

# Attachment and trust in children with and without ADHD

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## Introduction

- In the general population, externalizing behaviors appear to be related to insecure attachment and lack of trust in caregiver support <sup>2</sup>.
- Studies in ADHD populations are sparse but some studies showed that children with ADHD are more likely to be insecurely attached <sup>3,6</sup>.
- A recent review suggests an association between ADHD and insecure attachment <sup>6</sup>. Nonetheless, the studies in this review only examined broad dimensions of attachment (e.g. secure versus insecure attachment) and/or used observation procedures that can be confounded by overlap of attachment with ADHD pathology <sup>4</sup>.
- Objective:** To examine explicit expectations about avoidant and anxious attachment and trust to both mother and father with well-validated self-report questionnaires in children with ADHD, as compared to typically developing (TD) children. Also, associations between ADHD, ODD and CD symptoms, and attachment in both groups were examined.

## Method

- 45 children with ADHD and 57 typically developing (TD) children filled in:
  - The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale-Revised Child version (ECR-RC <sup>1</sup>), a questionnaire measuring attachment anxiety and avoidance.
  - The Trust scale of the People in My Life Questionnaire (PIML <sup>5</sup>), designed to assess children's internal representations of relationships with their attachment figures.

## Discussion

- Children with ADHD do not differ from TD children in self-reported trust and insecure attachment styles suggesting that a substantial group of children with ADHD can develop the experience of having a secure attachment relationship and trust in their parents.
- In the TD group the ODD and CD symptoms, and not the ADHD symptoms, were associated with both insecure attachment styles and with trust. This effect suggests that attachment might be an important factor linked to ODD and CD symptoms but not when these symptoms are comorbid to ADHD.

## Conclusion

Taken together, the current study shows that children with ADHD report secure attachment relations and trust in their parents, and appear not to differ from typically developing children.

## Results

Table 1. Independent samples t-tests and chi-square tests for demographic characteristics, trust, and anxious and avoidant attachment

	ADHD (n=45)	TD (n=57)	$\chi^2$	p
Sex (male)	62%	47%	2.23	0.14
ADHD-Inattentive type	37.8%			
ADHD-Hyperactive-impulsive type	13.3%			
ADHD-Combined type	48.9%			
Comorbid ODD-diagnosis	40%			
	M (SD)	M (SD)	t	p
Age in years	10.77 (1.12)	10.05 (1.20)	-3.12	0.00
Total IQ	98.11 (11.78)	103.32 (12.01)	2.18	0.03
Inattentive symptoms	18.05 (4.78)	3.33 (3.26)	-18.36	0.00
Hyperactivity/impulsivity symptoms	14.40 (5.38)	3.11 (2.99)	-13.40	0.00
ODD symptoms	7.23 (4.59)	2.26 (2.85)	-6.68	0.00
CD symptoms	1.16 (1.29)	0.50 (1.21)	-2.63	0.01
Trust in support Father	33.77 (5.58)	34.8 (4.16)	1.02	0.31
Trust in support Mother	35.05 (4.05)	34.82 (4.18)	-0.27	0.79
Anxious attachment Father	10.84 (6.52)	10.86 (7.80)	0.02	0.99
Anxious attachment Mother	10.02 (5.35)	11.00 (7.45)	0.73	0.47
Avoidant attachment Father	20.74 (8.48)	19.25 (7.36)	-0.91	0.36
Avoidant attachment Mother	16.79 (7.35)	16.71 (6.18)	-0.06	0.96

Note. There were no differences in children with or without medication on the dependent variables.

Table 2. Correlations between inattention, hyperactivity-impulsivity, ODD symptoms and CD symptoms in children with ADHD and TD children

		Trust in support father	Trust in support mother	Anxious attachment father	Anxious attachment mother	Avoidant attachment father	Avoidant attachment mother
Inattention	ADHD	.011	.068	-.037	-.076	-.080	-.132
	TD	.024	0.090	.202	.275*	-.010	-.002
Hyperactivity-impulsivity	ADHD	-.164	.002	.258	.120	-.094	.091
	TD	.015	0.095	.168	.196	-.070	-.078
ODD symptoms	ADHD	-.146	-.201	.208	.043	.121	.082
	TD	-.287*	-.185	.409**	.343**	.452**	.508**
CD symptoms	ADHD	-.200	-.165	.116	.059	.266	.182
	TD	-.165	-.198	.268	.318*	.334*	.312*

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

## References

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