

STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP AND CHILDREN'S ATTACHMENT – IS THERE A CONNECTION?

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Abstract

The period of early childhood and experience in the relationship with a parent or another close person who takes care of the child during the first years of life has a key role in the development of the individual. According to the attachment theory, the quality of care in early childhood is the basis for the formation of attachment behaviour. Attachment is characterized by specific child behaviour, such as seeking closeness to an attachment figure when upset or afraid of something. The concept of attachment was initially applied to describe the emotional bond between a newborn and his/her mother, but over the years of research, it has expanded to include the understanding of individual behaviour throughout the lifespan. Accordingly, the development of attachment must inevitably be observed in the context of relationships with others: parents, siblings, extended family members, friends, neighbours, early childhood educators, primary school teachers, and coaches. In addition, the educational context is very challenging when it comes to the development of attachment, especially in the transition periods, and also the discovery and creation of new relationships with others in the educational context. Therefore, the focus of this work is on the analysis of the development of attachment behavioural patterns in children of early and preschool age, the development of their relationships with early childhood educators, and the possibility of predicting the quality of these relationships based on the developed attachment behavioural patterns of children. In view of this, in five randomly selected kindergartens in the city of Rijeka Croatia, 17 educators agreed to cooperate with the aim of evaluating the attachment behaviour of children from their educational groups and also evaluating their relationship with them. Pianta's Student-teacher relationship scale was used to assess the relationship with children, and an adapted subscale from Golding's Observation Checklist was used to assess the Attachment behaviours of children. Within the student-teacher relationship's exploration, two aspects were measured: closeness and conflict between early childhood educators and children. In addition, within the children's attachment behaviour four aspects were measured: children's separation from caregivers, their behaviours with familiar adults, their behaviours with unfamiliar adults and their behaviours when experiencing minor hurts. Overall, 226 children (118 boys, 108 girls) of average age $M=5.2$ ($SD=1.03$) were evaluated by their early childhood educators, with previously acquired permits in cooperation with kindergartens' management. Same as in previous studies, closeness was evaluated higher than conflict, and all types of attachment behaviours were rated as moderate. This was also expected since lower and higher levels in attachment behaviours evaluation lead to certain types of unsecured and non-adequate attachment behavioural patterns. Finally, correlation and regression analyses revealed that difficulty of work and the dependent type of interaction with familiar adults present significant predictors of closeness and conflict in the relationship between early childhood educators and children. The results were discussed in the frame of providing institutional support for children's attachment development and at the same time enhancing the early childhood educators' competencies in developing a positive relationship with children.

Keywords: Attachment, children, early childhood educators, student-teacher relationship.

1 INTRODUCTION

Drawing from contextual theoretical models of child development, such as Bronfenbrenner's model of ecological systems [1], and contemporary Ecological-Dynamic model of transition [2], reciprocal relationships are key to the quality of children's development as well as to the quality of the transitions of all important people in children's lives and their relationships with children. Considering all types of relationships in which a child develops and taking into account the institutional context of growing up, relationships with educators are extremely important ([3], [4]). In addition to relationships with parents and family relationships in which a child grows up, relationships with educators represent one of the first relationships with other adults in a child's life, and they have a number of other meanings. First of all, new learning situations and models of other adults who are significantly involved in children's learning

