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The family keyworker as a critical element for attachment resilience in the face of adversity

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Abstract

Attachment resilience is the ability of attachment relationships to survive adversity and maintain their functions in the face of stress and is a critical component of personal and family resilience. This property is the result of interactive influences across multiple systems of care. In this way, security is transferred across what we call chains of security. This paper will delve into how family keyworkers (i.e., professionals who are referential and responsible for family intervention plans) function as a critical link within these chains of security for hard-to-reach families: first, through attachment-like relationships that foster attachment resilience within families that are vulnerable or face adversity, and second, as receptors and transmitters of security by means of attachment-centered supervision. Sensitivity, repair, and mentalization are highlighted as key processes constant across these multisystemic levels.

KEYWORDS
attachment, caregiver-child, family intervention, family worker, multisystemic, resilience, supervision

INTRODUCTION

The consideration of families as essential protective systems in the face of adversity has long been supported by the systemic literature (Maurović et al., 2020), stress and coping theories (Patterson, 2002), family resilience models (Henry & Harrist, 2022; Luthar et al., 2000; Walsh, 2003, 2021), studies on childhood post-traumatic stress (Scheeringa & Zeanah, 2001; etc.), and attachment-focused intervention models (Dozier et al., 2014; Hughes, 2007; Juffer et al., 2012; Powell et al., 2013; Schechter & Serpa, 2018), among others. These contributions posit that family relationships can buffer the impacts of adversity on child development and

well-being and even promote the development of personal resources or post-traumatic growth (Berástegui & Pitillas, 2021).

Resilience science notes that children are especially vulnerable to environmental trauma (Masten & Barnes, 2018; Shonkoff et al., 2012). Long-term impacts of adversity are more significant when they occur earlier in development, especially among children aged 0–3 (Gabard-Durnam & McLaughlin, 2019). This particular vulnerability during the first 3 years of life is related to the building of primary attachment relationships, which is a decisive process regarding the establishment of nuclear socio-affective tendencies among individuals, as well as their interpretation, response, and adaptation tendencies in the face of future adversity (Bretherton, 1996; Siegel, 2020). Moreover, attachment has shown to be extremely sensitive to the material and relational contexts in which it develops, especially when related to job loss, economic problems, migration, single motherhood, lack of support, stigmatization, social exclusion, exposure to violence within the family or the community, parenting stress, and, specially, cumulative risk, which may result in adverse caregiving environments (Belsky & Fearon, 2002; Candelaria et al., 2011; Cyr et al., 2010).

In this paper, we present the concept of attachment resilience, which builds on this tradition and adds relevant considerations at theoretical and practical levels. This concept refers to the ability of attachment relationships to survive and maintain their functions in the face of adversity (Berástegui & Pitillas, 2021). We propose that attachment relationships may respond resiliently to adverse situations and that this response is a function of the complex, recursive interactions between systems surrounding the family. Specifically, a concept of chains of security will be developed along the following lines. This concept, embedded in a multisystemic view of resilience (Ungar, 2021), refers to the transmission of experiences of care across different system levels: from institutions to professionals, from professionals to families, and from families to children.

In a more precise way, we want to delve into the particularly relevant position of family keyworkers (FKWs) within these chains of security. A keyworker is a professional who works closely with a particular family or individual and is responsible for its care and support package in complex interventions (Parr, 2015). This role can be performed by a wide variety of professionals, such as teachers, nurses, social workers, family educators, community psychologists, and the like. The keyworker is a professional figure present in the family intervention services across diverse policy fields, albeit under terms that may differ from the one we are using here. It occupies a prominent position in the UK (Bevington et al., 2017; Greco & Sloper, 2004; Hull & Turton, 2014; Parr, 2015) and has permeated into other countries such as Spain through the "family case coordinator" or the "family educator" figures (Rodrigo et al., 2011).

FKWs are adequately trained in assessing and working with family dynamics and work from a supportive, nonclinical position, helping families with complex needs and supporting their positive parenting (Parr, 2015; Rodrigo et al., 2011). Family keyworkers manage resources, interventions, and the professional-family relationship in a way that may foster attachment-related security and, hopefully, create interpersonal conditions that regulate difficult emotions in the family, and reactivate parental competences and strengths (Rodrigo et al., 2011). This may be achieved by a diversity of strategies, which will be detailed in the pages to follow. In general terms, FKWs try to build a consistent, safe relationship with families, become a point of reference among a diversity of interventions and services, connect families with a broader set of resources, and, when possible, coordinate that multiplicity of interventions (Parr, 2015). Previous work has explored the potential of an attachment perspective for psychosocial intervention with adults and families (Bennett, 2008; Bennett & Saks, 2006; Blakely & Dziadosz, 2015; Brandell & Ringel, 2007; Page, 2017). These professionals need to be trained, as well as supported, in the assessment and management of family dynamics and attachment. They also need to be aware of the ethical issues involved in family work with attachment-related issues, which are always sensitive. In that way, they serve as critical links within chains of security and as essential promoters of attachment resilience,

especially for families that are hard-to-reach or hard-to-engage by the family support system (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012). In the final part of this paper, we analyze how FKW can be supported by a team around them and by attachment-centered supervision.

