

**Nordic Attachment Network  
(NAN)  
Conference and Meeting**  
*Copenhagen, August 27<sup>th</sup> 2014*

*University of Copenhagen, Øster Farimagsgade 2A,  
second floor, 03.2.M202*

*Organizers:*

Barbara Hoff Esbjørn; University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Elia Psouni; Lund University, Sweden

Heidi Jacobsen; RBUP Øst og Sør; Norway

Anders Broberg; University of Goteborg, Sweden



## Program

- 8:30-9:00 Arrival, Coffee and Tea
- 9:00-9:30 Welcome by board members (introduction to conference and NAN)  
*Barbara Hoff Esbjørn, Elia Psouni*
- 9:30-10:55 Symposium: **“Nordic attachment research with infants and toddlers”**  
**Chair:** Anders Broberg; **Discussant:** Barbara Hoff Esbjørn
- 10:55-11:10 *Coffee break*
- 11:10 -12:30 Symposium: **“Nordic attachment research with children and adults”**  
**Chair:** Barbara Hoff Esbjørn; **Discussant:** Heidi Jacobsen
- 12:30-13:30 *Lunch*
- 13:30-14:15 Presentations on ongoing attachment related work in the Nordic Countries  
**Chair:** Elia Psouni
- 14:15-14:45 *Networking, mingling and Coffee*
- 14:45-15:00 Sum up of the conference
- 15:15-16:30 NAN meeting for future members  
*Elia Psouni & Anders Broberg*

*The meeting will address issues related to the establishment and running of the NAN network. All future members are welcome to join.*

# **Symposium: “Nordic attachment research with infants and toddlers”**

*Chair: Anders Broberg; Discussant: Barbara Hoff Esbjørn*

The symposium focusses on work conducted within the field of attachment in infants and toddlers in the Nordic Countries. The symposium includes work conducted in Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

## Presenters:

- 1 Johanne Smith-Nielsen
- 2 Johanne Smith-Nielsen
- 3 Elia Psouni
- 4 Mette Væver
- 5 Heidi Jacobsen

## **Presentation 1 (Johanne Smith-Nielsen):**

**Title:** *Postpartum depression: The role of State of mind regarding attachment and personality disorder.*

**Authors:** Johanne Smith-Nielsen\*, Howard Steele\*\*, Heike Mehlhase\*, Katharina Cordes\*, Miriam Steele\*\*, Susanne Harder\*, Mette Væver\*

**Affiliations:** \*Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen; \*\*Department of Psychology, New School for Social Research.

**Aims:** We examined whether women presenting postpartum depressive symptoms showed higher levels of personality pathology, and more insecure state of mind regarding attachment compared to non-depressed women. Previous research regarding effects of maternal postpartum depression (PPD) on parenting and infant development has been inconsistent. This may be due to lack of examining underlying persistent psychological difficulties that may moderate the potential adverse effects of PPD. However, only very few studies have examined whether mothers with PPD are more likely to present such difficulties compared with non-depressed mothers.

**Method:** Participants (N=85) were recruited into a longitudinal study and assessed with Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS), Present State Examination, Adult Attachment Interview, and Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV Axis II.

**Results:** Mothers with high EPDS-scores were more likely to have a preoccupied insecure state of mind and to have personality disorder, compared with mothers scoring below clinical cut-off. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis showed that personality disorder and AAI-classification were independently related to EPDS-score, and that these two factors together accounted for 48% of the variance in EPDS-score.

**Conclusions:** Research and clinical practice must take into account potential co-existing psychological factors that may magnify or buffer effects of depressive symptoms on parenting.

## **Presentation 2 (Johanne Smith-Nielsen):**

**Title:** *Postpartum depression and infant-mother attachment at one year: the impact of co-morbid maternal personality disorder.*

**Authors:** Johanne Smith-Nielsen\*, Anne Tharner\*, Howard Steele\*\*, Katharina Cordes\*, Heike Mehlhase\*, Mette Væver\*

**Affiliations:** \*Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen; \*\*Department of Psychology, New School for Social Research.