and development process influence children's development on multiple levels and in multiple directions, reflecting their complexity [5], which has been recognized by previous theoretical models. First, the aforementioned situations have a significant impact on children's overall social-emotional development and well-being [6], and thus on the development of attachment, as well as on the social-emotional competencies that children acquire through the development of relationships with other adults. It is fully understandable that a warm, close, and caring relationship between children and adults, first parents and then other adults, is critical for their optimal social-emotional development, well-being, and competencies. At the same time, this is a fundamental prerequisite for the development of a secure attachment pattern and for good transitions and adaptations in new situations ([7], [8], [9]). In addition, the figure of the educator is of great importance, as he/she is the model with whom the child establishes a new relationship and in which he/she develops his/her attachment, since he/she, in a way, takes the place of the parents during the child's stay in the kindergarten. Previous research has shown that the development of socio-emotional competencies, as well as the development of a secure attachment, are extremely important for children's mental health and that it is crucial to invest in their empowerment from early childhood ([10], [11]). According to attachment theory [12], the quality of care in early childhood is the foundation for the formation of attachment behaviors. Attachment is characterized by specific child behaviors, such as seeking closeness with a caregiver when upset or afraid of something. In addition, the educational context poses a major challenge to attachment development, especially during transitional periods and when discovering and creating new relationships with others in the educational context. With this in mind, it is of utmost importance to conduct the research that focuses on examining the relationship between attachment development in children and their relationship with educators.

1.1 Development of children's attachment and their relationship with early childhood educators

Attachment represents the basic human need for a close and familiar relationship between children and parents [13]). According to the APA dictionary, attachment presents "the emotional bond between a human infant or a young nonhuman animal and its parent figure or caregiver; it is developed as a step in establishing a feeling of security and demonstrated by calmness while in the parent's or caregiver's presence" [14]. Security, as its Latin root *-sine cura* would suggest, means "without care" or "without anxiety" [15, p.2]. Although they began their scientific work separately, Ainsworth and Bowlby [15] jointly developed an attachment theory that is an ethological approach to personality development. Their scientific contribution to the understanding of attachment development is enormous. Bowlby's theoretical framework of attachment as the child's bond with the mother, which can be disrupted by deprivation or separation, and Ainsworth's methodological contribution, which was highly innovative and reliable, provide a good foundation for today's understanding of attachment [16]. In addition, Ainsworth postulated and developed two important concepts in the study of attachment behavior: a) a concept of the attachment figure as a secure base for the child from which to explore his or her environment, and a concept of maternal sensitivity to the child's needs, which should be recognized and met during attachment development. Attachment theory thus provides the theoretical framework for understanding the initial relationships between children and caregivers (and other adults). It also explains the impact these relationships have on the child. Early attachment experiences have strong short- and long-term effects on the child's development. Previously established attachment patterns (secure, insecure-avoidant, insecure-ambivalent, and disorganized) develop in the situations in which caregivers respond to the child [17]. There are two main situations for caregiver responses to a child as a caregiver: a) when a child seeks support during play or exploration; and b) when he or she demonstrates attachment needs resulting from negative emotions such as fear, discomfort, or anxiety. Most children show a secure pattern of attachment behavior during childhood [18], and studies focus on the small number of children who show one of the insecure patterns so that caregivers and children can be supported regarding their socio-emotional development and well-being. "The concept of a secure base is one of the central concepts in attachment theory. When we talk about a safe base, we talk about the conditions that the figure of affective attachment creates so that the child (or some other person related to him) feels safe enough to explore new spaces, roles or relationships" [19, p. 364]. One of the key factors that impedes the development of healthy communication, relationship, and attachment, and thus the child's successful adjustment, is parental stress. Stress in the family leads to problems in the child's behavior and in the quality of the relationship between parent and child, which is a crucial factor in the child's life and adaptation process [4]. In contrast, positive attitudes towards new and unfamiliar life situations, such as transitional situations, represent a protective factor for the child's successful adjustment. "*Habits and attitudes that the child adopts at home will also be transferred to the nursery or kindergarten*" [20, p.211]. The more protective factors present in a family, the greater the guarantee of successful adjustment for

children during transitional periods. Goossens & Ijzendoorn's [21] research clearly showed that although educators work with more than one child in the group and these children have developed different attachment patterns in relation to their parents, they are able to provide a secure attachment figure for the children and establish a secure bond with the children in their group.