For that purpose, we first present the concept of attachment resilience and its three essential components. Secondly, we develop the idea of chains of security, and its implications for our understanding of attachment resilience. Finally, we explain the figure of the FKW as a critical link within the chains of security that foster attachment resilience. This section delves into FKW's role as a provider of an attachment-like relationship with hard-to-reach families and describe the main features of an attachment-centered supervision process with FKW and teams. Sensitivity, repair, and mentalization are highlighted as key processes throughout these three system levels.

THE CONCEPT OF ATTACHMENT RESILIENCE

Attachment relationships between a child and one or more attachment figures are characterized by some developmentally critical functions, among which are the provision of protection from danger; regulation of physiological and emotional distress; and support for the exploration and development of new skills (Cassidy, 2016; Thompson et al., 2021). These functions can be compromised by adversity that affects the family in various forms (illness, normative and unanticipated transitions, loss, war, pandemics, etc.). In the face of this risk, attachment resilience designates the capacity of early attachment relationships to maintain, recover, or even enhance their functions in the context of adversity (Berástegui & Pitillas, 2021).

The relationship between attachment and resilience has been studied from three traditional vantage points: understanding attachment relationships as antecedents, mediators, or outcomes in relation to resilience (Berástegui & Pitillas, 2021). First, the experiences of absence, loss, abuse, or neglect within early attachment relationships can be considered traumatic events that challenge individual resilience. Second, meta-analytic evidence has supported the idea that attachment may be a source of protection from hardship and a mediating factor between adversity and its impact on children's well-being, thus working as a core process of resilience (Corcoran & McNulty, 2018; Darling Rasmussen et al., 2019; Gerlach et al., 2022). Finally, in contexts of adversity, children's secure attachment has been understood as a result of individual or family resilience.

The concept of attachment resilience assumes that as well as mediator and outcome attachment relationships can also be considered resilient systems themselves. Caregiver-child dyads are dynamic, bipersonal systems of interaction and meaning-making, which may show more or less resilience when exposed to adversity. Attachment relationships show resilience when they are flexible and robust enough to maintain their essential functions in the face of adversity: a circuit of connection, mutual recognition, and a stable level of felt security within dyadic interactions (Berástegui & Pitillas, 2021; Siegel, 2020; Walsh, 2015).

Although sharing commonalities with other forms of resilience, attachment resilience, we suggest, involves particular processes as well as specific outcomes. On the one hand, attachment resilience shares with other levels of human resilience its activation under adversity, its procedural character and its main outcome, namely: the reestablishment of connection and well-being (Berástegui & Pitillas, 2021). On the other hand, some particularities of this level of resilience are its biosocial nature, its developmental relevance during the first stages of life, its focus on satisfying the children's need for security, and the vertical nature of the relationship. Three key processes or components of attachment resilience have been highlighted (Berástegui & Pitillas, 2021) and are explored below.

Responsiveness: Sensitivity and affect regulation

The process most traditionally associated with early attachment security is responsiveness, that is, the capacity of attachment figures to detect and respond promptly and appropriately to the child's needs (Ainsworth, 1979; Dunst & Kassow, 2008). This capacity is evidenced by the parent's discriminate reading of the child's needs for protection, emotional regulation, and comfort (linked to the attachment system) and the needs for separation, development of new skills, or search for stimulation (related to the exploration system). In contexts of adversity, the perception of danger can "overstimulate" the attachment system and interrupt the exploration system, because of the reciprocal inhibition relationship that characterizes these two systems (Cassidy, 2016). Thus, under stress, the child's learning and enjoyment capacities may be inhibited. Responsive caregivers function as stronger and wiser figures in times of difficulty, offering safe haven responses to the child's attachment system and secure base responses to the exploration system, respectively (Bowlby, 1988). The former involves tolerating, mentalizing, and regulating emotional states that the child cannot regulate by herself, keeping her within a range of tolerable arousal (Crittenden, 2016; Schore, 2019). The effectiveness of these responses allows for the reactivation of the second (exploratory) system, in the face of which secure base responses offer support and guidance, stimulate the child's growth in her zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1980), and show the caregiver's delight in the child's accomplishments. This balance results in a sense of felt security (Sroufe & Waters, 1977), which shapes positive relational expectations, allows the exploration system to remain active for increasingly more extended periods, and, ultimately, contributes to attachment security (Pasco Fearon & Belsky, 2016).

Rupture and repair

Observational studies (Beebe & Lachmann, 2014; Tronick et al., 2020) have pointed out that, under healthy conditions, parent–child interactions take the form of a reciprocal influence, where the states and signals of one participant affect the states and signals of the other, which feed back into the first participant. Child and caregiver co-construct unique ways of being with each other, within which the dyad's ability to overcome misattunements is a fundamental process for security. Studies on mother-infant face-to-face interaction indicate that, typically, mother-infant coordination states represent about 30% of the interaction time (Tronick, 2007). This suggests that the efficacy of attachment figures is not so much in providing the right response immediately, but in staying engaged with the child through sequences of misattunement followed by repair.

Interactive repair includes the micro-adjustments that allow the child to lower her stress levels and both members of the interaction to reengage (Tronick et al., 2020). These sequences have a broad anthropological scope, as they allow the members of an attachment dyad to get to know each other, build a shared and anticipated sense of security, and grow psychologically (Tronick & Gold, 2020).

