

Interculturality and Early Attachment: A Comparison of Urban/*Non-Mapuche* and Rural/*Mapuche* Mother-Baby Dyads in Chile

Chamarrita Farkas¹ · Marcia Olhaverby² · María Pía Santelices² · Patricia Cordella²

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Abstract It is well known in the field that culture and context play an important role in child rearing and parenting practices. However, many studies do not address the cultural dimension of attachment, although evidence indicates that aspects of early attachment differ across cultures. With the goal of comparing the quality of mother–baby interactions, this study analyzed attachment behaviors and maternal sensitivity in two settings: urban/*non-Mapuche* and rural/*Mapuche* in Chile. The sample was composed of 34 mother-baby dyads (17 urban/*non-Mapuche* and 17 rural/*Mapuche*) with 12-month-old children. During a feeding episode, the attachment style of the interaction was assessed with the Attachment during Stress scale, and maternal sensitivity was evaluated with the Child-Adult Relationship Experimental Index-Toddlers (CARE-Index). The groups differed in their interaction attachment style and in affective and proximity modalities: Urban/*non-Mapuche* mothers tended to have secure and ambivalent attachment styles, and rural/*Mapuche* mothers tended to have avoidant styles. When educational level is controlled, ethnicity group can explain the differences in mothers' attachment styles. The findings of the study and their implications are discussed.

Keywords Early attachment · Interculturality · Maternal sensitivity · Interaction modalities

Introduction

The mutual verbal and non-verbal exchanges that occur between a mother and baby contribute to the development of reciprocity as well as the sharing of information and emotions (Trevarthen and Aitken 2001; Tronick and Cohn 1989; Weinberg and Tronick 1994). Similarly, during the early years, the interactive skills of the caregiver are associated with emotional expression and the type of infant response (Kivijärvi et al. 2001). Bowlby (1969), who developed attachment theory, proposed that to guarantee the survival of the species, human beings have an innate attachment behavioral system activated by anxiety, fear, or stress that leads them to seek caring and physical closeness with primary caregivers. Bowlby (1995) also noted that the nature of primary caregivers' responses and their degree of availability lead children to develop characteristic patterns of interaction with other significant individuals and that these attachment styles persist over time. Through the bond with the caregiver, the child learns to regulate emotional states and to construct internal operational models of the self, others, and relationships, which underlie stable and lifelong patterns of interacting with others.

Ainsworth et al. (1978) identified three characteristic attachment styles related to the different types of maternal responses. Children whose mothers consistently responded to their children's attachment behaviors were classified as securely attached, children of mothers who consistently rejected their attachment behaviors were classified as exhibiting an insecure-avoidant attachment style, and children whose mothers responded inconsistently to attachment behaviors were classified as having an insecure-ambivalent attachment style (Ainsworth et al. 1978). Based on this theoretical framework, some researchers have proposed that secure attachment serves as a protective factor, while

✉ Chamarrita Farkas
chfarkas@uc.cl

¹ Psychology School, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Avenida Vicuña Mackenna 4860, Macul, Santiago, Chile

² Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Macul, Santiago, Chile