In the research of Cakić & Marjanovič-Umek [22], it is also stated that many studies have been conducted with the aim of testing the assumption that a developed secure attachment in children can be a predictor of better adjustment. According to the authors, a positive parent-child relationship represents "the strongest effect of secure attachment" [22, p.6]. Children who are found to have secure attachments with their mothers are found to be more joyful and indulgent and less unhappy and aggressive compared to children with insecure attachments. Their mothers are more empathetic and more likely to support and help their children and to encourage their children's positive behaviors. The secure attachment is the foundation for cooperation, acquisition of a value system, and socialization, and if there is no harmony in relationships, then there is no positive contribution of secure attachment. Children with a strong secure attachment pattern show more curiosity, confidence, and independence and tend to be flexible and competent in adulthood. In contrast to children with secure attachment, children with a distinct insecure attachment pattern may have difficulty forming relationships with others. They find it difficult to develop trust, have difficulty fitting in, and are shy and irritable. The influence of a child's temperament can vary, and if it has a negative effect, flexible parenting could mitigate it. This is possible if the parents are willing to adapt their behavior to the child's needs. In interacting with the parent with whom the anxiety arises, the child builds a model of trust. The child's expectation that the parent will provide protection and be there for him when he needs it reinforces and enables the sense of security that the child needs to explore his environment and acquire new skills.

As mentioned earlier, the role of the caregiver is critical to the child's well-being [23] and thus to socio-emotional well-being and attachment development. As parents are the primary "attachment figure," the educator is a secondary or alternative attachment figure [24]. It is important for the child to develop a positive image of the kindergarten itself during the adjustment process. This manifests itself primarily in the relationship with the educator, which should be close and friendly in order to generate trust in the child toward her/ him and thus a sense of security in the kindergarten. It is important that the educator is available to the child and responds to his or her needs so that the child perceives the educator as a trustworthy person who will make it easier for him or her to settle into the nursery, kindergarten or school.

Analyses of the transition from family to kindergarten from the perspective of attachment theory point to several important aspects [19]: (a) the possibility of early prediction of individual differences in child adjustment based on the quality of the mother-child relationship; (b) an answer to the question of transfer of attachment from the mother to the kindergarten teacher; (c) compensation of the harmful effects of an insecure relationship with the mother by a secure relationship with a kindergarten teacher; (d) the ability of a child at an early age to establish multiple relationships; (e) reorganization of the hierarchy of figures and methods of quality support for kindergarten teachers and kindergartens as institutions essential for the creation of secure relationships. Being in kindergarten allows for experiential learning in new situations, which expands the number of figures to which the child is attached to review the mental model of self and others, depending on the quality of interaction provided in the new environment [25]. Because of the innate adaptive mechanism of affective attachment, the child has the ability to change his patterns based on new figures. As the kindergarten teacher potentially becomes a figure with whom the child bonds, the child is provided with a learned secure base from which to explore, learn, and participate in various activities. On this basis, it is quite understandable that the process of building an emotional attachment to educators is very similar to the process of building an emotional attachment to the mother in the context of attachment development. It has been found that the longer children are exposed to continuous interaction with others over an extended period of time, the greater the chance of building a strong emotional attachment based on repeated interactions with people who care about them [21]. Howes [26] asserts that children with certain emotional difficulties are able to reorganize their attachment representations when they encounter caregivers who are sensitive to their needs or establish independent relationships based on experiences with new caregivers. The pattern created with the primary caregiver is relatively stable, as working models incorporate new information into existing schemas rather than change the assumed schemas [27]. However, to be malleable, the pattern must be plastic. For this reason, children can develop secure relationships with educators despite insecure relationships with parents [21]. Children who use educators as a secure base for exploring the environment (kindergarten) and new relationships (peer group, relationships with authority), i.e. children with developed secure attachment, are more interested and empathetic towards their peers, are involved in their peers' activities for longer and show greater autonomy and desire to succeed compared to children who felt insecure with their caregivers early on (i.e. children with insecure attachment) [28].

Based on these findings, it is evident that close relationships with educators are associated with secure attachment patterns in children, which is also expected in this study. Therefore, it is extremely important to analyze the development of attachment in children and their relationships with educators in the educational context, in as much detail as possible.

