

The Impact Mechanism of Parenting Emotional Response Strategies on the Social Emotional Abilities of Infants and Young Children: Empirical Research Based on Chenzhou City

Qingwei Qiao

Xiangnan Preschool Education College, Chenzhou, Hunan, 423000, China

ABSTRACT

This study explores the current development status of social emotional abilities in infants and young children aged 12-30 months and its relationship with the response styles of caregivers, providing a scientific basis for optimizing the social emotional development of infants and young children. A questionnaire survey was conducted on 130 caregivers of infants and young children aged 12-30 months in Chenzhou City, using the "12-36 month old children's emotional and social assessment scale" and the "caregiver's emotional response assessment scale for infants and young children". The results showed that the total score of infants' social emotional ability was (82.52 ± 13.12) , and the total score of caregivers' emotional response was (25.58 ± 4.95) , both significantly higher than the theoretical mean ($P < 0.01$). Early childhood care experience showed better overall scores in compliance, empathy, and social emotions compared to infants and young children who were not only children ($P < 0.05$); The educational background (with a bachelor's degree being the best) and age (with 24-30 months being the best) of caregivers have a significant positive impact on their social and emotional abilities ($P < 0.05$); The physical contact response, emotional guidance, and atmosphere creation of caregivers can positively predict the social emotional ability of infants and young children ($\beta = 0.27, 0.26, R^2 = 0.23, P < 0.01$). The research suggests building a "family early care community" linkage support system and conducting hierarchical parenting skills training to enhance the social and emotional development level of infants and young children.

KEYWORDS

Infants and young children; Social emotional ability; Parenting response

1 Introduction

In recent years, the cultivation of social and emotional abilities in infants and young children has received increasing attention. Social emotional competence is not only regarded as a core competitive ability in the 21st century, but also an important component of children's core literacy development^[1]. This ability refers to the adaptive behavior exhibited by an individual in a social context that is consistent with their psychological age^[2]. Its core structure covers dimensions such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, and prosocial behavior, and extends to areas such as attention control, motivation for excellence, and prosocial peer interaction^[3-4]. According to the social emotional assessment of infants and young children in 6 cities including Kunshan, Jiangsu Province, China, the detection rate of problems in one city was 24.8%, while in another city it was 24.6%^[5-6]. In contrast, social and emotional problems among infants and young children in poverty-stricken rural areas are more prominent. The detection rate of infants and young children in the Qinba mountainous area is as high as 44.2%, significantly higher than the urban sample^[7]. Longitudinal studies further reveal that delayed early social emotional development can lead to academic disorders, increased mental health risks, and is significantly associated with antisocial behavior in adulthood^[8-10]. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to attach great importance to and increase investment in the development of children's social and emotional abilities.

Based on Bronfenbrenner's ecosystem theory^[11], the family, as the core microsystem shaping the development of infants and young children, deeply influences children's social emotional trajectory through the "emotion behavior" feedback mechanism in daily interactions. Research has confirmed that the richness of family language input, the quality of emotional guidance strategies, and the frequency of physical contact all have significant predictive effects on children's later social and emotional development^[12-13]. The aim of this study is to explore the current status of social and emotional abilities in infants and young children, and analyze their relationship with caregivers' response styles, in order to provide a basis for improving the level of social and emotional development in infants and young children.

2 Object and method

2.1 Research object

A survey was conducted on 150 caregivers of infants and young children aged 12-30 months in Chenzhou City. A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed, and 130 valid questionnaires were collected, with an effective rate of 91.55%. In the sample, there were 72 boys (55.38%) and 58 girls (44.62%); 28 people aged 12-17 months (21.54%), 22 people aged 18-23 months (16.92%), and 80 people aged 24-30 months (61.54%); 58 only children (44.62%) and 72 non only children

(55.38%); 33 people (25.39%) have received early education services, while 97 people (74.61%) have not received early education services; The main caregivers are 26 grandparents (20.00%), 6 maternal grandparents (4.62%), and 98 parents (75.38%).

