

J. Zevalkink, J.M. Riksen-Walraven & C.F.M. van Lieshout

XII. The context of mother-child interaction in two urban communities in Bandung, Indonesia

General background of the study

This research project focuses on early *mother-child interaction* in two socio-economically different Sundanese urban communities in Bandung, Indonesia. The theoretical framework of this study is Bowlby's attachment theory with maternal sensitivity as a core variable. Sensitivity will be studied in relation to characteristics of the cultural and socio-economic context of mother-child interaction, and in relation to security of attachment and competence development of the child. Three main research topics concern: (1) *the context of mother-child interaction* in two Indonesian communities; (2) *maternal sensitivity* in relation to context characteristics, and (3) *quality of the mother-child attachment relationship and children's competence* in relation to maternal sensitivity. This report describes the study in which the first research topic is examined.

The context of early mother-child interaction

Studying the context of early mother-child interaction in a non-western society may help us understand its impact on maternal sensitivity and child development. Over a number of years, Bronfenbrenner has stressed that we have to take into account the context in which human development occurs. We will use his ecological model as a way of structuring context data. The model envisages context as a set of concentric rings, each ring influencing the ring adjacent to it. The child is placed at the center of the model. Surrounding the child are: (1) *the immediate environment*, which contains all the people, physical objects, and settings with which the child has direct contact; (2) *the social context* consisting of the family social network and its economic situation, and (3) *the cultural context* which consists of beliefs, values, and guidelines for behavior that people in a particular society tend to share. In each of the three concentric rings we have identified five domains which we expect to encompass possible determinants of early mother-child interaction. These domains have been called: *family structure, education, wealth, health, and residential mobility*.

Aims

The present study aims to describe the context of early mother-child interaction by constructing ecologically meaningful variables that can be related to maternal sensitivity, attachment quality and competence development in further studies. We intend to make an intra-cultural comparison of the context of early mother-

child interaction in two socio-economically different Sundanese communities.

Method

The sample consists of 80 families with children under six years of age evenly distributed according to sex and age. Of these 80 families, 48 families belong to a community consisting mostly of families with a low socio-economic status (Loompoor), and 32 families belong to a community which contains more low-middle socio-economic status families (Sheraton). Both communities are located in the northern outskirts of Bandung, West-Java.

Developmental psychological as well as anthropological methods have been used in order to safeguard methodological validity. Data with regard to the context of early mother-child interaction were gathered by means of: (1) a 'census', yielding basic data related to the five domains; (2) local records of health registration; (3) a semi-structured interview focusing on parental values and attitudes; and (4) subscales of the HOME ('Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment') to assess the quality of the immediate environment.

Results

On conceptual grounds, measures were assigned to the five domains in each of the three contexts. Next, we performed factor analyses on these measures, separately for each domain in each context. Not all measures assigned to a particular domain in one of the contexts easily formed one single variable. In all but four

instances factor analysis resulted in a one-factor solution. The resulting 19 factor scores constitute the context-variables. The pattern of intercorrelations of the context-variables shows that family's education, wealth, and health are interrelated and relatively independent of family structure and mobility. Families in Loompoor had parents that more often had been remarried, were more mobile, and more often came from a village instead of an urban area than families in Sheraton.

Conclusions

Families in Loompoor were less educated, less wealthy, less occupied with preventive health care, and more mobile than families in Sheraton. We can conclude that the context of mother-child interaction contains more stressful conditions in Loompoor as compared to Sheraton, which may have a negative impact on the quality of parenting in these low SES families. For example, low SES parents have less opportunities to foster their child's development because of their relatively restricted physical conditions as compared to low-middle SES parents. Furthermore, the stress of remarriage may have a negative impact upon the quality of parenting in the Loompoor families, just as their relatively great mobility and their poorer nutritional and preventive health status. Developmental research has shown that support from social networks may buffer against the negative effects of stress in parenting. The extended family, for example, could be a source of support for the families in Loompoor. The two SES groups, however, did not differ on the extensiveness

of the family. Thus, there is no reason to believe that social support compensates for poverty in the Loompoor low SES families. Similarly, relatives of low SES families can contribute less informational support because they have a lower level of education than relatives of low-middle SES families.

Although our study only deals with the context of parenting in one culture in Indonesia, our results may provide insights into the impact of context-variables on the quality of parenting in other cultures as well. The impact of context-variables on early mother-child interaction in Indonesia will be shown in a next study.