Three contributions of interactive repair to attachment resilience can be highlighted. First, these processes of reciprocity and mutual regulation stimulate, both in the caregiver and the child, a basic sense of agency (or social competence), which is probably one of the fundamental ingredients of the development of self-esteem and a protective factor against later difficulties (Thompson, 2015). In addition, this sense of competence and confidence in the relationship keeps each member connected and open to the influence of the other, during periods of danger or distress. Second, individuals' internal working models (IWMs) are nurtured by confident expectations about what is likely to happen when interactions become conflictual. Within the hierarchical set of multiple IWMs the individuals develop (Girme & Overall, 2021), interactive

repair contributes to expectations of achieving mutual understanding after misunderstandings, and collaboratively finding more appropriate ways of being together. Thus, experiences of interactive repair may have an impact both on the individual's relational models as well as on the representations about the relationship itself that circulate between child and caregiver (as more or less flexible, and prone to the correction of misattunements).

Finally, interactive repair promotes the development of the child's communication skills (with time, the child becomes more precise in expressing what she needs) and, in general, an improvement of these capacities in the dyad. Dyads that are accustomed to interactive repair become quicker in understanding what is happening and in organizing communication in ways that are coherent and adequate to the needs of both members (Beebe & Lachmann, 2014). Thus, an increasingly solid experience of reciprocally attuning is consolidated, even under distress or adversity.

Mentalization: Representation and intersubjectivity

Human attachment relationships are not only involved in protection and affective regulation. Exchanges between parents and children also include acts of meaning that allow both participants to understand what is happening, why it is happening, or what may happen next. In addition to the interactional dimension (what is done), the representational dimension (what is thought) is key to attachment resilience. These representational processes rely very directly on the intersubjective dimension of human attachment relationships, which involve the attunement of mental states, the synchronization of intentions and affects, or the mutual recognition between parents and children (Schore, 2021; Seligman, 2017).

Research has ascribed particular relevance to mentalizing in early attachment relationships for the development of security and well-being in families (Asen & Fonagy, 2021; Camoirano, 2017). Parents with robust mentalizing capacities can keep their child's mind in mind. This implies an ability to interpret behavior in terms of underlying mental states (e.g., beliefs, feelings, and needs) and to respond to the child accordingly. Parental mentalizing is often expressed in interactions where parents, by means of their bodily, expressive, or narrative responses, mirror and help the child organize and understand his or her experience (Fonagy et al., 2002; Oppenheim & KorenKarie, 2021; Shai & Belsky, 2017).

Parental mentalization has been related to parental responsiveness, the child's future attachment security and mental health, and the parent's ability to prevent the intergenerational transmission of trauma (Berthelot et al., 2015; Camoirano, 2017; Luyten et al., 2017). Moreover, three effects of mentalization have the most direct impact on attachment resilience. First, mentalization allows parents to interpret, with some precision, what it means for their child to be living under stress. Understanding the difficult, disorganized, or disruptive child behavior that may appear in the face of adversity prevents parents from responding automatically or defensively to such behavior (Asen & Fonagy, 2021). Second, in dyads where mentalization is robust, affective tolerance increases. Affects stimulated by adversity (e.g., fear, uncertainty, sadness, or anger) become more bearable within a system that can discriminate them, reflect on them through and turn them into the stuff of a communication that is adjusted and understandable to both participants (Fonagy et al., 2002). Finally, mentalization within attachment relationships contributes decisively to the development of epistemic trust, that is, the belief that social information is reliable, along with a willingness to use such information to learn from experience, update the image of self and others, and adapt (Fonagy et al., 2019). Social cues (gestures, words) are experienced as a reliable reference for understanding oneself, understanding others, and navigating the world of interactions, even when things become difficult.

CHAINS OF SECURITY AS DETERMINANTS OF MULTISYSTEMIC ATTACHMENT RESILIENCE

An attachment relationship, as a system, is nested within and vertically related to both higher and lower-scale systems that are contained within it. Consequently, attachment resilience, like resilience itself, is a multisystemic phenomenon (Ungar, 2021). A multisystemic view on resilience stresses that, when challenged by adversity, resilience results from the response of multiple systems, making positive development more or less likely to occur as a result of complex, recursive interactions between those systems (Ungar, 2021). Thus, attachment relationships are the endpoint of cascading processes (Prime et al., 2020) that can serve as an umbrella or a transmission belt in the face of adversity. Accordingly, attachment theory assumes that security is ultimately not generated at the individual level, but transmitted within human relationships. In order to feel safe, a person needs to establish a relationship with someone who, at least at the time of the interaction, is perceived as more capable of coping with danger at the physical, cognitive, or emotional levels (Bowlby, 1988). Similarly, to provide safety, caregivers need to be connected to their own sources of security, which may allow them to regulate, mentalize, and set caregiving dynamics in motion (Hughes & Baylin, 2012).

Conversely, insecurity can also be transmitted both through history and across the different layers of the social ecosystem. On the one hand, transgenerational transmission of insecurity in attachment relationships (van Ijzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2019) are at the core of attachment difficulties, and may partially explain the transmission of exclusion, school failure, imprisonment, or abuse (Assink et al., 2018; Lereya et al., 2013; Madigan et al., 2019). On the other hand, insecurity can be transmitted multi-systemically, in a cascade process from contextual insecurity to the community, the family, and finally, the child (Prime et al., 2020). Stressful life events and conditions may reduce the caregivers' experience of safety and overwhelm their resources to provide relational security (Crittenden, 2016; Gerlach et al., 2022; Kobak & Mandelbaum, 2003). "Thus, social exclusion is not only deeply embedded within structures of society but can become 'embodied' within the individual psyche" (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012, p. 2), through attachment insecurity.

