

Promoting Attachment Security among Internationally Adopted Children with Histories of Early Adversity

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Attachment and children adopted internationally

- Young children are biologically prepared to form attachment relationships
- Children adopted internationally do not have consistent caregivers who are responsive to their cues
- These children are at high risk for attachment-related disturbances prior to adoption



Adoption as an intervention

- Adoption involves moving from a depriving environment to an enriched one
- There are corresponding improvements in the quality of children's attachments
- But...internationally adopted children are still at risk for insecure attachments with their adoptive parents
 - Especially true for children with histories of adversity



Interventions for internationally adoptive families

- Existing evidence-based programs focus on pre-adoptive preparation for parents and internationally adoptive children's medical problems
- Few evidence-based interventions for improving attachment quality among children adopted internationally

Present study

- Evaluate whether an intervention targeting parents' sensitive responsiveness promotes secure attachments among children adopted internationally
- Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-up (ABC)
 - Shown to improve parental sensitivity and attachment security among children in foster care and children with histories of CPS involvement

Sample characteristics

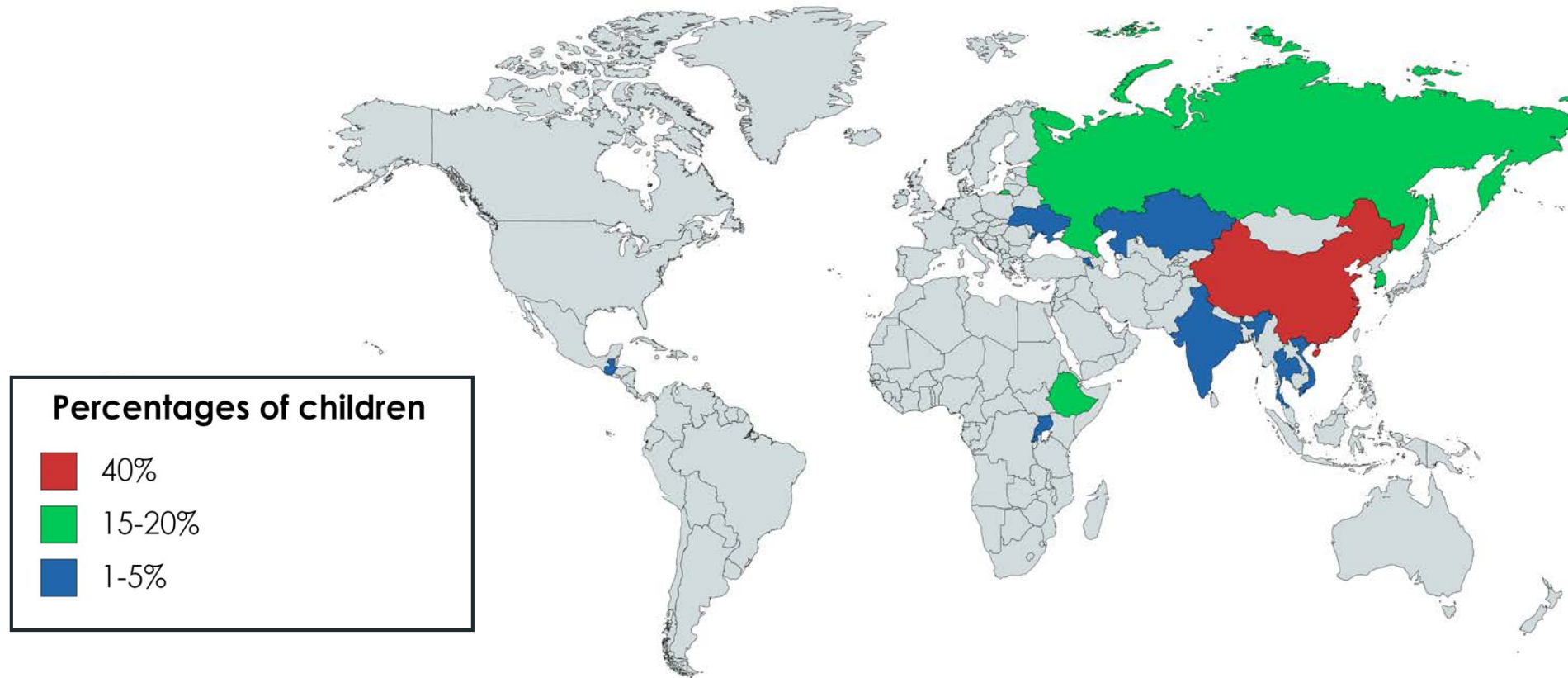
108 children adopted internationally into the US

- Children were adopted between 2007 and 2012 from 13 countries
- 65% were adopted after 1 year of age
- 73% had been in institutional care prior to adoption

