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## Socioemotional skills between 12 and 30 months of age on Chilean children: When do the competences of adults matter?

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### ABSTRACT

Due to the rapid growth in early socioemotional skills during the first three years of life, significant variations in socioemotional development begin early and increase with time. Family competences as sensitivity and mentalization, contribute to differences among children of the same age. This study examines whether the level of socioemotional skills is stable or changes between 12 and 30 months of age, and whether primary caregiver sensitivity and mentalization, as well as educational level, are associated with changes in the level of socioemotional skills. One hundred and three Chilean children were evaluated. The results showed a significant change in socioemotional level between 12 and 30 months. Primary caregivers' sensitivity was associated with socioemotional skills at 12 months of age, and caregivers' educational levels was the strongest predictor. At 30 months, caregivers' sensitivity and educational level did not contribute additional influence, and only child socioemotional skills reported at 12 months acted as a predictor. Results indicate that family competences contribute to infants' socioemotional development in the first year of life, which subsequently influences their later skills.

### 1. Introduction

Socioemotional development is a fundamental aspect of the development of the whole child; as children develop, social and emotional skills integrate with physical and cognitive skills (Greenspan & Shanker, 2004). Development involves the acquisition of social and emotional skills that enable children to adapt to the demands and expectations of the social environment (Greenspan, DeGangi & Wieder, 2001; Greenspan & Shanker, 2004), to effectively achieve goals (Campos, Mumme, Kermoian, & Campos, 1994) and to participate in socially appropriate interactions with peers, siblings, parents, and other people (Raver & Zigler, 1997). These skills include the ability to regulate emotions and behaviour, to understand one's own and others' emotional states, and to engage others in positive interactions. In the first year of life, the beginnings of skills that engage others in interaction are evident in behaviours such as emotional contagion, the discrimination of facial expressions, and affective and vocal cues (Perner, 1994).

Young infants begin life with little or no awareness of their dispositional states. Then, they progressively become aware of their internal affective states and emotional dispositions through a social mirroring process (Gergely & Watson, 2010). For this social awareness, children's knowledge and understanding of emotions is fundamental, and basic receptive and expressive understanding of

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