The concept of chains of security (Pitillas, 2020, 2021; Pitillas & Berástegui, 2018) designates the process by which security is transferred across systems or between the levels of a given system. These chains act primarily as a downward cascade (Prime et al., 2020), bringing security from higher to lower levels of human interaction and care. However, they can also operate bottom-up, with security at one level acting as a self-fulfilling expectation that affects both the higher level's security and its ability to provide downward protection (such as when a responsive child makes parents feel rewarded and enhances their willingness to be emotionally available for her). In this way, resilient attachment relationships can promote healthier and more resilient societies at different levels (extended families, schools, neighborhoods, and cultures), to the extent that it has been stated that "peace starts with attachment" (Surr, 2011, p. S6). Finally, security can also be transmitted horizontally, with reciprocal attachment relationships such as those established with friends or spouses. Horizontal transmission of security can also occur at the mesosystemic level as in the family-school, doctor-family connection, and the like.

Families living in highly insecure contexts can struggle to offer security to their children. Therefore, to enhance the processes of security transmission within families facing adversity, professionals must articulate these chains of security around different social nodes, including informal networks, formal networks, and specialized networks.

Informal support networks are the first level capable of offering security to parents and, thus, promoting the development of resilient attachments. Different cultures configure diverse attachment networks or caregiving alliances based on the parental couple, the extended family, the neighborhood, or friends. These networks underline the systemic, cooperative nature of

parenting (Kobak & Mandelbaum, 2003; Mesman et al., 2018; Otto & Keller, 2014). However, social and economic exclusion is often associated with isolation or social conflict, which compromises the development of these safety nets. Therefore, part of an attachment-sensitive intervention with families aims to rebuild these support networks through parent groups (Pitillas & Berástegui, 2021).

Besides, most families receive support and security in their mesosystemic relationship with formal support networks in which their children interact. This interaction occurs most notably within school-family relations (Berástegui & Pitillas, 2021) and also in other contexts related to nonformal education, leisure and free time, sports, or religious communities. Again, socially excluded families face important barriers to interacting with these formal networks.

Finally, families facing adversity may receive support from specialized networks articulated by the social services present in their community. However, these networks often find it difficult to access, connect, and effectively work with families labeled as hard-to-reach or hard-to-engage. These include under-represented, overlooked, and resistant families, all facing multiple sources of adversity and complex needs (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012; Doherty et al., 2004). Literature concerning how to reach these families highlights the need to build trust and secure relationships with them (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012; Cortis, 2012).

Moreover, attachment-based models of intervention, such as the Adaptive Mentalization Based Integrative Treatment (AMBIT), developed for working with hard-to-reach youth (Bevington et al., 2015, 2017), understand that we can only enhance security by building an attachment-like relationship with service users. From this perspective, for parents to enhance their responsiveness and mentalization towards their children, they need to be the object of sensitive responses and mentalization (by professionals, teams, and institutions). Changing the parent–child relationship from within entails going beyond traditional parenting approaches (Pitillas & Berástegui, 2021; Powell et al., 2013) and relying on the figure of a family keyworker, capable of acting as an attachment-like figure for families in distress.

THE FAMILY KEYWORKER AS A SIGNIFICANT LINK WITHIN CHAINS OF SECURITY

As advanced above, the Family keyworker (FKW) is a promising figure in the promotion of attachment resilience with families who suffer from accumulated adversity and/or trauma. The concepts of a Keyworker and an Individual Keyworker Relationship were put forward within the aforementioned Adaptive Mentalization Based Integrative Treatment (AMBIT), developed at the Anna Freud Centre (Bevington et al., 2017). Our adaptation of the concept for working with families involves a well-trained family support professional (e.g., a psychologist, social worker, educator) establishing a consistent, attachment-based relationship with the family. This relationship is not clinical in nature and does not entail the administration of sophisticated strategies belonging to the clinical world. Nonetheless, being a relationship that is based on sensitivity, interactive repair, and mentalization, it aspires to create a circuit of trust that not only grants us access to families and fosters their engagement with intervention, but also may have direct effects on families' well-being and ability to provide care to their members. In this sense, interventions using an attachment framework may be used, in different forms and with varying levels of intensity, by social (Harlow, 2021), education (Riley, 2010), and also therapeutic professionals.

Depending on the different case plans, a FKW can develop a diversity of functions: psycho-education, management of material aids, educational support, health care, among others. These functions are unified by the framework of a supportive and secure relationship that shares essential aspects with attachment relationships, which may promote attachment resilience within vulnerable families. From this perspective, an FKW works as a referential figure within

the broader field of resources and practitioners that traditionally surround vulnerable families. Particularly for families who after repeatedly being exposed to danger, neglect, or trauma have very low levels of trust, asking them to share their experiences with multiple workers may be counterproductive, emotionally overwhelming, and even consolidate a previous sense of insecurity and isolation. Unlike more conventional approaches based on a team around the family logic, we advocate the construction of a relationship between the family and a single practitioner, who is coordinated with other professionals and is supported by a wider team around the worker and by attachment-based supervision processes (see below for details).

