda yönlendirme ve cesaretlendirmede, hemşirelerinin önemli sorumlulukları bulunmaktadır. Bu derlemede, baba-bebek bağlanmasının önemi, bağlanma sürecini etkileyen faktörler ile olumlu bağlanma davranışı geliştirme konuları, güncel literatür bilgileri doğrultusunda ele alınmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Baba; bebek; hemşirelik

Attachment is defined as feeling a deep emotional bond due to the need to trust primary caregivers and has an important place in developmental periods in human life.¹⁻³ The consistent emotional attachment between mother and infant develops over time with increased sharing between father and infant and con-

tinues throughout life.² Attachment is an important process that affects the child's negative experiences or positive gains in all life periods.⁴ Attachment, which dates back to the 13th century, has gone from being a term that attracted the attention and interest of scientists for many years to having a theoretical basis.

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Attachment theory is based on the British psychiatrist Bowlby, but Bowlby and Salter Ainsworth developed the theory. Bowlby defines attachment as the deep emotional connection that people feel to individuals or caregivers with whom they have a close relationship due to the need for trust and belonging.^{5,16} The mother is the main figure of attachment behaviour that emerges especially in times of fear and stress. The bond between mother and infant is a continuous emotional bond. It develops over time with the increasing sharing between father and infant, continues throughout life, and is a process whose effects are seen throughout the child's life.¹ The process of attachment to the family develops through various stages, including pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum period. The father also participates in the attachment process by experiencing this process just like the mother. Following the gestation process, the father, who observes the mother, prepares for the role of fatherhood by forming thoughts, dreams and expectations about the infant before birth and by feeling love and interest in the infant after birth.⁶⁻⁸

In societies with a patriarchal structure, the role of caring for and raising the infant has been attributed to the mother for many years, while the father has been responsible for the financial process within the family.⁹ Advances in science and technology, women's participation in the labour force due to their desire for self-improvement, and most importantly, economic difficulties have led to changes in family dynamics and the traditional role of the mother.¹⁰ This change in roles within the family has led the father to take an active role in caring for the infants and meeting their needs. Especially after the 1970s, the traditional fatherhood model began to be replaced by the modern fatherhood model, and the bond of interest and love between the father and the infant increased. Fathers who tried to take more responsibility took more care of their babies to fill the gap left by the mother.¹¹ This led to a lighter burden on the mother in the family process, positive communication between the spouses, and the establishment of a strong father-infant bond.¹² The concept of attachment is largely shaped by the parents' attitudes and behaviours, and depending on the type of attachment, it can significantly affect the baby and their future

life. An example of attachment behaviour is when a child cries when the mother leaves and greets her with joy when she returns. If the child feels unwanted by the mother, they feel that no one will want them; however, when the mother accepts the child and attachment occurs, the child thinks that everyone will love them.⁵

ATTACHMENT TYPES

In recent years, studies on attachment theory have drawn attention to the fact that a child can develop different types of attachment styles with their parents from infancy.¹³ Secure and positive attachment between the father and the infant will contribute positively to the infant's discovery of the world and development if the foundations are properly laid.

Secure Attachment Style: Babies wanting to be with caregivers and forming close bonds is a result of secure attachment. Positive and forward-looking interaction between father/mother and baby results in secure attachment.¹⁴ When the infant sees that the parent has returned, the infant hugs the parent tightly and forgets the stress and becomes happy.¹⁰ Individuals who develop secure attachment become confident, emotionally stable, and academically successful members of society, possessing sufficient problem-solving skills.¹⁵

Anxious-Ambivalent Attachment Style: This is an attachment style in which babies are uncertain about their access to emotional and physical support from their parents. The inconsistency of primary caregivers in meeting the baby's needs paves the way for this style to emerge. In later life, personality development is likely to increase in dependency, experience fear of abandonment, and exhibit intense emotional reactions.¹⁶

Avoidant Attachment Style: This attachment style stems from a dismissive emotional process between the primary caregiver and the infant, resulting from a lack of emotional support from parents. It lays the groundwork for trust issues later in life.

Disorganized Attachment Style: It is possible that findings of childhood fear and trauma can be seen as the basis of this attachment style. It can also form the basis for mental health problems.¹⁴

FACTORS THAT PLAY A ROLE IN FATHER-INFANT ATTACHMENT

The attachment between the baby and the parent affects the baby's life physically, psychologically, and emotionally, both prenatally and postnatally, and contributes to the development of communication with the outside world.¹ Certain situations and behaviors that influence and facilitate bonding have been identified. Some of these include the individual feeling physically and psychologically well, accepting the baby, and creating an environment conducive to bonding.¹⁷ Belsky developed a model of the parenting process and defined 3 distinct domains.¹⁸

Parents' personal and psychological characteristics: He reported that factors such as age, education level, extroversion, emotional state, acceptance of the child, and adoption of parental roles are effective in attachment.