**Aims:** This study is the first to specifically examine the influence of comorbid personality disorder (PD) with maternal postpartum depression (PPD) in relation to infant-mother attachment.

**Methods:** Mothers were recruited either during pregnancy (comparison group, n=56) or eight weeks postpartum (clinical group, n=29). Infants of mothers with PPD only or in combination with PD were compared with infants of mothers with no psychopathology. Depression and PD were assessed using Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale and the clinical interviews Present State Examination and Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV Axis II. Infant-mother attachment was assessed when infants were 13 months using Strange Situation Procedure.

**Results:** PPD was associated with attachment insecurity only if the mother also had a PD diagnosis. Infants of mothers suffering from depressive symptoms only did not differ from infants of mothers with no psychopathology.

**Conclusions:** Co-existing PD may be highly important in understanding how PPD impact on parenting and infant developmental outcomes. Furthermore, when providing interventions with the aim of preventing attachment insecurity, our results suggest the need for not only focusing on the acute depressive symptoms, but also to assess persistent factors that may magnify or buffer the effects on parenting behaviors and treatment outcomes.

### **Presentation 3 (Elia Psouni):**

**Title:** *Non-help-seeking in postpartum depression: relations to attachment.*

**Authors:** Elia Psouni, Emily Cacciola

**Affiliation:** Department of Psychology, Lund University, Sweden.

**Aims:** Although insecure attachment styles are a contributing factor in the development and maintenance of PPD, and a help seeking barrier for mental health problems in general, its role in non-help-seeking in PPD is unknown. Here, we assessed women suffering from PPD who had not sought/received professional help and explored insecure attachment features as possible help-seeking barriers for PPD.

**Methods:** Data was collected from 37 women who had not sought or received professional help when suffering from PPD, using a mixed method including questionnaires, Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS: Cox et al., 1987), Attachment Assessment Questionnaire (ASQ: Feeney et al., 1994) and My Help-seeking Questionnaire (MHQ: Cacciola, 2013), narrative based Attachment Script Assessment (ASA: Waters & Rodrigues-Doolabh, 2004) and a semi-structured interview regarding Thoughts and Feelings about Help-Seeking (TAFHAP: Cacciola & Psouni, 2013).

**Results:** All women had EPDS-scores above 15, clearly indicating PPD. According to the ASA, 77% lacked a secure base script while according to the ASQ 62% were classified as insecure – out of which 14% anxious, 19% avoidant and 30% disorganized, indicating a non-normative sample with regard to attachment security. Reasons behind non-help-seeking varied systematically with attachment style. Convictions of a strong self and lack of trust in healthcare professionals constituted a help-seeking barrier for dismissive women while mythical expectations about motherhood constituted a help-seeking barrier for securely attachment women.

**Conclusions:** Our findings confirm that a large group of dismissive women suffering from PPD do not seek help. However, far from every aspect of non-help-seeking in PPD seems related to attachment patterns as motherhood myths and expectations are important help-seeking barriers for many women, including those with a secure attachment style. Our new round of studies focus on the interaction between attachment as well as other relational features, and gender specific social norms, in the occurrence of post birth depression in men and women and in reasons for hiding this condition/not seeking help. In a currently ongoing study we focus specifically on men suffering from depressive symptoms after the birth of their child, also assessing gender specific expression of the depressive symptoms.

## **Presentation 4 (Mette Væver):**

**Title:** *Origins of attachment: micro-analysis of mother-infant interactions and the development of early attachment relationships.*

**Authors:** Mette Væver, Anne Tharner\*, Marianne Krogh, Johanne Smith-Nielsen

\*presenter

**Affiliations:** BabyLab, Dept of Psychology, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

**Aims:** Micro-analysis of 4-month infant-mother face-to-face interactions which works as a 'social microscope' (Beebe & Steele, 2013), can contribute to a better understanding of the development of qualitative differences in early attachment relationships. In the current study, we aimed to identify behavioral patterns in 4 month old children while interacting face-to-face with their mothers that were related to attachment quality at 13 months of age.

