# Attachment Patterns in a Sample of South African Children at Risk in Middle Childhood

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**Abstract :** Despite the robust empirical support of attachment, advancement in the description and conceptualization of attachment has been slow and has not significantly advanced beyond the identification of attachment security or type (namely, secure, avoidant, ambivalent and disorganized). This has continued despite papers arguing for theoretical refinement in the classification of attachment presentations. For thinking and practice to advance, it is critically important that these categories and their assessment be interrogated in different contexts and across developmental age. To achieve this, a quantitative design was used with descriptive and inferential statistics, and general linear models were employed to analyze the data. The Attachment Story Completion Test (ASCT) was administered to 105 children between the ages of eight and twelve from socio-economically deprived contexts with high exposure to trauma. A staggering 93% of the children had insecure attachments (specifically, avoidant 37%, disorganized 34% and ambivalent 22%) and attachment was more complex than currently conceptualized in the attachment literature. Primary attachment did not only present as one of four discreet categories, but 70% of the sample had a complex attachment with more than one type of maternal attachment style. Attachment intensity also varied along a continuum (between 1 and 5). The findings have implications for a) research that has not considered the potential complexity of attachment or attachment intensity, b) policy to more actively support mother-infant dyads, particularly in high-risk contexts and c) question the applicability of a western conceptualization of a primary maternal attachment figure in non-western collectivist societies.
**Keywords :** attachment, children at risk, middle childhood, non-western context
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