2 RESEARCH AIM, RESEARCH TASKS AND HYPOTHESES

Thus, the focus of this paper is to analyze the development of attachment behavior patterns in early childhood and preschool children, the development of their relationships with educators, and the possibility of predicting the quality of these relationships based on the children's developed attachment behavior patterns. Within the framework of this research objective, three research tasks can be identified: (a) analyzing the level of specific attachment behaviors in children (separation-reunion, interaction with familiar adults, interaction with unfamiliar adults, experiencing minor hurts) and their relationship with educators (closeness and conflict); (b) analyzing the correlation between attachment behaviors in children (separation-reunion, interaction with familiar adults, interaction with unfamiliar adults, experiencing minor hurts) and their relationship with educators (closeness and conflict); and c) to analyze the predictive power of children's attachment behaviors (separation-reunion, interaction with familiar adults, interaction with unfamiliar adults, experiencing minor hurts) for their relationship with educators (closeness and conflict). In light of the theoretical models of attachment development and the student-teacher relationship presented, it is expected that all attachment behaviors will be moderately expressed as representing secure attachment patterns, high levels of closeness, and low levels of conflict in the student-teacher relationship. In addition, it is expected that there will be significant correlations between closeness and secure attachment behaviors, and vice versa for the conflict dimensions and attachment behaviors. In this regard, it is expected that a significant predictive role of attachment behavior will be found for the closeness and conflict dimensions.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

Regarding the research aim, 17 kindergarten teachers (all female) in five randomly selected kindergartens in the Croatian city of Rijeka agreed to collaborate in order to assess the attachment behaviour of children from their educational groups and also their relationship with them. The average age of the educators is $M=46.9$ years ($SD =8.72$) and ranges from 32 to 59 years. Their average work experience is $M=23.34$ years ($SD =10.58$) and ranges from 9 to 36 years of work experience. A total of 226 children (118 boys, 108 girls) with an average age of $M=5.2$ ($SD =1.03$), aged 3 to 8 years, were assessed by their kindergarten teachers with previously acquired permits in collaboration with the management of the kindergarten. Due to the already existing cooperation with a certain number of kindergartens in the city of Rijeka within an ongoing university project, five randomly selected kindergartens were included in this research.

3.2 Measures & Procedure

Pianta's Student-Teacher Relationship Scale [29] was used to assess the relationship with children, and an adapted subscale of Golding's [17] Observation Checklist was used to assess children's attachment behaviours. Two aspects were measured when examining the relationship between educator and child: Closeness and conflict between educator and child. Educators rated their closeness (7 items) and conflict (8 items) with the children in their groups using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1=definitely does not apply to 5=definitely applies) on 15 items, in total. The original validated study in Croatia [30] showed high and satisfactory reliability scores confirmed by original studies [29], which was also found in this study for closeness ($\alpha=.83$) and for conflict ($\alpha=.84$).

A subscale from Golding's [17] Observation Checklist was used to assess children's attachment behaviours, with four aspects measured: children's separation from their attachment figures and reunion, their behaviours toward familiar adults, their behaviours toward unfamiliar adults, and their behaviours when experiencing minor hurts. Golding et al. [17] constructed a scale as a tool for practitioners in structured observation of children in early years with the goal of better understanding children's needs, particularly for children with developed insecure attachment patterns. In the observation protocol, the items are located on the left and right sides ($N = 15$). The items should be rated in terms of children's frequency of behaviour using a two-point scale on the left side (from -

2=almost always to -1=sometimes) and similarly on the right side (from 2=almost always to 1=sometimes). The avoidant attachment pattern is rated on the right side, and the ambivalent attachment pattern is rated on the left side. If a child's behaviour is rated as the behaviour of a child of the same age or developmental level, an educator should choose zero in the middle of the protocol, reflecting the secure attachment pattern. However, for the purposes of this study, the scales were recoded into a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 on the left, through the middle as 3, and 5 on the right). Reliability values ranged from .43 to .83, which should be considered when analyzing the results.