2.2 Research tools

2.2.1 "Emotional and social assessment scale for children aged 12-36 months"

This scale was developed by Yale University and Boston University's School of Psychology, and revised by Dr. Zhang Jianrui from Huazhong University of Science and Technology. It includes 35 items, including six dimensions: compliance (7 items), attention (5 items), imitation or gaming (6 items), motivation for excellence (6 items), empathy (7 items), and prosocial peer relationships (4 items); Adopting a 3-level scoring system, higher scores indicate stronger social and emotional abilities. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the original scale is 0.88, and the correlation coefficients between each factor and the total score are between 0.73-0.85^[14]. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of the total measurement scale is 0.95, and the Cronbach alpha coefficients of each dimension of the scale are between 0.85 and 0.90.

2.2.2 "Assessment scale for emotional response of nurturers to infants and young children"

This scale was developed with reference to the World Health Organization's definition of "responsive care"^[15] and China's "Guidelines for Health Care of Infants and Young Children Under 3 Years of Age (Trial)". Evaluate the ways in which caregivers respond to infants and young children's emotions from three dimensions: physical contact, language communication, emotional guidance, and atmosphere creation. Covering 8 evaluation items: 1. How often do you comfort infants and young children by kissing, caressing, hugging, etc. when they show sadness, fear, or anger? When infants and young children are curious about new things or activities, how often do you pay attention to their curiosity and guide exploration through companionship and interaction? How often do you actively create a positive and relaxed atmosphere to promote emotional adjustment and development in infants and young children when they experience negative emotions such as sadness, anxiety, and fear? Waiting for the topic. Each item is evaluated on a scale of 0-3, with higher scores indicating more sufficient emotional response. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of the total measurement scale is 0.95.

2.3 Material collection

Distribute questionnaires through the Wenjuanxing platform, use standardized guidance language, organize caregivers to fill out through channels such as early childhood care institution teachers and parent communities, and conduct quality control checks to ensure data validity. The test takes about 15 minutes.

2.4 Statistical analysis

SPSS 22.0 was used for independent sample t-test, one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation analysis, and regression analysis, with a test level set at $\alpha=0.05$ (two-sided).

3 Research results

3.1 The overall status of social emotional abilities and emotional responses of caregivers in infants and young children

The average scores of various dimensions and total scores of social emotional abilities are as follows: compliance (15.82 ± 3.38), attention (11.57 ± 2.55), imitation or gaming (15.03 ± 2.87), pursuit motivation (14.76 ± 2.42), empathy (16.15 ± 3.59), prosocial peer relationships (9.19 ± 2.11), and total score (82.52 ± 13.12). The average scores of each dimension and total score of parenting emotional response are as follows: physical contact response (6.39 ± 1.27), language response (9.72 ± 2.05), emotional guidance and atmosphere creation (9.47 ± 1.94), and total score (25.58 ± 4.95). In terms of scores, both the social emotional ability of infants and young children and the emotional response of caregivers are higher than the theoretical mean. Among them, the theoretical mean of social emotional ability is 70.0 points ($t=10.89$, $P<0.01$); The theoretical mean of emotional response in infants and young children is 12.0 points ($t=31.31$, $P<0.01$).

3.2 Differences in social and emotional abilities of infants and young children in early childhood care experience, whether they are only children, age, and educational background of caregivers

The t-test results comparing the differences in social and emotional abilities among infants and young children who have experienced early childhood care and are only children show that the compliance (16.85 ± 2.55), empathy (17.27 ± 3.08), and social and emotional abilities (86.70 ± 10.31) of infants and young children who have been to early childhood care institutions are significantly higher than those who have not (15.46 ± 3.56), (15.77 ± 3.68), and (81.10 ± 13.70), with a

t-factor of 2.42, $P=0.02$; $t_2=2.10$, $P=0.04$; $t_3=2.15$, $P=0.03$ 。 The pursuit motivation of only children (14.24 ± 2.52) was significantly lower than that of non only children (15.18 ± 2.27), $t=-2.23$, $P=0.03$ 。

