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Promotores:
Prof. dr. M.H. van IJzendoorn
Prof. dr. R. van der Veer

Co-promotor:
Dr. H.J. Vermeer

Overige leden:
Dr. G. Posada (Purdue University)
Prof. dr. J. Mesman
Prof. dr. P. Silva

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to Antonia, Agustina & Alejandra
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In the last decade Chile has embarked on a road that must lead to the reduction of inequality gaps and higher welfare for the population. Special attention is paid to the issue of equal opportunities in early childhood and onwards. Particularly important is the national program Chile Grows With You, a policy begun in 2007 to cover the health insurance from birth until the age of four of the most vulnerable population. This program is meant to be one of the cornerstones towards progress in equal opportunities and child protection from a multidimensional perspective. Both physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive aspects of development are addressed. But how did childcare and how did the public policies for children change in the history of Chile? This is a preliminary question that will be addressed in the first chapter reviewing the milestones that preceded the current positive level in Chilean children’s physical and mental health.

This public policy has also focused on an unprecedented increase in the breadth of coverage of non-maternal care through daycare centers, to promote women’s employment, on the one hand, and meet the conditions of development of children from vulnerable families, on the other. However, it is known from the international literature, that the quality of this care may influence the developmental outcomes of children. Therefore, we wonder whether this rapid increase in daycare centers for infants in Chile has led to a decrease in their quality. What is the current quality of daycare in Chile? And how close or far is this from the quality of center daycare in other countries? These questions are addressed in the second chapter, where we measure quality of care in a sample of daycare centers and compare the result with those of other studies conducted in Chile prior to this explosive growth and with results of international studies.

Unlike many of the interventions in the past, which were more focused on nutritional aspects and aimed to reduce infant mortality, the program Chile Grows With You seeks to address the needs relating to children’s wellbeing and psychosocial skills. One of its internationally unprecedented features is the nationwide use of a measure for assessing the mother-child relationship to discover early difficulties in emotional development. However, this instrument was never validated and its reliability and validity were unclear. Therefore, and because of the huge number of families that have been evaluated using this instrument – to date, more than 200,000 cases – (Causadias, Sroufe, & Herreros, 2011), we conducted a validation study of the Massie-Campbell Attachment During Stress (ADS) scale, the results of which were compared with those of the Ainsworth’s Strange Situation Procedure, the gold standard to assess attachment. The results are provided in Chapter 3.
Moreover, since the program Chile Grows With You aims to support and evaluate child development in connection with parenting, various strategies have taken into account the cultural diversity of the country. Diversity is mainly represented by the Mapuche population, which reaches about 5% of the population and whose parenting may be affected by parenting guides written from the viewpoint of the majority culture. In the attempt to respect cultural diversity, the Chile Grows With You program provided a series of guides about pregnancy, childbirth and parenting to families from ethnic minorities, in which the parenting practices reflect their own culture and which they can read as an alternative to or in tandem with the guide for majority families. However, very little is known about cultural differences in parenting among the various ethnic groups and, above all, there are no empirical studies that investigate this matter. Thus Chapter 4 describes a first empirical study to answer questions such as ‘What are the differences in parenting between Mapuche families and non-Mapuche families’, and ‘What is the role of socio-economic inequality?’

Finally, Chapter 5 is focused on the issue of how type of care (maternal versus daycare) and ethnic differences may affect mother-child-attachment, maternal sensitivity, or the quantity and quality of home care children receive. Through a longitudinal study, the Magellan Leiden Childcare Study (MLCS), and using the opportunity to cross-validate some of its results in a representative sample of the Chilean population (ELPI), we tried to address the question as to how daycare attendance from early age can affect attachment relationships and the quality of the home environment.