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Earle, A.M., and Earle, B.V., "Early maternal deprivation and later psychiatric illness," Amer. J. Orthopsychiatry, 1961, 31, 181-186.

The object of this study is to investigate the relationship between maternal deprivation and personality disorders, specifically in the categories of psychiatric illness. One hundred patients out of a total hospital population of 1423, with a minimum of six months of maternal deprivation in the first six years of life, were compared by psychiatric evaluations with matched controls. All cases were diagnosed by one of the authors.

Results show that the sociopathic personality and childhood behavior disorders are significantly greater for the cases of maternal deprivation. No differences are found in nine other psychiatric categories. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

Maternal deprivation studies, such as those of Bowlby (1952) have often been criticized on the basis of the parents having a history of instability. These critics contend that it is the hereditary predisposition toward psychopathy inherited from unstable parents (as measured by incidence of divorce, separation, illegitimacy, prison record, etc.) that produces the psychiatric disorder (most commonly the sociopathic personality or childhood behavioral disorder), and not maternal deprivation per se. To test this contention, the authors divided their 100 cases of maternal deprivation into those who were separated from the mother by her death and those separated because of factors of maternal instability such as divorce, illegitimacy, etc. They found no significant differences between the groups except that depression was more common among the death-separated group. Thus it was shown that maternal deprivation is responsible for the development of psychiatric disorder, not biological inheritance from unstable parents.

Broken marriages, poor work record, and prison records were found to be common factors in the families of the maternal-deprived cases.

Discussion: "It will be seen that maternal deprivation is significantly related to the later development of sociopathic personality. Failure in adjusting to society in the spheres of marriage, work, and relationship to law and order is also a significant association" (183). Among those sociopaths who were not included in the maternal-deprivation group (ie., because they did not meet the criterion of six months minimum deprivation in the first six years of life), it is interesting to note that "some lost their mothers after age six, others were rejected, a number were overindulged in childhood, and only a comparatively small number came from apparently normal homes" (184).

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