

# Attachment in the lives of troubled kids An effective concept to explain violence?

Paper in progress

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# The Presentation

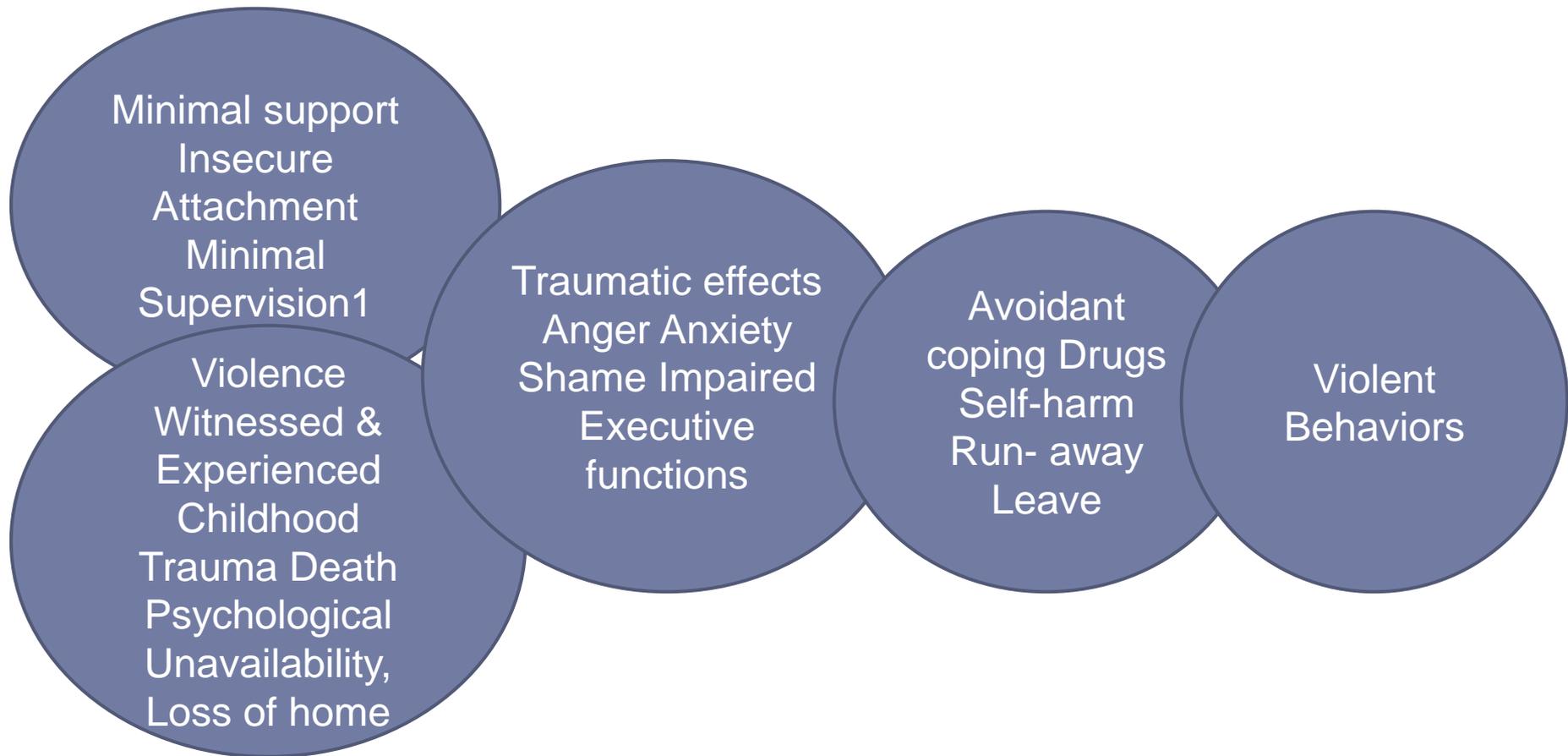
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- ▶ Background / Inspiration: Ryder's theory of the Link between Attachment and Violence (2014) and Bronfenbrenner's ecological – social interactive perspective
- ▶ The Main Study
- ▶ The sub-study: Linking attachment and troubled kids own violence offending
- ▶ Some Results
- ▶ Conclusion