**Method:** We observed 75 Danish mothers and their 4 months old babies in 3 minute non-stressful face-to-face interactions. During the interaction, infant head orientation and gaze were assessed micro-analytically using motion capture and video (Beebe, 2010). At 13 months, infant-mother attachment classification was assessed using the Strange Situation Procedure (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

**Results:** Preliminary analyses showed that infant gaze at 4 months was related to attachment classification at 13 months. Infants who spent more time in gaze off at 4 months were less likely to be avoidant at 13 months ( $B = -0.113$ ,  $SE = 0.045$ ,  $p = .01$ ). Minor avert with head down was associated with attachment disorganization ( $B = 20.5$ ,  $SE = 10.3$ ,  $p = .05$ ). Additionally, congruent behavioral patterns were associated with attachment security at 13 months: infants who spent more time looking at the mother while also facing her were less likely disorganized (vs. secure) ( $B = -34.3$ ,  $SE = 17.5$ ,  $p = .05$ ), as were infants who gazed away from the mother while averting their head ( $B = -224.3$ ,  $SE = 115.3$ ,  $p = .05$ ).

**Conclusion:** Behavioral patterns in mother-infant face-to-face interactions at 4 months are related to attachment quality at 13 months.

## **Presentation 5 (Heidi Jacobsen):**

**Title:** *Attachment in young foster children at 2 and 3 years of age and the foster parents state of mind.*

**Authors:** Heidi Jacobsen, Tord Ivarsson, Tore Wentzel-Larsen, Lars Smith and Vibeke Moe

**Affiliation:** Centre for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Eastern and Southern Norway, Oslo, Norway

**Aim:** In Norway foster care, often long-term, rather than institutional care is the preferred when young children are in need of new caregivers. Challenges in attachment formation in foster children highlight the importance to investigate such children's attachment patterns over time as well as the foster parents' state of mind (SoM).

**Methods:** The present study, including 60 foster children (all placed before the age of 2 years) and 42 children in a comparison group, investigated the possible differences between foster- and comparison parents' State of Mind (SoM) with respect to attachment as well as the concordance between caregiver SoM and child attachment classifications at 2 as well as at 3 years of age. The associations between foster children's attachment, age at first and final placement, number of placements and reasons for placement were also investigated. Descriptive analyses, including cross-tabulations, and independent sample t-tests, were used.

**Results:** The majority of the foster parents had an autonomous SoM, and no significant group difference between foster- and comparison parents was identified. Correspondingly most foster children were classified as securely attached at both time points and did not differ significantly from the children in the comparison group. Most foster children who were classified as secure at 2 and 3 years of age had autonomous foster parents, as was also the case for the CC. No associations between foster children's attachment, age at first and final placement, number of placements and reasons for placement were identified.

**Conclusion:** The present results are encouraging, suggesting that placing foster children with autonomous foster parents early in life may help them to remain secure over time. Further, focusing recruitment of autonomous foster parents, or offering those who are struggling with attachment issues supervision, is important when working with young foster children.

# **Symposium: “Nordic attachment research with children and adults”**

*Chair: Barbara Hoff Esbjørn; Discussant: Heidi Jacobsen*

*The symposium focusses on work conducted within the field of attachment with children and adults in the Nordic Countries. The symposium includes work conducted in Sweden and Denmark.*

## Presenters:

- 1 Pehr Granqvist
- 2 Tommie Forslund
- 3 Sonja Breinholst
- 4 Tommie Forslund
- 5 Elia Psouni

## **Presentation 1 (Pehr Granqvist):**

**Title:** *Religion as attachment, with emphasis on the Representation of God in relation to Self Interview (RGSi)*

**Authors:** Pehr Granqvist

**Affiliation:** Department of Psychology, Stockholm University

**Background:** Over the last 15-20 years, I have studied religion and spirituality from an attachment viewpoint, departing from an assumption that people represent and use God as a symbolic attachment figure. Through different methodologies and studying people of different ages, faith traditions, and countries, my colleagues and I have found consistent support for such an attachment-religion connection.

