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LCHS4010 Psychology in Health and Social Care

Understanding Isaac's Development Through Bowlby's Attachment Theory

- **INTRODUCTION**
- **Case Study: Isaac**
- Isaac is a 4-year-old boy attending a Children's Centre in London. He lives with his mother, who is a single parent experiencing post-natal depression, low confidence and limited social support. The family recently moved to London and Isaac has experienced disrupted childcare arrangements over the last two years.
- Staff have observed that Isaac:
- Is quiet and withdrawn during free play
- Becomes distressed when separated from his mother
- Shows delays in language development
- Struggles to join group activities
- His mother reports that he has difficulty sleeping, is very clingy and rarely plays independently.
- **Aim of Presentation**
- This presentation will use Bowlby's Attachment Theory to explain how Isaac's early experiences may have influenced his development and will propose practical strategies to support him.
- **(Bowlby, 1969)**

BOWLBY'S ATTACHMENT THEORY

What is Attachment Theory?

John Bowlby (1969) developed Attachment Theory to explain the emotional bond between a child and their primary caregiver.

Bowlby believed that children are biologically programmed to seek closeness to caregivers because this helps them feel safe and secure.

Key Concepts

- Attachment
- Secure attachment
- Insecure attachment
- Internal Working Model
- Monotropy
- Separation anxiety

Bowlby argued that early attachment experiences shape future emotional, social and behavioural development.

THE KEY CONCEPTS OF THE THEORY

Secure Attachment

A secure attachment develops when caregivers respond consistently and sensitively to a child's needs. Children with secure attachments are more likely to:

- Feel confident
- Explore their environment
- Form positive relationships
- Manage emotions effectively

Insecure Attachment

Insecure attachment may develop when care is inconsistent, unavailable or unresponsive. Children may become:

- Anxious
- Withdrawn
- Clingy
- Less confident socially

(Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth et al., 1978)

HOW THE THEORY APPLIES TO ISAAC

Impact of Maternal Post-Natal Depression

Isaac's mother experienced post-natal depression.

Research suggests that post-natal depression can affect a parent's ability to respond consistently to a child's emotional needs.

According to Bowlby's theory, reduced emotional responsiveness may affect attachment security.

This may explain why Isaac:

Appears clingy

Struggles with separation

Seeks reassurance from his mother

His attachment needs may not have been fully met during important stages of development.

(Murray and Cooper, 1997)

DISRUPTED CHILDCARE AND MOVING HOME

- **Effects of Instability**
- Isaac has experienced:
 - Changes in childcare arrangements
 - Moving to a new city
 - Reduced support networks
 - Bowlby believed that children require stability and consistency to feel secure.
 - Frequent changes may create uncertainty and anxiety.
- **Possible Effects**
 - Difficulty trusting unfamiliar adults
 - Increased separation anxiety
 - Withdrawal from peers
 - Reduced confidence in new situations
 - These behaviours are visible in Isaac's current presentation.
- **(Bowlby, 1969; Howe, 2011)**

EFFECTS ON ISAAC'S DEVELOPMENT

- **Emotional Development**

- Isaac becomes distressed when separated from his mother and has difficulty sleeping.
- This suggests emotional insecurity and anxiety.

- **Social Development**

- Isaac struggles to join group activities and prefers to remain withdrawn.
- This may affect friendship formation and social confidence.

- **Language Development**

- Isaac shows delays in language development.
- Limited social interaction and reduced confidence may contribute to these difficulties.
- Overall, his emotional, social and communication development appears to have been affected.

- **(Bee and Boyd, 2020; Berk, 2023)**

NATURE VS NURTURE

- **Nature**
 - Nature refers to biological influences on development.
 - Examples include:
 - Genetics
 - Brain development
 - Temperament
 - Isaac may naturally have a more sensitive temperament.
- **Nurture**
 - Nurture refers to environmental influences.
 - Examples include:
 - Parenting
 - Attachment relationships
 - Childcare experiences
 - Social interactions
 - Isaac's development has likely been influenced by both biological and environmental factors.
 - However, Bowlby's theory places greater emphasis on environmental influences and relationships.
- **(Berk, 2023)**

ISSAC'S SUPPORT PLAN

- **Attachment-Based Strategies**
- To support Isaac, the Children's Centre should:
- **Provide a Key Worker**
- A consistent key worker can help Isaac build trust and security.
- **Establish Predictable Routines**
- Consistent routines help children feel safe and reduce anxiety.
- **Gradual Separation**
- Staff can support gradual separation from his mother through short, supported transitions.
- These approaches are directly linked to Bowlby's emphasis on secure attachment relationships.
- **(Howe, 2011; Bowlby, 1969)**

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF BOWLBY'S THEORY

- **Strengths**
- Highlights the importance of early relationships.
- Supported by research from Ainsworth's attachment studies.
- Widely used in childcare, health and education settings.
- Helps explain Isaac's clinginess and separation anxiety.
- **Limitations**
- Focuses heavily on the mother-child relationship.
- May underestimate the role of fathers and other caregivers.
- Does not fully explain cultural differences in caregiving.
- Other factors such as temperament and wider social influences are also important.
- Despite these limitations, Bowlby's theory remains highly useful when understanding Isaac's experiences.
- **(Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth et al., 1978)**

CONCLUSION

- Bowlby's Attachment Theory provides a useful framework for understanding Isaac's development.
- His mother's post-natal depression, disrupted childcare arrangements and recent move may have affected his attachment security.
- These experiences may explain his separation anxiety, withdrawn behaviour, language delays and social difficulties.
- By providing consistent relationships, emotional support and targeted interventions, professionals can help Isaac develop confidence, independence and positive social relationships.

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