Comparison of differences in social emotional abilities among infants and young children of different ages and caregivers with different educational backgrounds. The results of the variance test showed that there were significant differences in the total score of social emotional abilities among children of different ages and caregivers with different educational backgrounds, $F(2, 127) = 11.85$, $P < 0.05$; $F(4, 127) = 3.41$, $P < 0.05$ 。 Subsequently, further multiple comparisons will be conducted. Post hoc comparison (LSD) showed that infants and young children aged 24-30 months had the best development of social and emotional abilities, followed by those aged 18-23 months and 12-17 months ($P < 0.01$); The development of social and emotional abilities in infants and young children with a bachelor's degree is the best among caregivers, followed by those with high school, graduate school, primary school or below, and junior high school degrees ($P < 0.01$).

3.3 Correlation analysis between emotional response and social emotional competence in infants and young children

The correlation analysis results showed that the dimensions and total scores of emotional response were significantly positively correlated with the dimensions and total scores of social emotional ability (r values were 0.23-0.48, P values were all < 0.01).

Table 1 The correlation coefficient (r value, $n=130$)

variable	compliance	attention	Imitation or gaming	Motivation for excellence	empathize	Pro social peer relationships	Social emotional competenceTotal score
Physical contact response	0.35**	0.41**	0.43**	0.38**	0.34**	0.26**	0.47**
Language response	0.36**	0.39**	0.32**	0.40**	0.29**	0.25**	0.43**
Emotional guidance and atmosphere creation	0.36**	0.40**	0.40**	0.47**	0.31**	0.23**	0.47**
Total score of emotional response	0.39**	0.42**	0.40**	0.45**	0.33**	0.26**	0.48**

** $P < 0.01$

3.4 Regression analysis of emotional responses of caregivers and social emotional abilities of infants and young children

In order to further explore the relationship between caregiver emotional response and infant social emotional ability, social emotional ability was used as the dependent variable, and physical contact response emotional emotion, emotional guidance and atmosphere creation, and verbal response emotional emotion were used as independent variables. Stepwise entry method was used to conduct multiple linear regression analysis (see Table 2). The results showed that Model 2 explained the largest variation and established a good regression equation. The adjusted R^2 value of Model 2 is 0.23, indicating that physical contact response to emotional emotions, emotional guidance, and atmosphere creation can positively predict the social emotional ability of infants and young children. These two variables together can explain 23% of the variation in the social emotional ability of infants and young children.

Table 2 Multiple regression analysis of emotional response and social emotional competence in infants and young children (Reg.)

Predictive variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	β	t	β	t
Physical contact responds to emotions and feelings	0.47	6.00**	0.27	2.21*
Emotional guidance and atmosphere creation			0.26	2.15*
R^2	0.21		0.25	
Adjusted R^2	0.21		0.23	
F	35.75**		20.68**	

** $P < 0.01$

4 Discussion

4.1 The influence of early childhood care experience and only child status on the social and emotional abilities of infants and young children

This study found that the social and emotional abilities of infants and young children are at an above average level, which is consistent with the findings of Smith et al. (2020). Early childhood care experience has a significant promoting effect on the social and emotional abilities of infants and young children, especially in the dimensions of compliance and

empathy. This is mainly attributed to the unique environment and educational guidance of early childhood care institutions: firstly, early childhood care institutions provide natural and social learning scenarios through structured peer interaction environments, such as group games, cooperative tasks, etc. Children can practice skills such as conflict resolution, emotion recognition, and expression under the guidance of teachers, complementing the single parent-child interaction mode of the family; Secondly, early childhood care institutions promote children's understanding and internalization of rules through daily norms and positive reinforcement strategies, while the lack of consistency in rule implementation in families may weaken the effectiveness of compliance cultivation; Thirdly, collective living enables children to frequently observe their peers' emotional reactions, and teachers guide children to understand emotional causality through "emotional dialogue", similar to the experience of non only children in the family. In addition, only children have a disadvantage in terms of "pursuit motivation" compared to non only children, which is related to the singularity of family interaction patterns. The strategic behavior formed by non only children in resource competition promotes their development of stronger goal orientation.