**Results:** We have also uncovered two attachment-related pathways to religion. One of these goes via secure attachment and experiences of being sensitively cared for by religious parents. The religiosity of these individuals is rooted in the parental relationship and marked by a secure representation of God in relation to self. During stress, God is mentally accessible also at implicit/unconscious levels. The other path goes via insecure attachment and experiences of being insensitively cared for. These individuals often become actively religious/spiritual in times of crisis, and tend to develop idiosyncratic belief systems in which God/other entities fills the role of surrogate attachment figure. Yet, when implicitly stressed, these individuals tend to mentally shy away from God.

**Aim/Presentation:** Besides a brief overview of the field, I will focus this presentation on upcoming work related to our RGSi system (Granqvist & Main, 2014), which was modeled after the AAI and developed to help capture the coherency/incoherency of religious/spiritual people's representation of self in relation to God.

## **Presentation 2 (Tommie Forslund):**

**Title:** *Disorganized attachment, externalizing behavior problems and self-regulation components: what is the nature of the relation between disorganized attachment and EF?*

**Authors:** Tommie Forslund\*, Matilda Frick\*, Gunilla Bohlin\*, Pehr Granqvist\*\*, Lilianne Eninger (PI correlational study)\*\*, Karin Brocki\* (PI longitudinal study).

**Affiliations:** \*Department of Psychology, Uppsala University, Sweden. \*\* Department of psychology, Stockholm University, Sweden.

**Aims:** Disorganized attachment (DA) is linked to Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and conduct problems. However, it is still an open question whether DA forms an independent pathway, or share variance with other self-regulatory components, (i.e. executive functioning [EF]/emotion regulation [ER]), to the explanation of externalizing behavior problems. Another important question regards specificity of associations, with symptom overlap being substantial.

**Method:** Typically developing children ( $n=184$ , 6-7 years) were assessed for attachment (SAT; Kaplan), EF (laboratory tasks for inhibition and working memory), ER, ADHD symptoms, and conduct problems (parental ratings).

**Results:** DA was related to ADHD and conduct problems, but did not contribute independently beyond EF and ER. DA was related to EF (i.e. inhibition).

**Discussion:** DA emerged as a nonspecific risk-factor for externalizing behavior. In line with previous research in low risk samples effects of DA might be through other factors mediating its effects (Fearon et al., 2010). Results are discussed in relation to research both indicating attachment to predict EF development, and EF deficits to predict DA, calling for research investigating direction of effects. Finally, our new longitudinal project ( $n=120$ , 10 months - 6 years) investigating child attachment and EF in relation to ADHD and general externalizing behavior problems is presented.

### **Presentation 3 (Sonja Breinholst):**

**Title:** *Is the relation between attachment insecurity and anxiety mediated by reflective functioning?*

**Authors:** Sonja Breinholst, Barbara Hoff Esbjørn, Katrine Wendelboe, Helle H. Hald, Monika Walczak

**Affiliation:** Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

**Aim:** Insecure attachment has been linked to increased levels of childhood anxiety (Brumariu & Kerns, 2010; Colonessi et al. 2011). However, it is yet unclear through which mechanisms these constructs are related. In the field of attachment theory it is hypothesized that reflective functioning, the ability to understand own and others internal lives, is a pivotal factor for self-organization and hence for a healthy psychological development (Fonagy & Target, 1997). Theoretically, insecure attachment is thought to lead to lower reflective functioning (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target 2004). The aim of this study is to examine whether reflective functioning in children mediates the association between parent-child attachment relations and childhood anxiety symptoms.

**Method:** The sample consisted of 106 children with clinical levels of anxiety. The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children was used to assess childhood anxiety (Spielberger, Edwards, Montuori & Lushene). The Friends and Family Interview was used to assess reflective functioning and attachment (Kriss, Steele, & Steele, 2012; Steele & Steele, 2005). To further assess the attachment relationship between child and parent, the Security Scale was administered (Kerns, Klepac & Cole 1996; Kerns, Aspelmeier, Gentzler & Grabill, 2001). Regression and mediational analyses were performed to explore the proportion of the variance of anxiety accounted for by attachment and reflective functioning and to examine possible indirect relations between insecure attachment and anxiety disorders in children; namely mediated through reflective functioning.

