



Children's
SOCIETY

Caring for the Future

Research Bites

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Mother-Child Bonding

Does the Caregiver Matter?

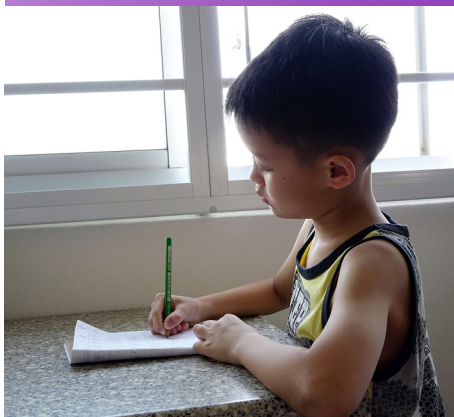
“Does having alternative caregivers affect mother-child bonding?”

Attachment is the emotional bond formed over the first year of life, that connects a child to his or her caregiver.

It is well established that this emotional bond usually develops when the mother is the primary caregiver. Studies on attachment have shown

that children who were more attached to their mothers tended to show more empathy.

Traditionally mothers have been homemakers and the primary caregivers to their children. In Singapore, this role has been changing as more mothers return to work.



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To find out, we collaborated with KK Women's & Children's Hospital and interviewed 439 first-time mothers when their babies were:

- 4 months old
- 18 months old
- 3 years old

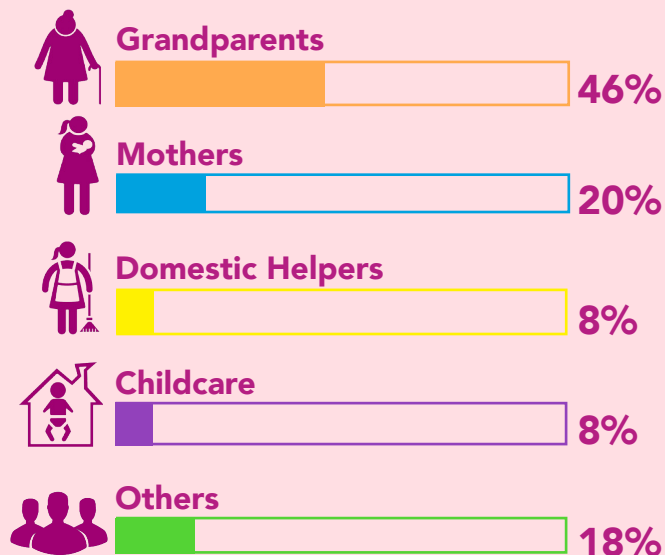


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Mother-Child Bonding — Our Findings

Main Caregivers

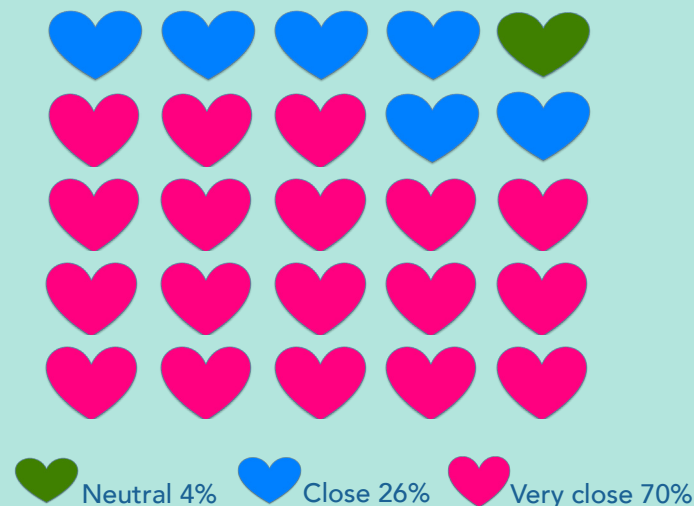
When babies were 5 to 18 months old, most were cared for by their **grandparents** or **mothers**.