# The Link: Attachment and Violence - Ryder's theoretical model model (female violence)

(2014)

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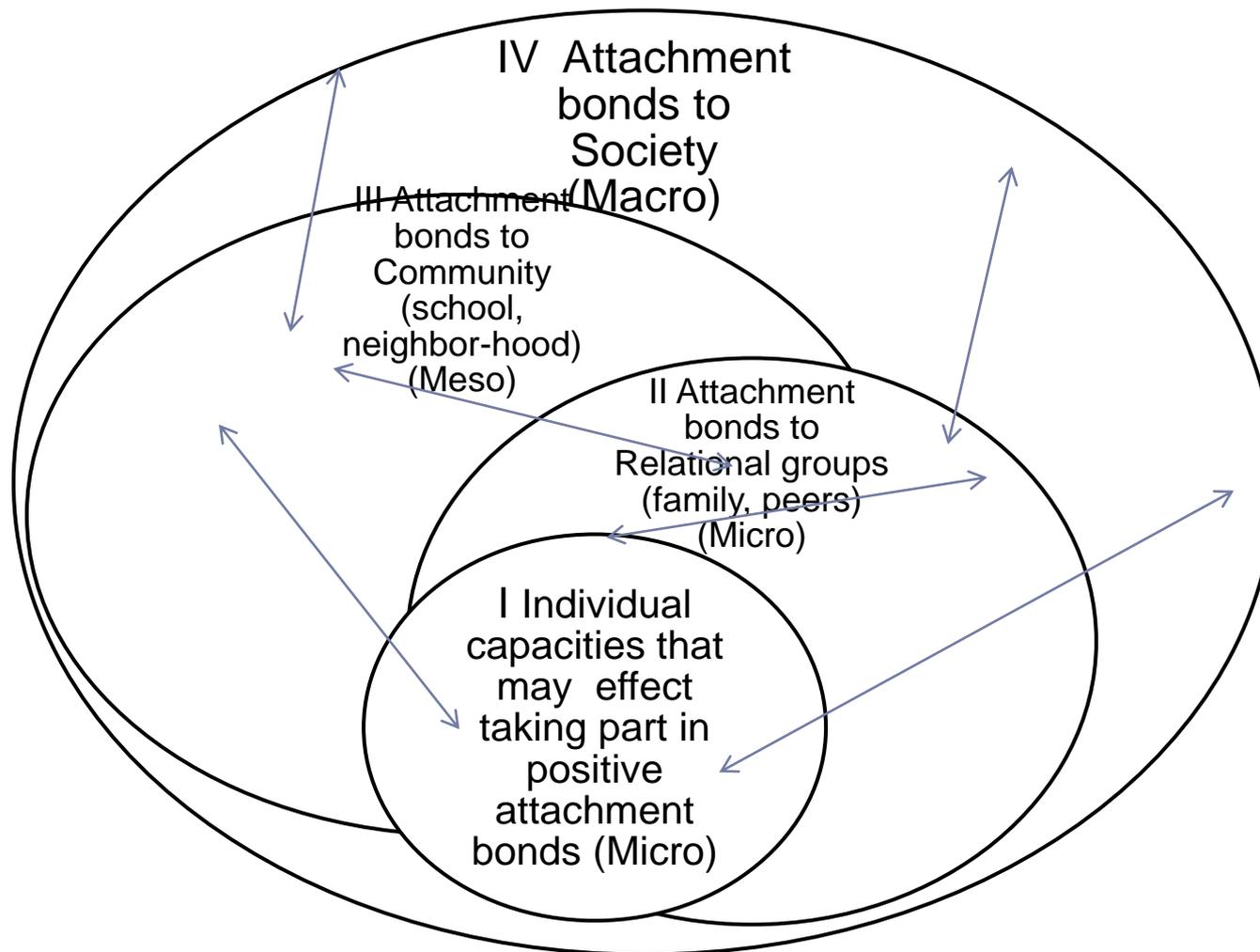