FKW can be decisive in promoting attachment resilience within the framework of downward influences that characterize human attachment relationships. The FKWs' role is key as an axis of the transmission of security, both when they work directly with the family and when they facilitate social connectedness and dynamics of mutual care between parents or families (Pitillas & Berástegui, 2021). The FKW is an important link within chains of security, a hinge in the responsiveness, repair, and mentalization processes that drive top-down safety (see Figure 1).These functions are reminiscent of the concept of transitional attachment figure (Crittenden, 2016), which designates the role of someone who, from an intermediate position between the professional and the interpersonal, temporarily performs functions typical of a secure attachment figure (i.e., mentalization, responsiveness to attachment and exploration needs). In his role as an attachment-like figure, the FKW talks with families from their frame of reference, understands the meaning of their family practices within the broader framework of their history and the adversities they face, encourages family members to develop new skills within their zone of proximal development, and keeps danger at tolerable levels. For a family, this type of relationship is experienced as being in contact with an affectively attuned other.
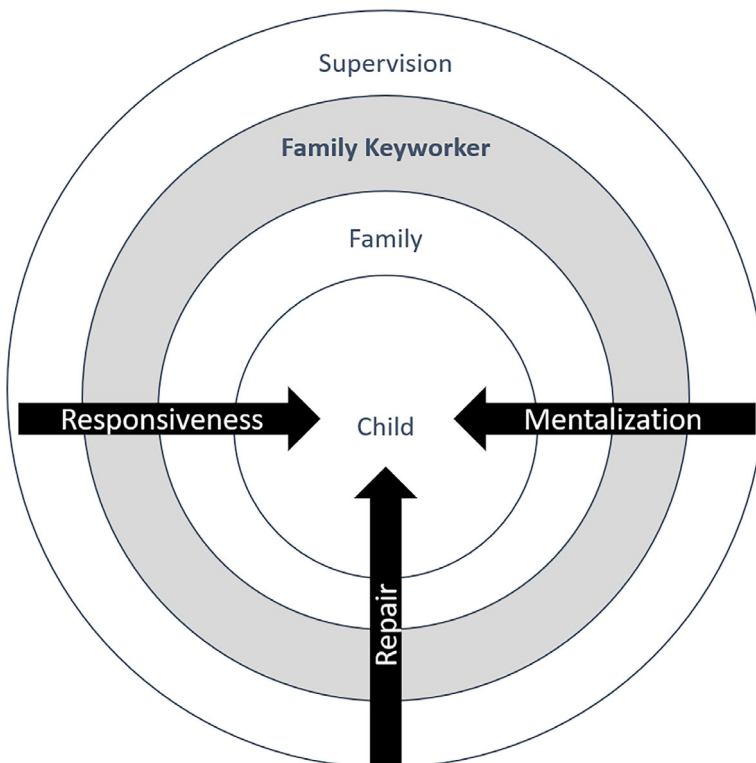

FIGURE 1 The family keyworker within chains of security related to attachment. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Besides working as a provider of security for the family, the FKW is also a potential object of the (in)security related to intervention with vulnerable families. In order for FKWs to build an attachment-like relationship with the family, they need a "team around the worker" (Bevington et al., 2017) experience, which may help in regulating emotions derived from working with, in understanding and mentalizing vulnerable families, and in exploring new and creative ways of intervention. Thus, an attachment-centered approach to supervision with the FKW can ultimately make essential differences in attachment resilience within the family.

THE FAMILY KEYWORKER'S ATTACHMENT-CENTERED APPROACH WITH FAMILIES

In this section, we present and explore the role that previously described ingredients of attachment resilience (responsiveness, interactive repair, and mentalizing) may play within FKW's work with families facing adversity. As has been already advanced, these principles do not necessarily take the form of specific techniques with a level of sophistication typical of long-term psychotherapy. The position is described as nonclinical because FKWs do not aim to transform personality structure, repair entrenched attachment or family dynamics, revise and correct unconscious processes, change defensive structures, or facilitate deep insights, among others. When these processes are necessary, the work of the FKW intervention may be replaced or supplemented by a family therapist or a parent–child therapist. Instead, FKWs develop their psychosocial support work adopting an attachment-sensitive stance towards families' vulnerabilities, the professional-family relationship, and supervision. An attachment-based perspective to family work involves a whole way of relating to families and providing a trust-based, consistent experience to them.

Responsiveness and affect regulation

Responsiveness and affect regulation are manifested as the FKW's ability to detect, discriminate, and respond appropriately to the family's attachment and exploration needs. Attachment-sensitive responses may include but are not limited to (a) interventions focused on acknowledging, validating, and coping with difficult emotions; (b) actions that increase the family's sense of connection and reduce isolation (Pitillas & Berástegui, 2021), or through community interventions, among others; (c) interventions that offer comfort, support, and hope in moments of helplessness and intense vulnerability (Pitillas & Berástegui, 2018); and (d) expressing and reducing parents' fears and barriers around parenting (Powell et al., 2013; Slade, 2014). In turn, sensitive responses to exploration may include but are not limited to (a) interventions aimed at stimulating new ways of understanding interactions and reactivating parental mentalization; (b) an exploration of positive and secure biographical experiences that may counteract insecure experiences and promote an intergenerational transmission of care (Lieberman et al., 2005; Pitillas, 2021; Pitillas & Berástegui, 2018); (c) actions that consolidate families' sense of competence by celebrating their achievements, pointing out their strengths, or exploring positive exceptions to habitually insecure patterns.