After the kindergarten directors, the kindergarten teachers, and the parents of the observed children gave their consent, the study was conducted with anonymity and confidentiality. Thus, only the kindergarten teachers knew the identity of the children they were assessing, and they used codes that they created for each child. The researchers of this study did not have any information about the identity of the children. Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 22 software for descriptive, correlation, and regression analyses.

4 RESULTS

Given the relatively small sample size (especially in terms of the number of early childhood educators) and with the aim of more precise calculations that come closer to the principle of representativeness, the bootstrapping method with a confidence interval of 95% was applied before each of the analyses. In addition, the results obtained could be pursued in the context of the three research tasks formulated previously.

4.1 Descriptive parameters of student-teacher relationship and attachment behaviours in children

The descriptive analysis conducted with the aim of determining basic descriptive parameters estimated by early childhood educators: a) for student-teacher relationship: closeness and conflict, and b) for the children's attachment behaviour at: Separation-Reunion, Interaction with Familiar Adults, Interaction with Unfamiliar Adults, Experiencing Minor Hurts, showed the expected results. In Table 1, high levels of closeness and low levels of conflict were found within the student-teacher relationship, which confirmed previous studies ([4], [29], [30], [31]). In addition, studies by Jerome, Hamre, and Pianta [32] and Choi and Dobbs-Oates [33], which examined the student-teacher relationship in kindergarten and school, found that the greatest closeness was present at the kindergarten age, confirming the high level of closeness found in this study. These findings are extremely satisfying given the importance of the quality of the student-teacher relationship, which is critical to both short-term positive effects on children's well-being and long-term effects. In other words, the educators who participated in this study seem to be aware of the importance of a good relationship with children and show that they are able to achieve it, which is extremely important since early relationships largely determine the child's development and success later in life ([34], [35]). As can be seen in Table 1, all types of attachment behaviours were classified as moderate. In other words, the majority of children were rated in the medium range of the rating scale, implying secure attachment behaviour in four different situations, namely, separation from and reunion with parents, interaction with familiar adults, interaction with unfamiliar adults, and experiencing minor hurts. This finding was also expected, as lower and higher levels in attachment behaviour assessment lead to certain types of unsecured and inadequate attachment behaviour patterns, i.e., avoidant and ambivalent, which were also found to have very low frequencies in previous studies ([36], [18]). Therefore, in this study, most children were rated by their educators as "like any other child of the same age" in terms of their attachment behaviour in four different situations. The educators rated very few children as self-reliant (not seeming to need their caregiver or the adult in the setting), anxious to please, or unusually compliant, which could describe an avoidant attachment pattern. They also rated a very small number of children as clingy, attention-needing and more emotionally demanding, which is descriptive of an ambivalent attachment pattern.

Table 1. Descriptive parameters (Means, Standard Deviations and Ranges) of student-teacher relationship variables (closeness and conflict), children's attachment behaviours (separation-reunion, interaction with familiar adults, interaction with unfamiliar adults, experiencing minor hurts)

Variables		M	SD	Range
Students-teacher relationship	Closeness	4.28	.64	2.14-5
	Conflict	1.6	.65	1-4
Attachment behaviours	Separation-reunion	3.03	.52	1-5
	Interaction with familiar adults	2.97	.42	1.6-4.4
	Interaction with unfamiliar adults	2.99	.42	1.25-4.75
	Experiencing minor hurts	3	.62	1-5

4.2 Correlations between student-teacher relationship and attachment behaviours in children

Table 2 shows the results of the correlation analysis of the variables of student-teacher relationship (closeness and conflict), children's attachment behaviour (separation-reunion, interaction with familiar adults, interaction with unfamiliar adults, experiencing minor hurts) and socio-demographic variables (age, gender, difficulty of work, and work experience).