Vectors designed by Piktochart

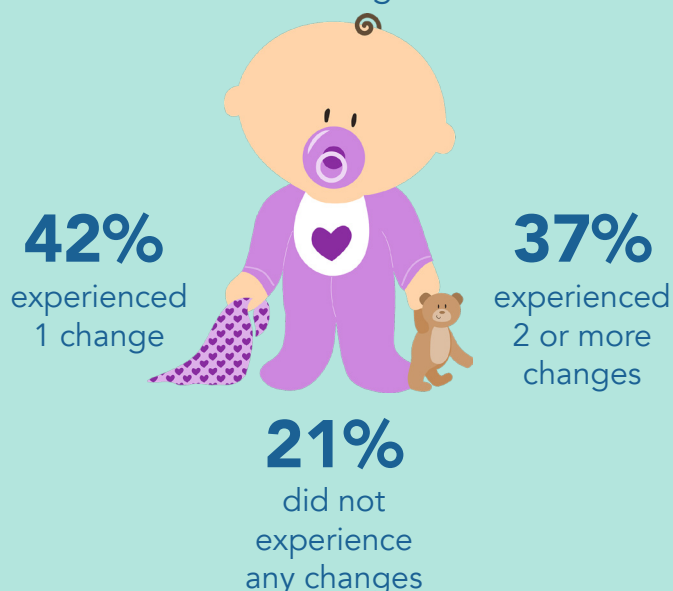
Closeness to Baby

When babies were 5 to 18 months old, mothers were asked how close they felt to their babies. Most mothers felt **very close** to their babies.



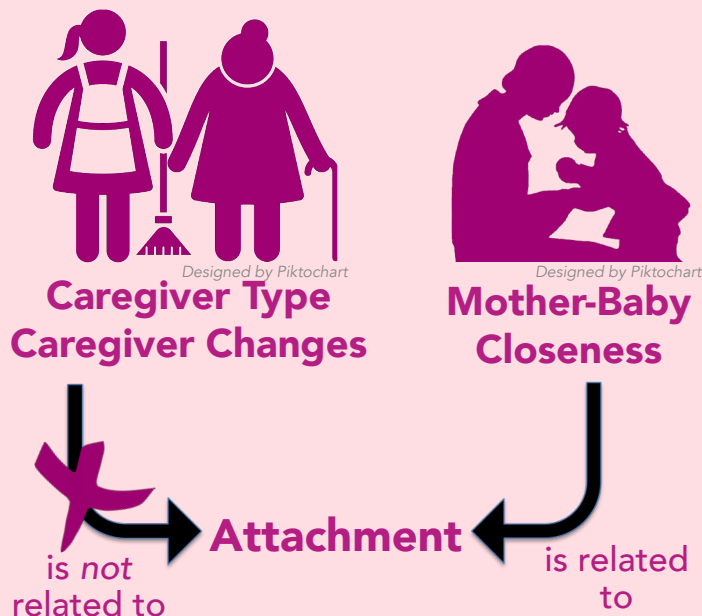
Caregiver Changes

We looked at the **number of changes** in caregivers that babies experienced between birth and 18 months of age.



Mother-Baby Attachment

We wanted to find out which **factors** influenced mother-baby attachment.



Our findings suggest that quality instead of quantity of mother-child interaction is more important in establishing attachment. Working mothers who may be concerned about their child's attachment may wish to explore ways to bond with their child.

Stay tuned for more findings in our next issue!

Are All Schools "Good" Schools?



Dear Diary,

I am taking my PSLE this year. Mum says PSLE is very important because if I don't do well, I'll go to a "gangster" secondary school. Mum wants me to go to a "good" secondary school so I'll have a better future. But my teacher says "all secondary schools are good schools". What is a "good" school anyway?

♥ Christabel

How Do Parents Feel About "Good" Secondary Schools in Singapore?

To find out, we interviewed 20 parents of primary and secondary school children in a qualitative study. Here are their responses:

Indicators of a "Good" Secondary School

Reputation

"These schools are good because they are already good, told by everybody in Singapore."