# . Attachment bonds at different levels

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- ▶ Most researchers focus on attachment bonds within primary groups (near family and caretakers) at young age. Aversive attachment bonds are viewed as the basic bonds with longstanding effects, on unhealthy emotions, later problematic relations and behavior (Ainsworth).
- ▶ Families and individual's attachment to school, are also crucial, but not focused in mainstream research as an independent factor. Weak bonds to school may represent a risk factor for later crime (Farrington et al). Weak attachment to and exclusion from mainstream group- and society bonds may create marginalization and fare to be fetched up and included in troubled groups, as gangs and extreme ideological/religious groups (e.g Rudd). Attending and being attached such groups may escalate violence (e.g Thornberry, Grathwohl)
- ▶ Attachment bonds are effected by the individual's own participating in the relations. Some individuals bring with them vulnerable states that may interfere with attachment bonds in negative/aversive direction
- ▶ We therefore include that it is necessary to analysis of other levels than family level, and focus on attachment bonds to broader groups,
- ▶ 4 schools, local community, and leisure time activity as well as micro individual level, to study if violence is linked to attachment bonds

# The link between attachment and violence at four levels. Inspired form Bronfenbrenner



# The Link between aversive attachment bond and later violence: Risk factors situated in the attachment bonds at different levels

1. Minimal support (1-IV)
2. Insecure attachment bonds /or strong harmful bonds related to sanctions for not following rules and love an affection when following (1- IV)
3. Minimal supervision /or aversive supervision (1- IV)
4. Violence witnessed and experienced (I -IV)
5. Childhood trauma /group trauma (I – IV)
6. Death (I – VI)
7. Psychological unavailability (I-IV)
8. Loss of home or exclusion (I-IV)
9. Neuro- physiology vulnerability, intense temperament, weak impulse- control (I)

# The Main study: Youngsters out of control – Pathways to Violence – Design and Methods

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Design: **Target** and Control group, a follow-up of a small group 4 years after first T

- ▶ Retrospective Life-course qualitative deep-interview, longing from 10 to 30 hours.

## Methods /Instruments

- ▶ **Semi-structured guide**, Content analysis of Archival journals, Some observations, Interviews with some experts who have been working with the youngsters
- ▶ Evaluation instrument on aggression: SORC aggressive assessment
- ▶ Karolinska Scale of Personality

# The sub study sample: The Target group - The troubled kids – linking attachment and violent offending

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- ▶ 35s: Adolescents, 32 live in Childcare housings, placed by a special court for demanded treatment. 3 live at home, one of them moving to Childcare housing during the period of the interview
- ▶ Sex: 22 boys, 13 girls
- ▶ Age: 13 – 20 years (average 17 yrs)
  
- ▶ Background: 1/3 (14s) from minority groups: South- and East Europe, Asia, Africa and traditional Norwegian minority groups
  
- ▶ Social Economic Background: A variety of social groups are represented, except higher academic. Some overrepresentation of people on social security (caused by mental illness and drugproblems)
  
- ▶ Most are school-drop-outs and have a problematic substance-use pattern. All have a defined violence problem

# Manifestations of Disrupted Attachment-bonds (Ryder, 2014)

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## I Primary caregivers, secondary others and social bonds

- ▶ Break-ups and Chaos
- ▶ Presence of Traumatic experiences
- ▶ Violent and neglecting relations with caregivers, primary and secondary others
- ▶ Disrupting social climate in the family and with secondary others
- ▶ No one to talk to with their problems

The Ryder Hypothesis

Violence is a product of a cluster of disrupted attachment-bonds

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# Results

Tracing experiences of the Attachment bonds through the kids upbringing.

Do the youngsters have a disrupting attachment bond pattern in accordance with Ryder's model?