Adoptive families

- Over 90% were married
- High socioeconomic status

Countries of adoption

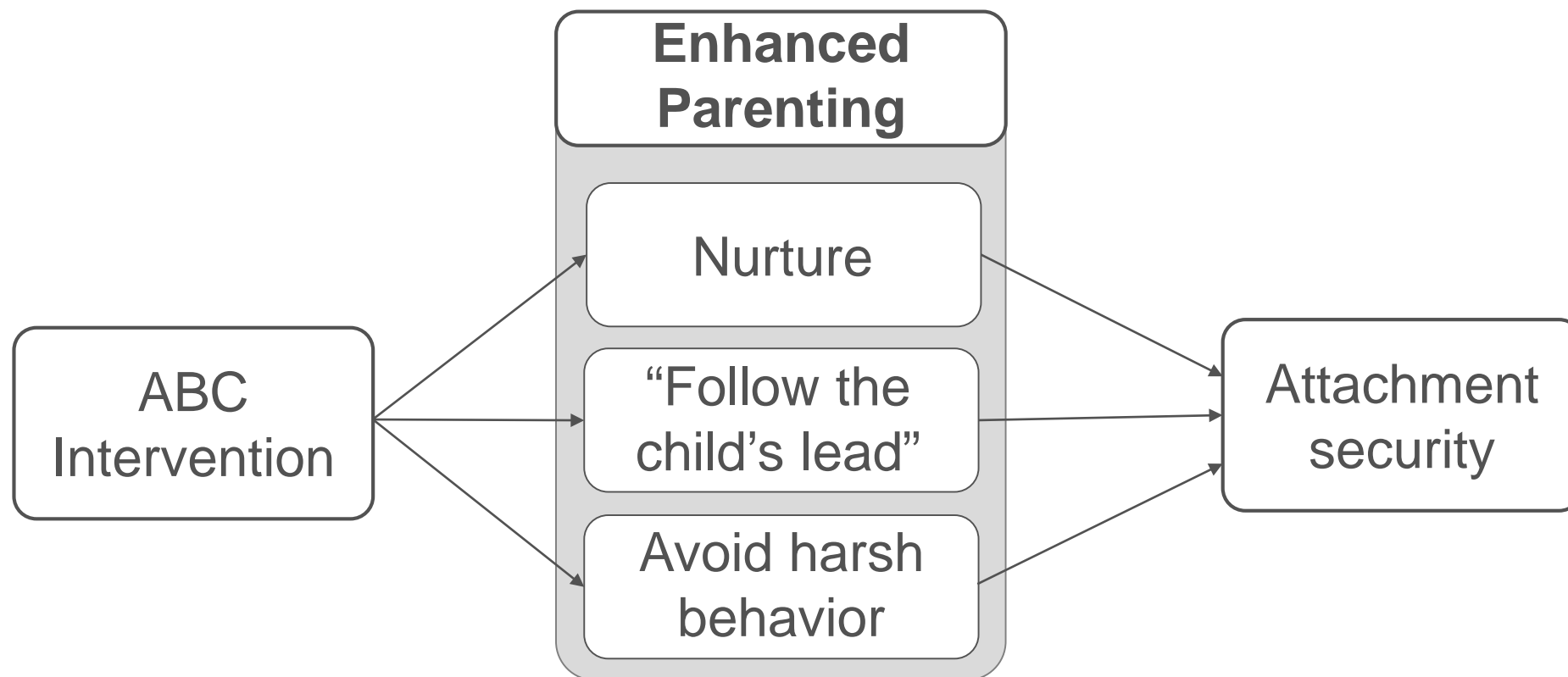


Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-up

- 10-session intervention
- Implemented in families' homes
- Targets parenting behaviors shown to be important for the development of attachment security in children



Targets of the ABC intervention



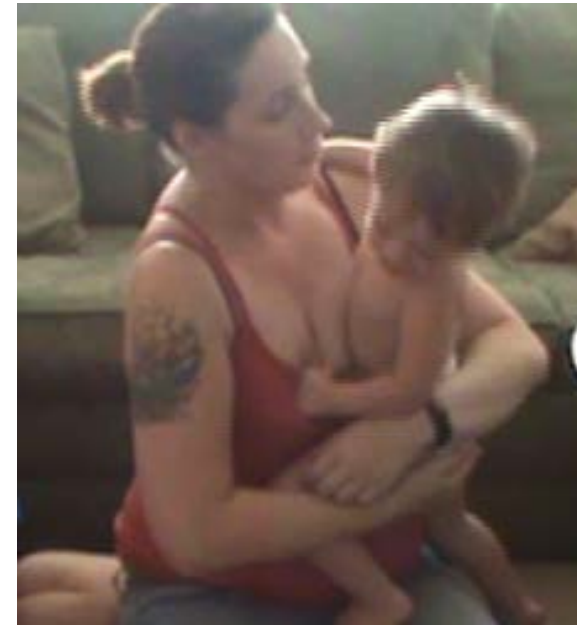
Randomized controlled trial

- Families were randomly assigned to receive ABC ($n = 54$) or a control intervention ($n = 54$)
- Control intervention: Developmental Education for Families (DEF)
 - Same structure as ABC (10 weekly sessions in home)
 - Focused on children's cognitive and motor development