PSLE Cut-Off Score

"The ranking on the 'kiasuparents' website. And the cut-off point."

Benefits of a "Good" Secondary School

School Environment

"When I go to [a good school], I can see that it's a very safe environment...you won't see...bullies and gangs."

Academic Results

"Because they are already good schools, they know how to achieve good results. So they can guide [my child] there."

Importance of a Secondary School For the Future

Peer Influence

"Once you...step into Secondary One, you have your own mind...so of course, a good environment in school...the friends that you mix with, would be very, very important."

Educational Pathways

"In secondary school, you have to take a very major exam – the O'levels. That will ultimately determine what route they [will] take...it's either they go to JC, or Poly."

"If you go to Poly...your chances of going to local university are lower. Then you will have to go to private or overseas university, which will be expensive. So if your goal is to go to university, you have to go to JC."

Are All Schools "Good" Schools? *Continued...*



In short, parents believe that going to a "good" secondary school matters because it:

- provides a "good" or "safe" environment at a time when peers become more influential
- helps the child achieve **good results** in the O'levels (which eventually determines if the child can enter university)

Such perceptions may in turn fuel the drive to do well in the PSLE, as these quotes from parents with primary school children show:

Need for Tuition

"We realised that...because all the other students had tuition, their PSLE scores were much higher...so we had no choice but to spend the money on tuition."

Stress on the Child

"It's quite sad, because I can see [that] my [child in] P6... is drowned with homework, tuition homework, and all the past year papers ...we don't want to give them the pressure at this young age."

Lack of Focus on Character Building

"Come P5 and P6, we actually do nothing but drill PSLE. They don't have time for character building... [but] primary school is important to build their character."

"Whatever you learn in school, it may be outdated by the time you step out into the work force...but in the future economy, it is creativity, [and] the can-do spirit, that is more important."

➡ Evidently, the competition for limited places in "good" secondary schools results in certain drawbacks.

➡ Yet, how true are parents' perceptions of "good" secondary schools? Does going to a "good" school really matter for children?



We are conducting a study to examine the influence of school type on children's self-concept and aspirations. We surveyed 601 children from Primary 4 to Secondary 4, and categorised the children into 3 school types, according to the academic streams and autonomy status of the school.

Stay tuned for more findings in our next issue!

NB: All interviews were conducted before the revamp of the PSLE scoring system was announced.

Perceptions of Child Abuse & Neglect

Our Study



500

members of the public

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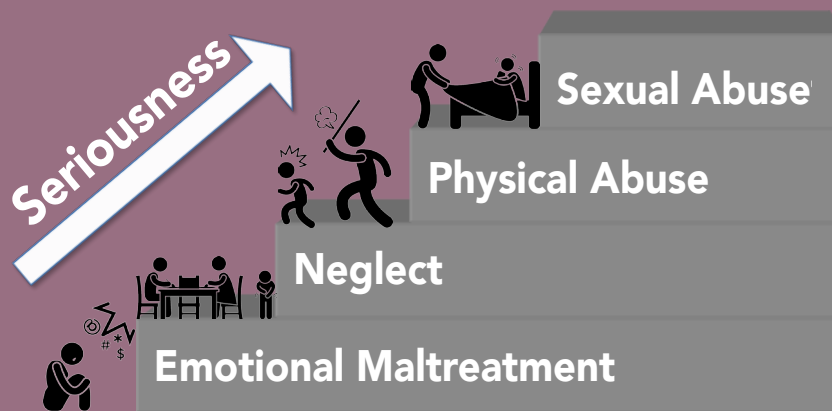
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professionals who come into contact with children

Rated 21 abuse incidents from



Abuse Types & Seriousness



Sexual abuse incidents were rated as the most serious, followed by physical abuse. Obvious harm to the child — whether physical or sexual — appears to be an important factor that helps people decide how serious an incident it is.

Context Matters!