Infant characteristics: He reported that factors such as premature birth, congenital anomalies, chronic illness, and the need for long-term medical treatment are effective in parent-infant attachment.

Contextual stress factors and support mechanisms: The structure of family communication and spousal support, the mother's emotional state, parenting stress, number of children, and the attention and affection the father receives from his own family are factors that affect parent-infant bonding.¹⁸

Father-infant attachment, which is of great importance in the physical, mental, and spiritual development of the infant, is at least as important as mother-infant attachment.^{2,19} For the father, the first contact with the baby begins with holding the infant. This contact has a strong emotional impact on the father. However, changing family and social structures, the perception of the fatherhood role, and various cultural practices that prevent the father's participation in infant care delay the adaptation process between father and infant and may negatively affect attachment.¹¹ When we look at the literature examining the factors that play a role in father-infant attachment; Toney reported that increasing the education level, having a male infant, breastfeeding, forceps intervention delivery, and caesarean delivery increased fa-

ther-infant attachment. However, he stated that early contact with the infant after birth was not effective on father-infant attachment.²⁰ Kuzucu stated that older fathers are more involved in childcare. They have reached professional satisfaction, whereas younger fathers cannot find enough power and time for childcare because they spend more effort in business life.²¹ Dinç found a significant positive relationship between the father's education level and father-infant attachment. It was determined that fathers' participation in infant care increased with increasing education level, and they expressed themselves as individuals with democratic views.²² In another study, it was stated that increasing the father's level of education increased the father's work intensity, and this situation decreased father-infant attachment.⁸ Hall et al. examined the attachment levels of the parents of preterm and term infants; it was stated that higher emotional attachment occurred between the preterm infant and the mother, and the time of birth between the father and the infant did not affect the attachment level. In addition, it was emphasized that the advanced age of the father negatively affected father-infant attachment.²³ Wynter et al., in which they investigated the factors affecting father-infant attachment in the first 6 months after birth; it was stated that father-infant attachment was negatively affected due to the father's hypersensitive and sensitive structure, high levels of depression and anxiety, problems in family relationships and negative criticism of the partner regarding infant care.²⁴ Contrary to Toney, Olsson et al. emphasized the importance of skin-to-skin contact. They stated that including fathers in care makes them feel as important and valuable as mothers. It was emphasized that the equal parenting opportunity offered is a practice that increases father-infant attachment.²⁰ Kılan stated that adolescents who assume the role of fatherhood at an early age experience role confusion because they have not yet completed their own development, and that these adolescents who transition to parenthood have the risk of experiencing a second crisis with the role of fatherhood.²⁵ Nishigori et al. examined the factors that negatively affect father-infant attachment; it was reported that the mother's mental and physical problems during pregnancy resulted in

the mother's failure to attach to the infant. It was stated that these problems experienced in the family negatively affect father-infant attachment and that these parents should receive support before birth.²⁶ In a study by Arslanlı and Çelebioğlu it was noted that fathers who interacted more with their babies and actively participated in childcare had better levels of father-infant bonding.¹⁰ In a randomized controlled study evaluating the effectiveness of kangaroo care, kangaroo care was found to have positive effects in increasing father-infant interaction.²⁷ Buisman et al. aimed to promote parental sensitivity and involvement in prospective parents by using ultrasound images and stated that it provides an opportunity to promote attachment between father and infant.²⁸

APPROACHES AND INTERVENTIONS TO INCREASE FATHER-INFANT BONDING

While having a baby is a joyful experience for parents, factors such as changes in daily life and increased financial burdens bring new responsibilities. This means that parents must go through a period of adjustment to meet the baby's various needs, such as care and feeding, while experiencing this new phase. Fathers are just as affected by this process as mothers. Therefore, fathers must adapt to the process to ensure the baby's well-being as mothers.²⁹ A study has determined that the risk of depression in fathers negatively affects father-infant bonding during early infancy.² To establish a healthy father-infant bond, it is important to approach parents appropriately before and after birth.

