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## **SECURE BASE SCRIPT ATTACHMENT REPRESENTATIONS AND BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The security of a child's attachment to a caregiver is a critical component of a child's early development. This study examined correlations between children's attachment security and their behavioral issues, and how these varied between low-risk and high-risk groups of children. Participants included children around the age of 10 years and their caregivers. Participants were recruited from the Philadelphia area, and consisted of two groups: 92 high-risk children who had involvement with Child Protective Services (CPS) and 66 low-risk children recruited from the same community without CPS involvement. Children were assessed via the Middle Childhood Attachment Script Assessment (ASA), a storytelling measure looking at attachment security by evaluating the child's knowledge of the secure base script. Children's behavioral issues were measured using the Childhood Behavioral Checklist (CBCL), which assessed children's emotional and behavioral problems, and the Emotion Regulation Checklist (ERC), which assessed children's emotion regulation abilities. Both measures were collected via parent reports.

I hypothesized that higher ratings of attachment security would be associated with lower levels of behavioral problems for both low-risk and high-risk groups of children. I tested the correlation between secure base script knowledge and behavioral issues for the whole sample, then separately for both groups. There were no significant correlations between the secure base script scores and the CBCL or the ERC when these analyses were run for the entire sample. The low-risk group did not exhibit any significant associations between secure base script knowledge and behavioral issues. The high-risk group exhibited a significant negative association between secure base script knowledge and the Emotion Regulation scale of the ERC, meaning that lower secure base script knowledge scores were associated with better emotion regulation.

By looking at the relationship between attachment security and behavioral issues we can better understand why attachment plays a critical role in healthy development of children in the early stages of life. The main outcome of this study is a better understanding of how attachment relates to behavior and how this can affect children throughout their lifespan. Children who suffer from abuse and neglect may be more likely to have less attachment towards their caregiver and this can lead to behavioral or health issues later on in life. Future research may enable a better understanding of why such populations are prone to facing these difficulties.