4.2 The influence of parenting education and infant age on social and emotional abilities

This study found that the social and emotional abilities of infants and young children significantly improve with age, mainly due to the development of cognitive and language abilities. Due to limited cognitive abilities, infants and young children aged 12-17 months mainly rely on nonverbal ways to express emotions, and social interaction is in its early stages. At the age of 18-23 months, they begin to recognize and express basic emotions, and have a strong interest in social activities. By the age of 24-30 months, cognitive abilities have significantly improved, enabling clear expression of complex emotions through language, understanding of others' emotions, and enhancing social skills through imaginative games, promoting the development of social emotional abilities. The study also found that there are differences in the effectiveness of parenting education in cultivating social and emotional abilities in infants and young children. Undergraduate degree caregivers perform the best, possibly because they possess knowledge of child development and do not experience parenting anxiety due to excessive specialization. In contrast, the performance of graduate education caregivers is relatively weak, possibly due to insufficient time investment and excessive reliance on theory, neglecting the immediate needs of infants and young children. Low educated groups need to pay attention to their implicit disadvantages, namely insufficient response skills, and their socioeconomic status may indirectly affect children's development by restricting access to resources (such as community support services).

4.3 The correlation and predictability between parental emotional response and social emotional abilities of infants and young children

Relevant analysis shows that the three dimensions of caregiver emotional response (physical contact, language response, emotional guidance, and atmosphere creation) are significantly positively correlated with the social emotional ability of infants and young children, which is consistent with the research conclusions of Yu Haiyan, Xu Yuying, and others^[16]. This indicates that positive emotional responses play a crucial role in the development of social emotional abilities in infants and young children. Physical contact, as the most fundamental form of communication, not only conveys care but also enhances the sense of security of infants and young children, thereby promoting their compliance, attention, and imitation abilities in social interactions. Language response helps infants and young children understand and express emotions, enhancing their social and emotional management abilities. Emotional guidance and atmosphere creation are equally important. By creating a positive emotional atmosphere, caregivers can guide infants and young children to handle emotions correctly, enhance their emotional regulation and social adaptation abilities.

Regression analysis showed that in the emotional response of caregivers, physical contact ($\beta=0.27$, $P<0.01$) and emotional guidance and atmosphere creation ($\beta=0.26$, $P<0.01$) were included in the prediction model, which had a significant positive predictive effect on the social emotional ability of infants and young children. The combination of the two explained 23% of the variation ($R^2=0.23$, $F=20.68$, $P<0.01$). Although there is a significant positive correlation between language response and the total score of social emotional ability ($r=0.43$, $P<0.01$), it did not reach statistical significance in the regression model. This suggests that nonverbal interaction and environmental guidance may have more predictive value than simple language input.

5 Educational inspiration

The development of social and emotional abilities in infants and young children is influenced by multiple factors, and a multi-party collaborative cultivation system needs to be established. Firstly, social and emotional abilities can be incorporated into the core goals of early education. Based on the "Guidelines for Health Care of Infants and Young Children under 3 Years Old (Trial)", a monitoring network of "family early care medical care" can be established in the community, and standardized screening tools can be used to achieve early identification and intervention of

development problems. Secondly, implement hierarchical training for caregivers' response skills: design practical courses on "situational simulation instant feedback" for low education groups; Develop a "de anxiety" parenting guide for highly educated parents to alleviate excessive intervention tendencies. Finally, implement differentiated support strategies: build community peer interaction platforms for only child families and organize cross month social activities every month; Provide conflict resolution skills guidance for non only child families to avoid emotional problems caused by competition. Through the above methods, a solid foundation will be laid for the comprehensive development of social and emotional abilities in infants and young children, and their healthy growth will be assisted.