Table 2. Pearson's correlation coefficients with significance levels between student-teacher relationship variables (closeness and conflict), children's attachment behaviours (separation-reunion, interaction with familiar adults, interaction with unfamiliar adults, experiencing minor hurts) and socio-demographic variables (age, gender, difficulty of work and work experience)

Variables	Closeness	Conflict
Conflict	-.447**	
Separation-reunion	-.099	.033
Interaction with familiar adults	-.214**	-.174*
Interaction with unfamiliar adults	-.149*	-.097
Experiencing minor hurts	-.217**	.053
Children's gender	.358**	-.326**
Children's age	.085	-.063
Difficulty of work	.563**	-.656**
Educators' age	.095	-.210*
Educators' work experience	.093	-.254**

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Previous studies found a negative, high, and significant relationship between closeness and conflict ([4],[29],[30],[31]), which was also confirmed in this study. Regarding the relation between student-teacher relationship and children's attachment behaviours it was found that all children's attachment behaviours (except for behaviours during separation from the caregiver or reunion) were negatively significantly related to closeness within the student-teacher relationship. In other words, high levels of closeness are significantly related to high levels of ambivalent attachment patterns (clingy, attention-needing and emotional-demanding) during with familiar and unfamiliar adults and when experiencing minor hurts. Interestingly, the same negative significant correlation is also found for high ambivalent attachment patterns and high conflict. Thus, in the situations where they interact with familiar adults, early childhood educators simultaneously rate high levels of closeness and conflict with the children who show high levels of ambivalent attachment behaviour. Although this result may seem unexpected, it is understandable. After all, an educator could have a very close relationship with a child who is very clingy and in need of attention, but at the same time this could be very demanding, leading to conflict in the student-teacher relationship. Especially in educational situations where there are about 20 children in a

group and the educator has to respond to each child who needs a lot of attention, this can lead to conflicts in the relationship.

Table 3. Results of hierarchical regression analysis of student-teacher relationship (closeness and conflict) as criterion variables and children's attachment behaviours (separation-reunion, interaction with familiar adults, interaction with unfamiliar adults, experiencing minor hurts) (Model 1) and socio-demographic variables (Model 2) as predictors

		Predictors' variables	B	Beta	R R ² ΔR ²	F change (df)
Closeness as criterion variable	Model 1	Constant	5.379		.259**	3.379** (4, 188)
		Separation-reunion	.061	.049	.067**	
		Interaction with familiar adults	-.217	-.141	.047**	
		Interaction with unfamiliar adults	-.033	-.022		
		Experiencing minor hurts	-.183*	-.178*		
	Model 2	Constant	4.092		.649***	22.358*** (5, 183)
		Separation-reunion	.039	.031	.421***	
		Interaction with familiar adults	-.349**	-.227**	.392***	
		Interaction with unfamiliar adults	-.033	-.022		
		Experiencing minor hurts	-.079	-.077		
Children's gender		.255**	.198**			
Children's age		.026	.042			
Difficulty of work		.303***	.492***			
Educators' age		-.013	-.170			
Educators' work experience	.013	.215				
Conflict as criterion variable	Model 1	Constant	2.157		.227*	2.556* (4, 188)
		Separation-reunion	.053	.042	.052*	
		Interaction with familiar adults	-.405**	-.262**	.031*	
		Interaction with unfamiliar adults	.040	.026		
		Experiencing minor hurts	.140	.135		
	Model 2	Constant	1.766		.736***	39.163*** (5, 183)
		Separation-reunion	.054	.043	.542***	
		Interaction with familiar adults	-.182	-.118	.519***	
		Interaction with unfamiliar adults	-.035	-.023		
		Experiencing minor hurts	.009	.009		
		Children's gender	-.131	-.101		
		Children's age	-.012	-.019		
		Difficulty of work	-.380***	-.612***		
		Educators' age	.083***	1.121***		
Educators' work experience	-.076***	-1.247***				