Measures

- Attachment security
 - Strange Situation Procedure completed at 2 years and 4 years

Securely attached

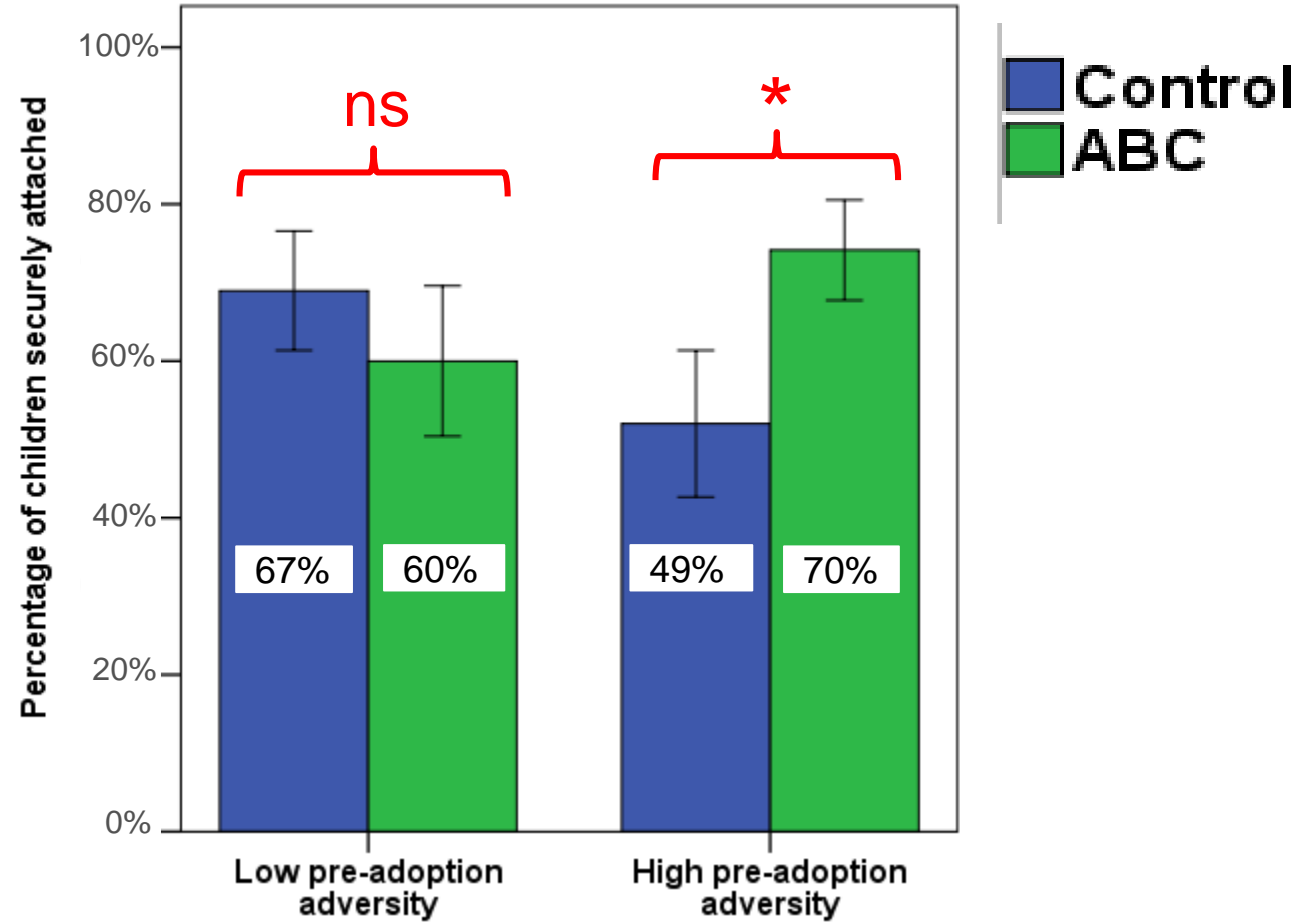


Insecurely attached

Measures

- Pre-adoption adversity
 - Composite of 5 variables:
 1. Children's age of adoption
 2. Duration of institutional care
 3. Stunted physical growth at the time of adoption
 4. Poor pre-adoptive caregiving quality
 5. Pre-adoptive social neglect

Results



Conclusions

- ABC intervention promotes secure attachments among internationally adopted children who are at highest risk for problematic development
 - Children have a remarkable ability to recover from early adversity when they experience supportive caregiving
- Questions for future research
 - Will these improvements in attachment quality persist across time?
 - Will these improvements facilitate recovery in other domains?

Acknowledgements

Mary Dozier



ABC Lab



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