

Hedwig van Bakel

In the thesis entitled 'Infants and their parents: development in a social context' 129 infants and their primary caregiver were observed in various settings and situations. The thesis has yielded new and interesting findings regarding infant and parent relationships. First of all, the thesis offers new and both theoretically and practical relevant knowledge about the determinants of parenting and infant development. The thesis was the first study to confirm Belsky's (1984) model of the determinants of parenting with infants, by showing that parental, contextual, and child characteristics each explain significant and unique portions of the variance in the observed quality of parenting. In general, the thesis underscores the need of good quality infant-parent interactions in order to promote a secure infant-parent attachment relationship. Skillful and consistent support of the parent can broaden the infant's sense that the parent will be able to serve as a secure base in any and all situations. Especially in the face of perceived threat, infants need to rely on a parent who serves as a source of reassurance and enhanced confidence. This latter fact clearly emerged from the present thesis by the finding that a secure relationship with the parent buffers or protects infants from anomalous levels of physiological stress.