**Results:** No mediational effect of reflective functioning was found between anxiety and attachment. We found no correlation between reflective functioning and anxiety. Further, no correlation was found between attachment security to mothers and childhood anxiety. However, we did find a relation between attachment security to fathers and child anxiety. A significant difference was found between the attachment relationships displayed by the children to their mother and father, with the children being significantly more securely attached to their mother. In a subgroup of dismissive children, a correlation between reflective functioning and attachment security to both mothers and fathers was found. But no relationship between reflective functioning and anxiety was found in this subgroup. Results of the study will be presented and discussed.

## **Presentation 4 (Tommie Forslund):**

**Title:** *The Role of intelligence and Experience of Trauma and Abuse for Maternal Sensitivity in Mothers with Intellectual Disability and their children's Attachment: A Matched Comparison Study*

**Authors:** Tommie Forslund\*, Mari Fransson\*, Lydia Springer\*\*, Lene Lindberg\*\*\*, Pehr Granqvist\*\*\*\*

**Affiliations:** \*Dept of Psychology, Uppsala University, Sweden; \*\* SUF Kunskapscentrum, Sweden; \*\*\*Stockholm Public Health Care Center, Karolinska Institute, Sweden; \*\*\*\* Dept of Psychology, Stockholm University, Sweden (PI)

**Aims:** Using a matched comparison study of mothers with ID and their children, we tested whether child attachment (security/disorganization) and maternal sensitivity to child signals are predicted by maternal experiences of trauma/abuse and intelligence (maternal/child). There is no prior evidence on maternal ID in relation to child attachment and limited knowledge on these mothers' sensitivity to child signals. Further, it is important to investigate both internal and external factors affecting ID-mothers' parenting and child outcomes.

**Method:** Participants were 23 mothers diagnosed with mild ID and their children, and 25 socioeconomically matched comparison mothers/children. Mean child age was 77 months; 58% boys. Maternal experiences of trauma/abuse and child attachment were assessed with semi-structured interviews, maternal sensitivity with structured behavioral observations, child intelligence with Leiter-brief, and maternal intelligence with a subtest from WAIS-III.

**Results:** In both sub-samples, maternal intelligence was unrelated to all measures, whereas child intelligence was positively related to maternal sensitivity. Controlling for intelligence, ID mothers' experiences of trauma/abuse uniquely predicted insensitivity to child signals as well as child insecurity and disorganization.

**Conclusions:** Research and clinical practice must take into account the deleterious impact of trauma on ID mothers' capacity to give sensitive care and on their children's attachment representations.

## **Presentation 5 (Elia Psouni):**

**Title:** *Perceived pressure to conform and attachment as predictors of preadolescent internalizing symptoms: Preliminary results from a 3-year longitudinal study.*

**Authors:** Elia Psouni

**Affiliation:** Department of Psychology, Lund University, Sweden.

**Aims:** In a 3-year long longitudinal study we focused on the development of children's internalizing (anxiety related) behavior problems during transition to adolescence, considering both the child's emotional needs of the parent and the parent's thoughts and feelings about his/her relationship with the child. Important questions concern how parents' and children's states of mind with respect to attachment and caregiving interact with other features of the family environment during transition to adolescence, increasing the risk for internalizing behavior problems. Furthermore, we explore associations between attachment related thinking, reflective functioning, existing and emerging strategies for emotion regulation, and internalizing behavior symptoms.

**Methods:** After screening (N = 478) we followed 84 preadolescents and their parents for a 3-year period, collecting data including child/parent reports with the CBCL (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001), *Intolerance of Uncertainty* (IUSC, Comer et al., 2009), perceived pressure to conform (P-CONF, Psouni & Bengtsson, 2013), perceived relational support (RSI, Scholte et al., 2001), the *Emotion Questionnaire* (Rydell, Berlin & Bohlin, 2003); scripted knowledge of secure base (*Secure Base Script Test*, SBST: Psouni & Apetroaia, 2012, 2014 and ASA: Waters & Rodrigues-Doolabh, 2004), reflective functioning and state of mind with respect to attachment (*Friends and Family Interview*, FFI: Steele & Steele, 2005) and caregiving (*Parental Caregiving and Attachment Interview*, P-CAI: Bengtsson & Psouni, 2008) respectively.