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

4.3 Predictive role of attachment behaviours in children for student-teacher relationship

Finally, the regression analyzes revealed that difficulty of work and dependent type of interaction with familiar adults were significant predictors of both closeness and conflict in the educator-child relationship (Table 3), although there are some differences in the models that emerge for the two dimensions of the student-teacher relationship, so they are analyzed separately. Regarding closeness as a criterion variable, both main effects are significant: in Model 1, only attachment behavior explains 7% of the total variance; in Model 2, attachment behavior together with sociodemographic variables explains a much

larger proportion of the variance in closeness, 42%. In Model 1, the significant predictor of closeness proved to be children's attachment behavior when experiencing minor injuries (with an individual contribution of 2%), whereas in model 2, children's attachment behavior when interacting with familiar adults, children's gender, and difficulty of work proved to be significant predictors, with individual predictions as follows: 4%, 5%, and 25%, respectively. As for the highest correlation between closeness and difficulty of work, the individual contribution of this variable is understandable. In other words, easier work with children predicts higher levels of closeness with children in the educational group. In addition, greater dependence (ambivalent attachment pattern) of the child and a female gender of the child could make the strongest prediction of higher closeness. Analysis of significant predictors of conflict also shows (Table 3) that in Model 1, only attachment behavior explained 5% of the total variance; in Model 2, attachment behavior, together with sociodemographic variables, explained a much larger proportion of the variance in closeness, 54%. Again, in Model 1, attachment behavior in interaction with familiar adults was found to make a significant individual contribution to explaining 4% of the total variance. Higher levels of ambivalent attachment patterns and attention-seeking behaviors in children strongly predicted higher levels of conflict between educators and children in kindergarten. In Model 2, attachment behavior did not show significant predictive power. On the other hand, job difficulty (39%), educator age (11%), and educator work experience (13%) showed significant individual contributions in explaining the overall variance in conflict. Thus, if the job is rated as difficult, the educator is young, and has less working experience, this strongly predicts the higher level of conflict in the educator group between educators and children.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained should be analyzed in the context of institutional support for children's attachment development and, at the same time, strengthening educators' competencies in developing a positive relationship with children. In terms of institutional support, attention should be focused on training future educators to develop close relationships with children on the one hand, and on the other hand, to shape them in a way that allows children to develop more independent attachment behaviors and have less conflict with children. In addition, the results confirmed previous findings about children's gender as a significant predictor in the student-teacher relationship, which should be thoroughly considered in future studies and has implications for educational policy and discourse about the profession of female educators. Finally, future studies should focus on qualitative research of the reasons for the difficulty of working in kindergarten, as this has been shown to be the strongest predictor of both closeness and conflict in the student-teacher relationship. Finally, the results obtained should be considered with some research limitations in mind: the small sample of kindergarten teachers and the low reliability of the subscale for children's attachment behavior in situations of separation and reunion.

Attachment informed practice is one of the scientifically proven ways to ensure a high-quality, individualized approach to children, especially those who come from families and other environments that carry the risk of less quality care or even traumas in early childhood ([17], [37], [38], [39]). The attachment theory has significantly contributed to the interest in the effects of the early experiences (in primary caregiving) on the relationship with the teacher, mainly on the child's ability to rely on the teacher and learn and develop with his support ([17], [39]). Aversive early experiences of care may actually create vulnerability for generally lower-quality relationships that disrupt development, learning, reaching educational goals, lifelong competencies, participation in the community ([38], [39], [40]), but they also significantly contribute to the more pronounced professional stress of teachers ([41], [42]).

That is why attachment informed practice in the educational system looks for capacities and the best way to provide support for the development of educators' responsiveness and quality relationships with children. This is the interest of adults who work with children, but above all- children with aversive early childhood experiences. Attachment informed practice has strong foundation in evidence related to the effects of early experiences on the quality of the child's relationship with the teacher, but also to the moderating role of the quality of the teacher-child relationship for the child's attachment security and capacities for close relationships, and finally evidence on the importance of reflective practice and building capacities for teachers' responsiveness as the basis for quality practice in working with children ([43], [44]). The first step is analyzing teacher-child relationship from the attachment perspective, and understanding the teacher's role in the context of care and provision of secure base and safe haven for the child.

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