

Infants in a Colony of Captive Chimpanzees: Social Enrichment?

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Social enrichment refers broadly to the social lives of chimpanzees as social interactions with other chimpanzees. Optimizing the management of social behavior is essential to maintaining a breeding population of chimpanzees that retain their behavioral competence over generations.

This study aims to underline whether and how newborns could be considered a social environmental enrichment for a colony of captive chimpanzees housed at Parco Natura Viva, by comparing interactions between the different members of the colony and two young females: a 2-month-old infant, fully dependent on the care of her mother, and a 4-year-old infant, completely weaned.

Results highlight that the 2-month-old infant receives attentions significantly more from the mother and the grandmother than from the remaining subjects. On the contrary, the 4-year-old infant receives more interactions from the rest of the group rather than from her mother. Moreover, the grandmother of the 2-month-old infant acts as an allomother.

In conclusion, an infant may represent a social enrichment for a group of chimpanzees, since it stimulates social relationships among individuals, especially when the strong mother-infant bond becomes less exclusive.