During the Prenatal Period: The father should be introduced to the baby while it is still in the womb, and he should be encouraged to bond with the baby and express his feelings toward it. Women should be prepared for the role of motherhood, men for the role of fatherhood, and the family should be provided with emotional support in this regard. The effects of saying words of love, hugging, showing interest and affection on the child should be explained to the family, and the goal should be to instill the correct behavior in this process.³⁰⁻³²

During the Postpartum Period: The family should always be supported during the birth and post-

partum period, and an environment of trust should be created. During the postpartum period, cooperation with the mother is essential. Fathers should also be assisted alongside mothers in various matters such as infant feeding, sleep, or care, and encouraged to take on responsibilities. Kangaroo care should be taught to both the mother and father. Skin-to-skin contact between the father and baby should be facilitated in the early period, if possible.³¹

Psychosocial Approaches: The family should be informed that the parent-infant bond is an ongoing process that needs to be strengthened over time, and the father should be given time in this regard. When necessary, the family should be supported psychosocially through appropriate interventions. The family should be evaluated holistically, the issues they need should be identified and informed, and specific intervention programs should be taken under necessary conditions.³³

EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS

Attachment and Biobehavioral Compensation Program: A home-based intervention program includes 2-day training and a 12-month supervision meeting. This program covers parents with infants aged 6-24 months. The main objectives of this program are to determine the needs of the infants and provide parental support, reduce frightening and intrusive parental behaviors, develop a positive perspective, and create sensitivity.^{34,35}

Circle of Safety: It is a maximum 10-week intervention that aims to increase caregiver sensitivity and empathy. Various adaptations have been developed for the intervention and the most widely used is circle of safety-parenting. It is an intervention that aims to improve attachment outcomes by understanding how the caregiver's past experiences affect their current parenting, aiming to follow and improve the child's attachment cues.³⁴

Steps Towards Effective and Enjoyable Parenting: is an initiative to help parents develop insight into their own early childhood experiences and their impact on their caregiving responsibilities. This therapeutic relationship also serves as a corrective experience for caregivers' insecure attachment relationships.³⁶

CONCLUSION

Attachment is a developmental process based on feelings of trust, love, and belonging.³⁷ When social and cultural factors are taken into account, while the traditional role of fathers is limited to providing economic support, it is stated that fathers in modern societies contribute more to childcare.³⁸ Father-infant bonding is as important as mother-infant bonding. Establishing secure attachment will affect the infant's entire life socially, psychologically, and academically. Therefore, pediatric nurses have important responsibilities in creating a healthy future child population.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Based on the articles reviewed in this study, it is recommended that detailed prenatal education be provided to fathers to create a secure attachment environment and that they be involved in the birth process to provide them with the opportunity to share in this experience. In addition, fathers should be encouraged to use paternity leave when conditions allow, and father-infant interaction should be increased. Awareness levels should be increased by informing fathers about their working conditions and leave entitlements. Projects and policies should be disseminated to break down stereotypical gender roles in society and promote the adoption of equal parenting roles. Fathers' participation in infant care should be encouraged, and it should be emphasized that the bonding process will continue to develop over time. The stress fathers experience regarding their perception of fatherhood should be reduced, and practices that enhance father-infant bonding should be adapted to the home environment and implemented routinely. Within the context of changing and

evolving nursing roles, counseling should be provided to mothers and fathers, providing them with descriptive information about the baby care process. It should be remembered that mothers are the most important predictor of attachment, and that communication between parents should be supportive during the prenatal and postnatal periods. Guidance should be provided to mothers and fathers in determining social support systems for care. Parents should be informed about the importance of the father figure, which is a determining factor in the child's future life. Furthermore, it is recommended that experimental and qualitative studies be conducted on the potential effects of attachment types on the father/mother specific during childhood periods.

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Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest between the authors and / or family members of the scientific and medical committee members or members of the potential conflicts of interest, counseling, expertise, working conditions, share holding and similar situations in any firm.

Authorship Contributions

Idea/Concept: Hilal Kurt Sezer; Design: Hilal Kurt Sezer; Funda Gürbüz; Control/Supervision: Hilal Kurt Sezer; Data Collection and/or Processing: Hilal Kurt Sezer; Funda Gürbüz; Analysis and/or Interpretation: Hilal Kurt Sezer, Funda Gürbüz; Literature Review: Hilal Kurt Sezer, Funda Gürbüz; Writing the Article: Hilal Kurt Sezer, Funda Gürbüz; Critical Review: Hilal Kurt Sezer, Funda Gürbüz; References and Fundings: Hilal Kurt Sezer, Funda Gürbüz; Materials: Hilal Kurt Sezer, Funda Gürbüz.

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