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# 1. Attachment bonds - Primary caregivers

## Break-ups and Chaos within family and between places

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1. **Stability:** *Some very few.* They live with both biological parents who do not separate, and do not experience break ups related to family break ups or moving. In their teens they are compulsory placed to a home for treatment of antisocial behavior (evaluated as a danger to themselves and/or others)
2. **Internal family instability and chaos:** *The main pattern.* Most of the kids have experienced multiple caregivers and chaotic family relations: Mother most often main caregiver, but often experienced 6-8 different step-fathers or step-mothers and up to 8 - 10 half- and stepsiblings. Often they do not remember them or know their names. Often they have not been in touch with biological father (or mother) for years.
3. **External family instability attachment bonds related to physical moving:** *The main pattern:* Most have been Moving between multiple caregivers: Biological and step-caregivers, foster-parents and institutional caregivers

Conclusion: According to Ryder: T- kid's attachment-bonds in the family (level I) may indicate possible risk of developing later violence

## 2 Attachment-Break-ups – Places

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### Attachment Break-ups - Places

1. **Stability:** *Some very few* live with both biological parents and have moved just one or two times within their local community or between towns – Their schools and peer-groups have been stable. Peer-group break-ups happened when the kids start or join gangs, usually when they are 13-14 years of age. Then they move from mostly safe peer attachment bonds to averse
2. **Instability:** Most of them have experienced many break-ups through moving, at the most 15 times before reaching 16 years of age. They have lived about one year on each place. Each time they have had to change local community, schools and peer-groups
3. Two of the kids have broken out / been thrown out of their home. One live with one friend after another, the other live as homeless

Conclusion: Acc.t. Ryder: For most of the Troubled kid's attachment-bonds to places /moving often break and indicate possible risk of developing later violence

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# Conclusions external attachments

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- ▶ The youngsters have experienced a chaotic and unsafe situation with many break-ups related to
  - ▶ Primary family
  - ▶ Foster- and institutional care
  - ▶ Local communities
  - ▶ Schools
  - ▶ Peers
- ▶ According to Ryder: This pattern will put them into a vulnerable and risky situation for later external and/or internal violent development



# Attachment Quality Primary bonds



# 1 Parenting Styles: Healthy or disrupting bonds?

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## Upbringing - styles

1. Protecting styles: Most of them report caregiving–styles not able to protect children:
  1. Several have experienced a laissez-faire, often inconsequent upbringing-style. Caregivers have not been engaged in protecting their child from harm ,often because they are drugged. The child has been allowed to go everywhere, to be with everyone. They have not been protected from severe media violence. Some are left alone at home from early years. Some have to take care of younger siblings for longer periods
  2. A strict authoritarian /power-oriented upbringing-style that trigger off revolt. These bonds make them seek equal kids, joining or starting gangs and troubled groups
  
2. Disrupting styles: About 90% report violent and harsh parenting-style that include
  1. Being beaten by objects, kicked, and isolated for days in closed room or outside in the cold
  2. Witnessing of violence towards mother, siblings and people who are visiting their home
  3. Own violent offending towards family members

Several report that the violent events have effected a long-lasting traumatic internal situation that make them panic, raging or frightened, or creating nightmares

Conclusion: T-kids attachment- bond indicate risk of developing later violence

## 2 Someone to talk to with problems

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- ▶ Almost none report having a biological parent to contact when in trouble for help and advice
- ▶ When they have someone to contact it is usually
  - ▶ A special social worker in an institution they have lived in
  - ▶ A special teacher they have met in school
  - ▶ A person from one of their foster-home
  - ▶ An aunt or an uncle, sometimes a grandparent and great-grand parent
- ▶ Often that they do not want to have anyone. They report that they do not have had anyone to trust and they interpret actual persons as hostile ones
- ▶ Only some very few report that their parents have been a role model for them. Usually they report no one as a model

Conclusion: A.t. Ryder T-kids attachment- bond indicate risk of developing later violence