Rupture and repair

Rupture and repair dynamics within family intervention are manifested as the professional-family relationship's ability to flexibly recover states of adjustment after moments of rupture. Within the typical course of any intervention, levels of emotional intensity will increase and lead

to interpersonal distress. In this context, emotions may hijack both the family and the professional's reflective capacity and drive each participant to increased feelings of insecurity. In the face of this, Asen and Fonagy (2021) present a procedure that starts from pausing or slowing down interactions and continues by rewinding to an earlier moment in the conversation, prior to the interactive rupture and loss of mentalization. Interactions between a sensitive professional and a stressed family may take a spiral-like (with constant forward and backward movements), more than a straight-line form. One trial after another, interpersonal attunement and professional-family collaboration are consolidated. Initially, the major responsibility for repair falls on the FKW's side. As intervention progresses, both parties become actively involved and increasingly symmetrical in terms of the capacity for interactive repair. A growing ability to observe and correct misattunements emerges within the relationship.

Interactive repair also involves the FKW's ability to acknowledge their contribution to interactive ruptures. FKWs may find it difficult to maintain connection and understanding of the needs or behaviors of families from underrepresented cultural backgrounds, or to remain available and cooperative when families seem to resist or question interventions. From an attachment-centered perspective, both the families' resistances and their collaboration are not understood so much as a property of the family itself, but of the professional-family relationship (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012). This makes monitoring of the FKW's own expectations, emotions, or resistances during intervention a key part of the work.

Interactive repairs within family work, as well as professional-family collaboration in setting (and adjusting) intervention goals, not only helps to regain a sense attunement, but can also foster a growing sense of trust towards the professionals' communications, the information they convey, and the intervention itself. Within a collaborative relationship, where misunderstandings can be acknowledged and overcome and families' perspective is recognized by professionals, social information may become reliable. In this way, interactive repair fosters the enhancement of epistemic trust (Fonagy et al., 2019).

Mentalization

Mentalization dynamics within family intervention can manifest as the professional's growing capacity to recognize mental states that underlie parental behaviors, to interpret these states in a balanced way, and, over time, to make sense of adversity experiences in a way that recognizes the multiple perspectives of different family members. In the face of stress and adversity, caregivers are vulnerable to losing their mentalization and reading their children's behaviors in a one-sided, rigid, or distorted way. By mentalizing caregivers, FKWs regulate difficult emotions within stressed families and, at the same time, model a reflective stance, helping them to reactivate or strengthen their own mentalizing capacity.

This capacity to model mentalizing is achieved by adopting a genuine curiosity about the individual experience of each family member, the acceptance of a plurality of perspectives around common experiences, or the tolerance of difficult or unacceptable emotions (Bateman & Fonagy, 2016). The repeated display of these attitudes makes the relationship itself a secure space, where family members can play at understanding their feelings and thoughts around giving and receiving care.

Many mentalization-focused family interventions involve enhancing the caregivers' detailed observation of interactions, to prevent parents from automatically resorting to rigid interpretations and reactions (e.g., "My child is oppositional because he wants to hurt me") (Asen & Fonagy, 2021; Powell et al., 2013). Watching attentively, waiting before responding, and wondering about the meaning of interactions (Cohen et al., 2006) is a common form of mentalizing conversation, and may be especially useful in giving voice to the weakest members of the relationship (i.e., the children). Selectively conveying theoretical or developmental

information to families (i.e., developmental guidance) is another tool that promotes understanding and reinterpretation of children's behaviors, and may be especially useful when mentalizing failures result from educational disadvantage or lack of information (Berlin et al., 2016).

ATTACHMENT-CENTERED SUPERVISION PROCESSES WITH FAMILY KEYWORKERS AND TEAMS

Working with vulnerable families and children who face adversity is, in itself, risky work. It involves witnessing high levels of pain and/or injustice, facing limits to our ability to help, vicariously experiencing insecurity and trauma, or reexperiencing insecure aspects of one's own attachment history. Furthermore, secure relationship-building with hard-to-reach families may be compromised by contextual and organizational insecurity (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012). Thus, intervention within these contexts "is not work for lone rangers" (Bevington et al., 2017, p. 170).

Supervision groups within family support organizations and services may provide safe spaces and relationships to scaffold and restore FKW's security. The relationship between supervisor and professionals can function in a manner equivalent to an attachment relationship (Fitch et al., 2010), restoring FKW's security and preventing some of the potential consequences of the accumulation of insecurity, such as burnout or the activation of defenses that prevent caring for families. Thinking of the supervisor as an attachment-like figure shifts our attention away from technique or solutions and puts the focus of supervision on its relational aspects. This not only makes us think of the supervisor as a direct source of security for the FKW, but also as a facilitator of dynamics of regulation, mutual support, and mentalization within intervention teams. Thanks to this work, teams may "internalize" dynamics of security provision and reflective capacities that allow them to become safe spaces for each individual FKW. Supervision work may thus be understood as the scaffolding of a structure of support that becomes integral to the teams and consolidates a "team around the worker" logic (Bevington et al., 2017). In the following lines, we present and explore the role that previously described ingredients of attachment resilience (responsiveness, interactive repair, and mentalizing) may play within supervision processes with FKWs and intervention teams, as a higher level in the chains of security process.

