



RESEARCH REVIEW

“Soft” baby carrier aids mother-child bonding

Chicago — Carrying infants around in a soft body sling such as a Snuggli rather than the ubiquitous plastic carrier does seem to tighten the bond between mother and baby.

To explore the effects of increased physical contact on mother-infant attachment, researchers from Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons sent 23 new mothers home from the hospital with soft infant carriers and presented 26 with the portable plastic version.

All the mothers pledged to use the randomly assigned carriers exclusively.

Researchers assessed the relationships between infants and mothers when the babies were two months, three-and-a-half months and 13 months.

Test measures included the Bayley Scales (Mental and Psycho-motor) of Infant Development, the Ainsworth Strange Situation test and videotapes of mother-child play sessions

Better attachment to baby

Even by the three-and-a-half-month evaluation, mothers who used the soft carriers responded more often to their babies’ noises and initiated more vocal exchanges with them than the control mothers did.

At the 13 month checkpoint, this responsiveness seemed to be correlated with more secure mother-baby attachment ratings: 83 percent of the soft-carrier babies were rated as securely attached, compared with 38 percent of the plastic-carrier infants.

Also, fewer babies in the Snuggli group (13 percent) exhibited avoidant behavior’ toward their mothers.

In contrast, 38.5 percent of babies in plastic carriers showed avoidant responses to their moms.

Physical closeness helps

The physical contact inherent in bodycarriers such as the Snuggli “seems to have brought out latent nurturing behavior,” the researchers speculate in *Child Development*.



The soft carrier apparently “enabled some mothers who might have had an initial aversion to physical contact to overcome this and form healthy relationships with their babies.”

The team noted that avoidant--type relationships have recently been associated with neglectful care among inner city lower sociometric groups, so the soft carriers may be especially helpful for mothers and babies in that population.

It seemed to be true for the new mothers in this study, who were randomly selected from low income, predominantly black and Hispanic clinic patients.

The more mothers used the soft carriers, the greater was the strength of their babies’ attachment to them. The infants of 15 of the 16 mothers who used the carriers most often were securely attached, compared with four of the seven babies whose mothers reported moderate or low use.

Use of the soft carrier did not seem to have any effect on babies temperaments, however, or on their development.

The researchers note that these findings should be confirmed by studies using larger samples and other sociometric groups before there can be a blanket statement that “increased physical contact between mother and infant is a major factor in creating secure attachment.”