Incidents differed in the amount of context provided — some incidents contained more background information than others. Context mattered more for physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect than for sexual abuse — incidents with more contextual information were rated as being less serious than incidents with less information provided.



Striking a child with a wooden stick



Caning a child for not excelling in exams

Key Takeaways

1 People may be judging how serious child abuse incidents are based on obvious signs of harm to the child.

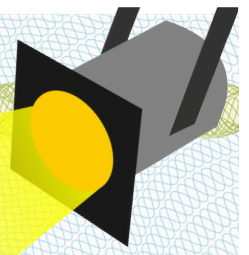
2 Though judged as being less serious, emotional maltreatment does have an impact!

3 Context affects ratings of how serious an incident is, but context matters less for sexual abuse incidents.

Spotlight!

Research Grant Recipient

Ms Cheryl Goh was a recipient of a Singapore Children's Society Research Grant in 2013. She was a Psychology student at the National University of Singapore and completed this study as her Honours thesis.

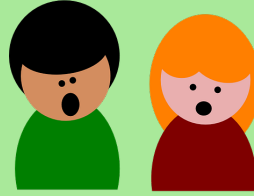


Types of Problem Behaviours in Adolescence



School / Academic

Example:
Cheating, Truancy



Peer Relationships

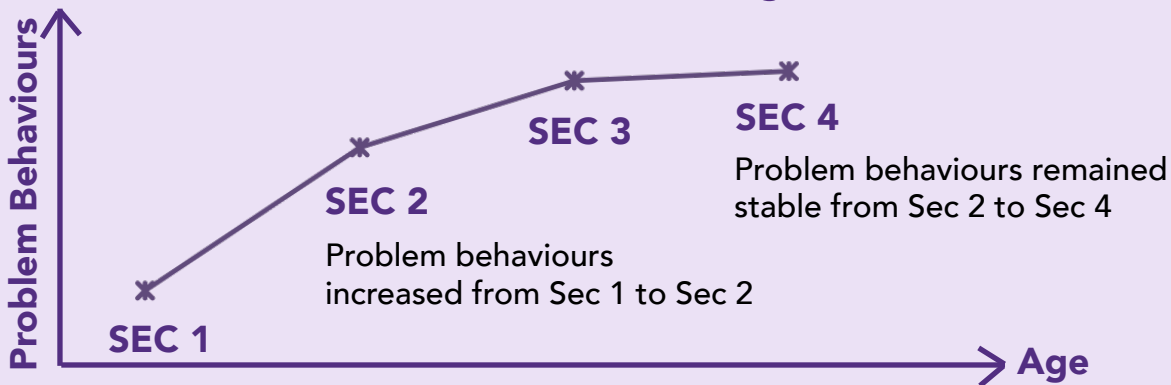
Example:
Bullying



Underage Acts

Example:
Substance Abuse

Results from 302 Secondary School students



NORMAL STREAM > **EXPRESS STREAM**

Students in Normal Stream have more problem behaviours than students in Express Stream



BOYS

Boys engage in more problem behaviours than girls



GIRLS

Adolescence is a time for...



