

## **Attachment-related memory biases: The role of attachment expectations.**

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### **Abstract**

**Introduction:** Attachment theory states that attachment experiences are stored in a mental model, which has been shown to function as a cognitive schema. Although research shows that attachment schemas influence attentional processing, less is known about the influence on memory processes. Following attachment theory, and similar to findings concerning depression-related memory biases, one can expect to find a more negative memory bias in insecurely compared to securely attached children. Therefore the current study examined whether children's attachment representations are linked with a negative mother-related memory bias.

**Method:** Fifty general population children (aged 10 – 12) completed the Trust scale of the People In My Life Questionnaire, the Child Depression Inventory and an adapted version of the Self-Referent-Encoding-Task in which they had to decide whether a set of words was descriptive for the relationship with their mother instead of self-descriptive, followed by a recall task in which memory bias was computed as the difference between the proportion of positive versus the proportion of negative recalled mother-referent words.

**Results:** Both depression and trust in the availability of mother were related to memory bias, with higher depression and lower trust scores being linked with a more negative memory bias. However, the effect of depression disappeared when controlling for trust, although vice versa the effect of trust became even stronger when controlling for the effect of depression. Finally, a significant interaction effect was found, showing that the effect of trust on mother-related memory biases is more pronounced in low depressive than in high depressive children.

**Discussion:** These findings confirm the hypothesis that cognitive attachment schemas influence attachment-related memory biases. Furthermore, this study shows the importance of considering the influence of attachment in the development of depression and related cognitive phenomena, advocating a more pronounced focus on attachment relationships in existing prevention and treatment techniques.

### **Suits within the following research lines:**

Depression literature