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Understanding childhood trauma with The Child Attachment and Play Assessment: evidence from a physiological perspective.

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Topic: Research

This PhD research project investigates the utility of The Child Attachment and Play Assessment (CAPA) as an assessment tool for childhood trauma. CAPA follows the narrative story stem procedure which traditionally focuses on attachment strategies. Current project collected data from both community samples and referrals from Social Care services. The participants are children between the ages of 3 and 8 years, with no known learning disabilities. Data on the children's attachment strategies, presence of unresolved trauma, trauma and care history, auditory language proficiency, and results of a psychometric trauma symptom checklist was collected. Additionally, the children's heart rates were monitored during the CAPA, and their saliva samples were collected to provide further information on their physiological arousal, both at the time of assessment and on a baseline day.

It is hoped that the project can provide evidence that CAPA can be reliably used as a trauma assessment tool as well as attachment assessment. The physiological measures could also shed light on how trauma manifests in the context of different attachment strategies.

How it used the DMM

The CAPA was developed with DMM as its major theory basis. DMM theory is the underpinning principle to the analysis of the result in this project to understand how trauma can alter children's physiological states in both short term and long term, to explain the links between behavioural traits and attachment strategies, as well as the seemingly non-strategic elements.

What it can contribute to the DMM

It is the goal of the project to add to the evidence in DMM related research and practice regarding younger population. The physiological elements of the project will extend the understanding of how altered arousal states can influence neurological development and thus attachment behaviours.