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Secondary attachment –bonds Level  
II and III

# 1 Social climate, local community and schools

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- ▶ Although local communities and schools in Norway are usually peaceful, the T- kids report that they experience their environment as unsafe and potentially violent
- ▶ They report fights at schools and in streets. Many bring weapons with them for protection, or to eliminate threats or attack
- ▶ They report that they have been both bullies and that they get bullied at school and in local community
- ▶ Some are shut out from school and leisure-time activities, due to own violent and disrupting behavior. Most of them are truancies and school-drop-outs and are excluded for mainstream participation
- ▶ They report hostile perceptions of groups “outside” their own group, of school authorities and specially of the Police.

Conclusion: They are to a lesser degree developing healthy friendship and integration with prosocial others or healthy bonds to school and community. They are to a lesser degree not integrated into a warm and caring social climate. “It is a barrier between me and the society. Everything outside the gang become negative and hostile”. To break the logic situated in the troubled group means sanction both for exclusion and violence

This may, a.t. Ryder, escalate the youngsters’ disruptive attachments and their violent patterns

# The troubled kids - Violent offending – a possible link to disrupting attachment bonds?

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- ▶ Bullying
- ▶ Weapon bearing: Mostly knives and bats, but also guns and pistols
- ▶ Weapon fights and threats: On streets, clubs, schools and at home.
- ▶ Gang-fights (2s have been in fights ending up with homicide)
  
- ▶ Retaliation, revenge, conflicts that goes out of control (3s: consequences of threats and violence: 2 victim have died)
- ▶ Robbery: Commercial – street and home robberies
- ▶ Sexual assaults /rape
- ▶ Violent rioting (neo-nazi)
- ▶ Taking Hostages (2s: parents, police/social worker)
- ▶ Arson (2s, one of them multiple times)
- ▶ Internalized violent offending: Some have been cutting themselves, Most: self medication, run-away and leaving problematic situations by moving away from their home and living “everywhere”
  
- ▶ For most: Violence have developed and are part of a broader antisocial and criminal pattern. for

Conclusion: There is a link between disrupting attachment-bonds described in Ryder’s model and violent offending. But we do not know the disrupting bonds are the main explanation to the violent behavior

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# Vulnerability for experiencing in problematic bonds – The person level

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- ▶ Many of the T – kids have a diagnosed neuro physiological disturbance (as AD/HD), that if not treated or properly met and understood by their surrounding, may effect problematic attachment bonds. “ I have had a bag of aggression and violence on my bag as long I can remember” report one of the guys that also report safe attachment with his near caretakers
- ▶ Some personality characters and disturbancies may for some be an important factor in interplay with external factors to explain violent offending



# Conclusions

# Questions

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- ▶ What are a product of attachment bonds and what are independent risk factors in the development of violence ?
- ▶ What are the most convenient perspective: An attachment or a risk /protective perspective in studies on violence?

# Do the kids in our study have a disrupting attachment pattern that in accordance to Ryder's model may explain violence?

- ▶ Ryder's theory includes only girls. Our study includes both girls and boys. We do not find any big difference between the genders. All the kid's have experienced a cluster of averse attachment-bond at one or several levels. These bonds may be a base for developing own violence
- ▶ Some of the T kids do not experience chaos and instability in their family. These kids have, however some vulnerable qualities that put them in danger of developing violence and problems in their attachment, independent of the attachment bonds they experience
- ▶ We do not know, however, if a cluster of attachment-bond is the main explanation of violence or if it is working through other risk factors. The attachment-perspective may perhaps function as a too broad perspective. We also have to include other factors, as resilience etc
- ▶ At the time we think that a risk /protection factor perspective are the most convenient perspective in research that target to explain violence
- ▶ We still have not been able to discover the developmental chain described by Ryder, from disrupted attachment bond to traumatic effects, anger, anxiety etc - to avoidant coping, drugs self-harm etc, - to Violent behavior. To discover this chain we need longitudinal studies focusing on the mechanism between the different links