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Yarrow, Leon J. "Maternal deprivation: toward an empirical and conceptual reevaluation," Psychological Bulletin, 1961, 58:6, 459-490.

The object of this review of literature loosely bound under the label "maternal deprivation" is 1) to sort out the varied antecedent conditions of maternal care, and 2) to relate the empirical findings to theoretical conceptualizations. Working through four deviations of maternal care -- institutionalization, maternal separation, multiple mothering, and distortions of quality, the article focuses upon "an analysis of the environmental conditions and the impact of these events and conditions upon development" (460). Theoretical implications are then formulated under the concepts of deprivation and stress, in variations of duration, time (ie., critical phase or developmental stage), and constitutional factors. The issue of reversibility of effects as a function of long-term deprivation is briefly discussed, and the article is concluded by a hypothetical concept of maternal deprivation that is derived from a reduction of manipulable variables for purposes of research.

1. Institutionalization. Empirical findings in institution studies are separated into those dealing principally with sensory, emotional, social, and learning conditions. The major consistent findings of these studies point to: "general intellectual retardation, retardation in language functions, and social and personality disturbances centering around the capacity to establish and maintain close interpersonal relationships." (464)

With respect to intellectual functioning, 1) "the amount of individualized stimulation...seems to be significantly related to the degree of retardation," (462) 2) "the younger the child at the time of institutionalization the more likely is subsequent retardation" (464), 3) interpretative data suggest constitutional differences in vulnerability to institutional deprivation" (465), 4) a cumulative impact of duration of institutionalization showing progressive drops in developmental quotients with continued institutional residence.

Two important studies are cited to show that lack of adequate stimulation, rather than some special aspect of the institutional setting per se, are responsible for intellectual retardation. These are Rheingold (1943), and Coleman & Provence (1957).

Separate aspects of intellectual functioning are not equally affected. For example, language functioning is found consistently to be severely retarded; time and space concepts, and abstract thinking processes (where adequately investigated) show varying amounts of defectiveness, while motor functions are less severely affected. There is a suggestion based upon findings of deviant motor patterns and defects in conceptual thinking of "the possibility of central nervous system damage as a result of institutionalization" (468).

Social and personality disturbances as a result of institutionalization, usually take one of two interrelated forms: "social apathy" and "affect hunger." Social apathy is described as: inadequate social responsiveness, indifference to social attachments, inadequate social discrimination, and lack of social sensitivity. The affect hunger syndrome is characterized by "indiscriminate and insatiable demands for attention" (469). The former deviation is more common among institutionalized populations. There is often evidenced a pattern of



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diffuse and impulsive behavior suggesting a lack of normal inhibitory controls." (469) Beres and Obers (1950) report "a distortion in psychic structure, an immature ego, and deficient superego development..." (469).

A theoretical concept of maternal deprivation in institutions cited by Goldfarb is that

...without continuity of mothering in an institution...normal development of the self-concept is impaired, with resulting defects in abstract thought processes. Social and personality disturbances are linked directly to lack of opportunity for close human relationships in infancy in institutional environments. (471)

Goldfarb's contention is based upon Stern's theory (1938), ie., "the grasp of identity, as well as judgments of equality, similarity, and difference are all derived from the sense of continuity of self" (471).

2. Maternal Separation. "Maternal separation has never been studied under pure conditions." (471) Nevertheless, a characteristic sequence of responses is noted: active protest and violent emotional reaction upon initial separation, "followed by active rejection of adults, and finally apathy and withdrawal of interest in people" (473). Robertson and Bowlby (1952) interpret this latter phase as repression of the mother figure, the prelude to a psychopathic character.

However, despite these dramatic effects, a "substantial portion" (unspecified) of children in these studies do not show such reactions. Reactions seem to vary with age, and vary in kind, according to age. For example, "Shaffer (1958) relates the global disturbances (of infants under 7 months) to sensory deprivation, whereas the social disturbance at the later ages...are interpreted as reactions to separation from the mother" (474).

