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Childhood temporary separation: long-term effects of the British evacuation of children during World War 2 on older adults' attachment styles.

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Abstract

This study investigates **long-term effects** on adult attachment due to temporary childhood separation as a result of the **British evacuation of children** during World War 2. A total of 859 respondents, aged 62-72 years, were recruited who had childhood homes in the county of Kent during the war. Of these, 770 had been evacuated and 89 remained at home and formed a non-evacuated control group. They participated in this retrospective survey of possible associations between childhood experiences of the **evacuation**, early upbringing, and later life-course variables, with adult attachment style assessed by the Relationship Questionnaire (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Reflecting the wartime concerns of Bowlby, male and female respondents evacuated between the ages of 4 and 6 years showed low incidences in secure attachment style of 38% and 27%, compared to those not evacuated at 64% and 44%, respectively, with a corresponding increase in the fearful category. The quality of care received during **evacuation** and the frequency of parental visits were also found to be significantly associated with attachment style for female respondents. Irrespective of experience of **evacuation**, both male and female respondents who reported poor home nurture showed a similar low incidence of secure attachment of 23% compared to those from homes with good quality care of 45% and 43%, respectively, with concomitant increases in proportions in the dismissing category for males and the fearful category for females. The clinical implications of the study are briefly discussed.

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