Responsiveness

Responsiveness and affect regulation are the heart of supervision processes (Friedlander, 2015). This dimension of attachment relationships manifests itself primarily in the form of availability on the part of the supervisor. An available supervisor welcomes teams by evidencing their interest in the emotional and relational aspects of the work, and ensures that the nonverbal aspects of supervision (the tone, respect for rhythms, the type of words chosen to give feedback, etc.) convey to professionals a triple message: you are not alone; we will reflect together on your work experience; this supervision will be a space to regain security in difficult moments (Watkins & Riggs, 2012).

Responsiveness also includes discriminated and sensitive responses to supervisees' attachment and exploration signals. The reciprocal inhibitory relationship between attachment and exploration systems (Cassidy, 2016) may imply that, when the FKW's attachment is activated, their abilities to mentalize the families' emotional experiences are disrupted, and defensive solutions to professional anxiety can arise (e.g., criticizing families; prematurely withdrawing guardianship from parents; restoring to rapid, nonreflective actions to eradicate problems). Critical incidents (Pistole & Fitch, 2008) in intervention, with their technical, emotional, or professional identity challenges, can be strong triggers of attachment. Yet, they are potential drivers of

learning and may promote the consolidation of FKW's security, when the supervisor offers safe haven responses to attachment (or facilitates these responses within the team), among which we can find (a) recognizing and validating professionals' difficult emotions; (b) reassuring, comforting, and offering hope to professionals; and (c) facilitating empathetic, mutually supportive, and warm responses within the professional team.

In turn, the supervisor's secure base responses to exploration needs can maintain (or strengthen) FKWs' ability to observe, reflect, and be flexible in working with families. As with attachment needs, teams can function as very effective enhancers of professional exploration. Some of the supervisor's actions favorable to this effect are (a) inviting professionals to explore new perspectives about families and the meaning of their experience or behaviors; (b) naming and exploring the (sometimes invisible) skills of the FKW, individually or with the support of the team; (c) selectively using theoretical concepts to broaden the professional's view and enhance their mentalizing capacity; and (d) celebrating and exploring the FKW's and team's achievements.

Alternating sensitive responses to attachment and exploration makes the supervision experience analogous to the circle of security (Powell et al., 2013) in which healthy parent–child interactions move. The result is a growing sense of autonomy-within-connectedness (Bennett & Saks, 2006). This logic also allows supervisions to evolve from an asymmetrical starting point (articulated around the FKW's distress and the supervisor's expertise), into a territory of greater mutuality and collaboration (organized around the team's discoveries and emerging capabilities). When supervisions develop along the lines of secure attachment, the result is that the relationship becomes, increasingly, more symmetrical, mutual, and cooperative.

Rupture and repair

The work of rupture and repair is another central element of supervision processes, as understood from an attachment perspective. Overt or subtle communication mismatches, differences in the way that professionals and supervisor understand the issues that families face, cultural discrepancies between supervisors and supervisees, and, above all, the supervisor's "crossed" responses to attachment/exploration cues in the supervisee (e.g., the supervisor invites the team to explore alternative interpretations of a problem, without first addressing the team's distress) can lead to ruptures within this link of the chains of security. When misattunements take place, FKWs may feel inadequate, worry about not being effective or useful, or feel exposed to a potentially identity-threatening evaluation (Fitch et al., 2010). Given the power configuration inherent in these processes, the FKW's insecurity is more likely to manifest as withdrawal, deference, or a subtle disconnection from the process, rather than overt confrontation (Watkins & Riggs, 2012).

Within supervision, interactive repair can be understood as a path that starts with observing the misunderstanding/rupture, continues with naming it, explores/mentalizes the experience of the rupture, and takes some restorative action (e.g., acknowledging one's own contribution to the misunderstanding, apologizing, rewinding to a pre-rupture point in the conversation, and/or clarifying the misunderstanding (Watkins, 2021)).

Adequate interactive repair by the supervisor can have two relevant outcomes. On the one hand, it can consolidate feelings of security in the FKW, an increasingly robust capacity for (self-)mentalization and, ultimately, an internal model that represents oneself as capable of regaining attunement in moments of mismatch. On the other hand, it can model this function for the team, so that this becomes an increasingly present and more accessible tool in their daily work with families.

Mentalization

When facing complex issues that affect families, it may be hard to preserve a reflective position (Bevington et al., 2017). Adversity, risk, and the urgency that arise within professional work with vulnerable families, expose professionals to feeling distressed, overwhelmed, helpless, or overinvolved, among others. All these conditions may compromise the professional's ability to mentalize the family and its members.

Consequently, restoring mentalization plays a decisive role within the supervision process. It transforms the *noise* (i.e., FKWs' sense of difficulty and distress) into information about the cases. Mentalizing cases and critical incidents involves translating what happens in terms of what it means, which can boost the supervisee's ability to organize their own experience and self-regulate and progressively strengthen their mentalizing capacity. To do this, the supervisor must keep the FKW's and the team's mind in mind. The supervisor's attention is relatively decentered from the case (and diagnoses, or potentially effective work techniques) to focus on the professional's attachment/exploration needs, and what it means for him to help each family.