Funding

This article is a phased research result of the "14th Five Year Plan" for Education Science in Hunan Province in 2024, titled "Research on Strategies for Nurturing Effective Responses to the Emotions and Emotions of Infants and Young Children" (No: ND248165); This article is the research result of the 2023 Hunan Early Education Research Association project "Research on Parenting Response Strategies for Emotional and Emotional Cultivation of Infants and Young Children" (NO: 23SHEE07).

About the Author

Qingwei Qiao, master's degree, lecturer, research direction: child psychological development.

References

- [1] Huang Zhongjing Social and Emotional Abilities: Key Factors Influencing Success and Happiness [J]. Global Education Outlook, 2020, 49 (6): 102-112.
- [2] Li Xueying, Li Yangzhuo The relationship between father's emotional expression and infant's social emotional ability: the moderating effect of infant temperament [J]. Research on Preschool Education, 2018, (04): 28-39.
- [3] Carter A S, Briggs-Gowan M J, Jones S M, et al. The Infant-Toddler Social and Emotional Assessment (ITSEA): Factor Structure, Reliability, and Validity [J]. Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 2003, 31(5): 495-514.
- [4] Clinton J, Feller A F, Williams R C. The importance of infant mental health [J]. Paediatrics & Child Health, 2016(5): 239.
- [5] Song Jia, Zhang Dan, Li Jing, etc A study on the correlation between family upbringing environment and social and emotional problems of young children in Jiangsu Province [J]. Chinese Journal of Children's Health, 2016, 2 (3): 256-259.
- [6] Lu Ping, Yu Qian, Han Xia, etc Analysis of the current situation of early social and emotional problems in infants and young children in Kunshan City [J]. Modern Preventive Medicine, 2018, 45 (18): 3320-3332.
- [7] Li Shanshan, Wang Boya, Chen Peng, etc Empirical Study on the Development and Impact Analysis of Social Emotions in Infants and Young Children in Impoverished Rural Areas of China [J]. Journal of East China Normal University (Education Science Edition), 2019, 37 (3): 33-46.
- [8] Darling-Churchill K. E., & Lippman L. Early childhood social and emotional development: Advancing the field of measurement [J]. Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 2016, 45: 1-7.
- [9] Martinsone B., Supe I., Stokenberga I., et al.. Social emotional competence, learning outcomes, emotional and behavioral difficulties of preschool children: Parent and teacher evaluations. [J]. Frontiers in Psychology, 2022, 12: 760-782.
- [10] Jones D E, Greenberg M, Crowley M. Early Social-Emotional Functioning and Public Health: The Relationship Between Kindergarten Social Competence and Future Wellness [J]. American Journal of Public Health, 2015, 105(11): 2283-2290.
- [11] Urie Bronfenbrenner. The Ecology of Human Development [M]. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1981.
- [12] Xu Yuying, Guo Chenming, Mei Fangxuan, etc Research on the correlation between family upbringing environment and children's social and emotional abilities [J]. Chinese Journal of Children's Health, 2024, 32 (05): 559-565.
- [13] Sansavini A, Zavagli V, Guarini A, et al. Dyadic co-regulation, affective intensity and infants development at 12 months: A comparison among extremely preterm and full-term dyads [J]. Infant Behav Dev, 2015, 40: 29-40.
- [14] Zhang Jianduan Revised Study on the Emotional and Social Assessment Scale for Children Aged 12-36 Months [D]. Huazhong University of Science and Technology, 2008.
- [15] World Health Organization, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Bank Group. Nurturing care for early childhood development: A framework for helping children survive and thrive to transform health and human potential [R]. Geneva: WHO, 2018.
- [16] Yu Haiyan, Wang Ruiling, Zheng Shuo, etc The mediating role of responsive care in the relationship between maternal reflective function and young children's social and emotional abilities [J]. Chinese Journal of Children's Health, 2024, 32 (12): 1294-1299.