**Results and Conclusions:** Only one line of results of many emerging is presented: Conformity out of fear of rejection (P-CONF) was independent of attachment and explained variance in preadolescents' symptoms both in self-reports and in parental ratings. Gender and coherence in the preadolescents' attachment representations (FFI) were not significant predictors but negative reactivity to conflict and fear of rejection (P-CONF) together captured 60% of variance in self-reported internalizing symptoms. By contrast, when based on parent ratings, gravity of symptoms was negatively predicted by preadolescents' attachment representation coherence and positively predicted by pressure to conform due to negative reactivity to conflict and fear of rejection. These results suggest that perceived pressure to conform out of fear of rejection or because of strong negative reactivity to conflict is associated with preadolescents'

internalizing symptoms beyond the contribution of their attachment representation coherence.

**Presentation on the day was changed to:**

Parent-child interactions, emotion regulation and coping during transition to adolescence.

## ***Presentations on ongoing attachment related work in the Nordic Countries***

*Chair: Elia Psouni*

*Informal presentation of ongoing clinical or research related attachment based work*

Karin Riber: “Adult Attachment Interview with traumatised refugees”, Denmark.

Katrine Grovn Nissen: “Examining the relationship between attachment style and distress in metastatic cancer patients and their caregivers: Methodological challenges and future studies”, Denmark.

Ingeborg Eikenæs: “The link between attachment and personality functioning”, Norway

Susanne Harder: “WARM-study”, Denmark.

Kerstin Neander & Katarine Furmark:” Circle of Security-P implementation in Sweden”, Sweden.

Tua Hassling: “Attachment Based Family Therapy”, Sweden.

Susanne Erikson: “Child Parent Psychotherapy for trauma”, Sweden.

Mette Væver: “Baby-lab Copenhagen”, Denmark.

# Conference Participants

1	Anders Broberg	Sweden
2	Barbara Hoff Esbjørn	Denmark
3	Heidi Jacobsen	Norway
4	Elia Psouni	Sweden
5	Elin Alfredsson	Sweden
6	Ulf Axberg	Sweden
7	Sonja Breinholst	Denmark
8	Katharina Cordes	Denmark
9	Susanne Ericson	Sweden
10	Emma Fager	Sweden
11	Tommie Forslund	Sweden
12	Matilda Frick	Sweden
13	Christina Høskuldsson	Denmark
14	Catarina Furmark	Sweden
15	Kerstin Frygner	Sweden
16	Pehr Granqvist	Sweden
17	Kathrine Grovn Nissen	Denmark
18	Sandra Gufler	Denmark
19	Helle Hald	Denmark
20	Tua Hassling	Sweden
21	Anna Håkansson	Sweden
22	Anna Johnsson	Sweden
23	Nina Olea Hovemoen	Norway
24	Camilla Overbye	Denmark
25	Karin Riber	Denmark
26	Trude Röd	Sweden
27	Anders Schiöler	Sweden
28	Johanne Smith-Nielsen	Denmark
29	Eva Tedgård	Sweden
30	Anne Tharner	Denmark
31	Øyvind Urnes	Norway
32	Mette Væver	Denmark
33	Monika Walczak	Denmark
34	Katrine Roehder	Denmark
35	Tine Kornelia Kraglund	Denmark
36	Susanne Harder	Denmark
37	Ingeborg Eikenæs	Norway
38	Katrine Wendelboe	Denmark
39	Kerstin Neander	Sweden
40	Lina Wirehag	Sweden

Tine Stenhoff	Denmark	Assisting student
Sofie Wille Østergaard	Denmark	Assisting student
Simone Kirkeskov Knudsen	Denmark	Assisting student
Christian Philips	Denmark	Assisting student