Several actions articulate mentalization work with teams and professionals in supervision. Among the most frequent are (a) adopting an attitude of genuine curiosity about mental states, both in the professional, within the team, and in the family that is being discussed; (b) tolerating discrepancy and using it as a driver for the exploration of multiple perspectives about intervention incidents or difficult situations; (c) understanding that all behavior is an act of communication (Powell et al., 2013), and, therefore, translating the FKW's and families' behaviors into signals of a relevant need or emotion; (d) promoting the teams' rereading of family parenting difficulties as caregivers' adaptations in the face of danger, or defensive responses to core fears or sensitivities (Powell et al., 2013), all of which may be related to adversity; (e) rereading coping strategies/parenting practices as actions endowed with meaning that is cultural (e.g., parental unresponsiveness may function as a culturally transmitted way of stimulating the child's self-reliance and resilience in the face of a hostile environment) or protective (e.g., a parent may abdicate of her parental role as a strategy to avoid repeating the aggressive parenting style of her caregivers); (f) exploring FKW's emotional experience and what this experience reveals about emotions, fears, and difficulties that circulate between the professional and the family. In this way, supervision can utilize the practitioner's emotional reactions as a source of information about vulnerable families' emotional and defensive processes and, therefore, as a valuable material for mentalizing.

DISCUSSION

The ability to respond adaptively to adversity and stress depends, to a large extent, on the quality of one's interactions. Attachment is a central aspect of human resilience, as revealed by empirical studies (Darling Rasmussen et al., 2019) and intervention proposals with vulnerable families for years (Berlin et al., 2016).

Thinking of resilience at the level of attachment relationships offers a perspective that goes beyond characterizing individuals as resilient. It allows to understand that each person's adaptation to adversity is often embedded within wider (attachment) relationships, which may themselves be flexible and resilient. Moreover, the concept of attachment resilience emphasizes the dynamic nature of the adaptations made by parent–child dyads in the face of adversity. Resilience is thus not a property of the parent or child, nor is it identified with static concepts pertaining to each participant in the relationship, such as attachment style (secure, insecure-anxious, insecure-avoidant, or disorganized). On the contrary, the dynamism of attachment resilience implies that it can acquire different formats or activate specific microprocesses, depending on the type of adversity the dyad faces. For example, faced with the recent diagnosis

of an illness in the family, a parent–child dyad may be predominantly involved in processes of meaning construction. However, in the wake of a particularly intense developmental crisis in the child, the dyad may rely more intensely on processes of emotional regulation. This variability is longitudinal: the early resilient responses of an attachment relationship may change over time, and with changes in the adversity itself (Berástegui & Pitillas, 2021).

Based on recognizing the multisystemic nature of resilience in general (Ungar, 2021) and the top-down influences of safety across multiple layers of care (i.e., chains of security), this work has explored some of the main practical implications of attachment resilience. Influences that interact and contribute, in a complex way, to attachment resilience in the family have been explored. In this work, we have continued an already existing tradition of linking attachment perspectives to the work and supervision of social professionals (Bennett, 2008; Bennett & Saks, 2006; Blakely & Dziadosz, 2015; Brandell & Ringel, 2007; Page, 2017) and reflected upon one of the possible influences that contribute to the transmission of security towards families: the FKW. In our view, the FKW functions as a powerful link in the chains of security for vulnerable families. On the one hand, the FKW can be a direct source of security for the family and thus helps family attachments withstand the onslaught of adversity. On the other hand, FKWs are themselves objects of the (in)security around complex cases and when working with families that suffer under adversity. In face of this, professional and teams' supervision may be understood in attachment-centered terms, as a space of responsivity, interactive repair, and mentalization. By means of attachment-centered supervision, practitioners and teams can recover security and regain a reflective stance in face of complex cases. In addition, in the mid to long term, supervision may scaffold the team's capacity to function as an attachment network for its members and as a mentalizing agent itself.

As has been stated previously, the nonclinical nature of FKW interventions does not impede the adoption of an attachment perspective that organizes the professionals' stance and way of looking at families. The ways of coordinating different services, listening and responding to families, reading the problems that families present, or managing professional-family relationships, among others, are guided by an overarching goal of providing security, when FKWs work from an attachment lens. This demands sensitivity to the relational and ethical issues that arise within professional-family relationships, as well as proper training in understanding and working with family dynamics.

Future research on attachment resilience should assess the extent to which these dimensions of responsiveness, repair, and mentalization are present in the relationships between FKW and families in vulnerable situations, what factors promote or hinder them, and what impact they have on family engagement, on strengthening parental responsiveness, and, ultimately, on children's attachment security within adverse contexts. Finally, research should explore how promoting active and functional chains of security that reach their target goal (i.e., parent–child attachments) may effectively articulate policies and actions across several domains.

In sum, we believe that the ability of attachment relationships within vulnerable families to remain functional is the end result of a complex, vertical interplay of processes that involve several provisions of security: from supervisors to professionals and teams; from professionals to families; and from families to their members. The proposal we have developed here resembles other understandings of family intervention (Berlin et al., 2016; Pitillas, 2020) and supervision (Bevington et al., 2017; Watkins & Riggs, 2012; Watkins, 2021) and is based on the premise that the most effective ingredient for improving or strengthening relationships is the relationship itself.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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