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PEER ORIENTATION

where peers and their opinions are especially important



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INDIVIDUATION FROM PARENTS

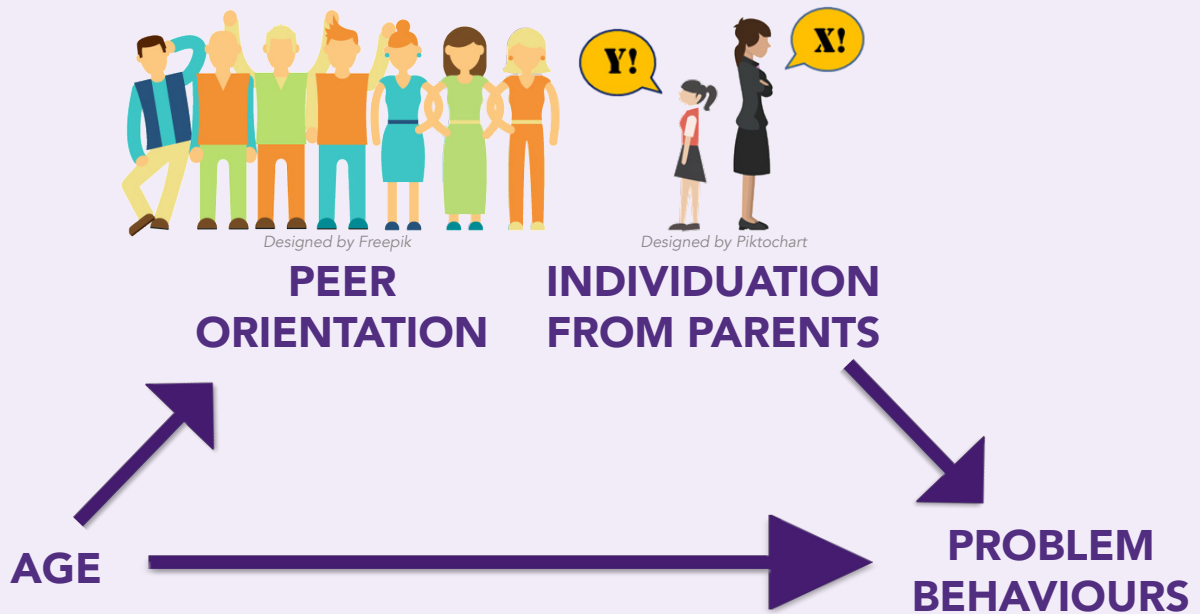
where children want to gain autonomy and independence from parents



Next Issue »

- » Easy or difficult child: What contributes to child temperament?
- » Are all schools good schools?: What children really think
- » Child abuse and neglect: Through the lens of different professions
- » When bullying goes online: What we know about cyberbullying in Singapore

Problem Behaviours Increase Over Adolescence



Older adolescents are more likely to view adolescence as:

1. a time to individuate themselves from their parents
2. a time to orientate towards peers

This in turn partially predicted an increase in problem behaviours.

Singapore Children Society's Research Grant

Since 1992, the Singapore Children's Society has awarded over 90 research grants to students conducting research related to children, youth, and families. For more information, visit <http://www.childrensociety.org.sg/research-grants>.

A Note From Our Research Chairman...



Please Welcome Research Bites!

Singapore Children's Society has been supporting research in children's welfare for many years. We published our first Research Monograph, on public perceptions of child abuse and neglect, exactly 20 years ago this year. We support research outside the Society through our research grants to students working higher degrees or honours theses, and we have our own research officers who undertake research on topics central to the Society's remit and aims, to improve the welfare of Singapore Children. We also help with programme evaluation in the Society, which is also a form of research.

Research needs to be published in technical monographs or research journals, where other researchers can replicate or extend the findings. Indeed, Singapore Children's Society is now widely recognised at home and abroad for its investment and expertise in research, which we present internationally at Conferences and in the international research literature.

However, interested readers who are not professionals, and many who are, need to be able to quickly acquaint themselves with findings and potential applications of findings. Reading monographs and research paper is demanding and takes time. We are therefore launching Research Bites. It is a new publication, which will appear every six months, aimed primarily at bringing the findings of our research to interested public and professionals and to our own Children's Society staff. We have adopted a compact, readily understandable and visually appealing format. We will use it to acquaint readers with the range of research completed and in progress, and with research related information. We aim to be accessible to any educated reader, as part of a commitment to encouraging appreciation of research as fundamental to evidence-based interventions and programmes.

I am delighted with this inaugural issue, and would like to congratulate and thank all the contributing authors, and also the editor PRO Denise Liu and our volunteer and Research Advisor Dr Tan Seok Hui for their work on the design and layout. We look forward to receiving any constructive suggestions readers may have, either with respect to how we may improve, or regarding matters that could be considered for future content.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'John Elliott'.

John Elliott,
Chair, Research Committee, Singapore Children's Society.

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