The effects of separation are also varied by the quality of the mother-child relationship preceding separation, and the quality of mother-substitution following separation. "It might be hypothesized that a close relationship with a mother figure preceding separation will be followed by more severe immediate reaction but will be ultimately more favorable than a poor antecedent relationship" (476).

3. Multiple Mothering. The few relevant studies of multiple mothering indicate that there are no necessary ill-effects to the child. Three types of studies are discussed: home management houses, Israeli kibbutzim, and a few anthropological reports. Among the latter, for example, it is found that in cultures where traditionally the mother role is assigned to members of the extended family, to the father, or, in the case of the old Southern Aristocracy, to the Negro "mummy", no... "disturbances in infant functioning (or)...later personality or character deviations (are)...attributed to this aspect of early maternal care.

The kibbutzim studies offer evidence that not only are there no ill effects of the multiple mothering situation, on the contrary, children show "better emotional control and greater overall maturity" (Rabin, 1958). Also, using the Blacky test to assess psychosexual development, Rabin found Kibbutz boys showed "...less Oedipal intensity, more positive identification with their fathers, and less intense sibling rivalry" (478).

Home-management house studies consistently report no ill effects in terms



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of intellectual retardation or personality disturbances.

4. Distortions in Mother-Child Relationship. Personality manifestations of distorted mother-child relationship are most likely to be in the schizophrenic, depressive, and neurotic categories. Distortions are "manifested in overtly or covertly hostile or rejecting behavior, ...overprotective behavior, and often in unpredictable swings from affection to rejection, or in ambivalent behavior" (479).

The data from the research on institutionalization, maternal separation, and multiple mothering have relevance for a number of fundamental issues in developmental theory: Questions concerning the kinds of environmental conditions which facilitate, inhibit, or distort normal developmental progress; the conditions which influence the reversibility of effects of events in infancy and early childhood; and the extent to which the timing of an experience, i.e., the developmental stage at which it occurs, determines its specific impact." (480)

Two concepts from developmental theory, deprivation and stress, are related to studies on maternal deprivation. A summary of these relationships includes:

1) Sensory deprivation studies with animals often result in permanent damage to function in which the deprivation occurs.

2) The extent of retardation in institution corresponds to the degree of sensory deprivation.

3) Social deprivation results in disturbances such as social apathy and social hyperresponsiveness.

4) If social deprivation "occurs after appropriate social responses are learned, affect hunger or intensified seeking of social response may occur" (480).

5) "Emotional apathy, withdrawn behavior, lack of differentiation of affect, and insensitivity to feeling or emotional nuances in others are characteristics which might be related to early maternal deprivation." (480)

6) Changes in the physical environment result in a loss of environmental predictability.

7) There may be a critical time interval in maternal separation after which irreversible effects occur (Spitz and Wolf, 1946), i.e., sensitivity to intellectual damage is greatest during the 3-12 month period.

8) "Some animal studies suggest that a minimal level of stimulation may be necessary to produce the biochemical changes necessary for development of underlying structures." (484)

A concept of maternal deprivation. In avoiding the complex emotional relationship between mother and child, the focal point of psychodynamic theories, the mother is here portrayed as 1) social stimulus, "providing sensory stimulation to the infant through tactile, visual and auditory media, and 2) as mediator of environmental stimuli." (485) The meaning of these mothering activities and the impact of separation "varies with the child's perceptual, cognitive and motor capacities at different developmental levels" (486).

The mother image gradually evolves out of "a welter of tactile, visual, kinesthetic, & auditory cues" (486). In time these cues become organized as distinctive or 'familiar' to the infant. "Finally, there is a fixation of positive feelings on this perceptual complex" (486). Loss of the mother before this critical point tends to result in manifestations of sensory deprivation, whereas after the point of fixation, the loss of a significant person becomes the primary factor,