

'To what extent do research studies support the view that maternal deprivation can have long term effects?

Maternal deprivation is when the child is deprived of love from the primary caregiver (i.e. the mother) in the early stages of development. This essay will examine the latter effects of bond disruption, and the studies that have been carried out to support it. Early attachments by the primary caregiver are important in the child's latter life. This is supported by a study carried out in 1944 by Bowlby. The participants were patients of the child guidance clinic, half of which were referred to the clinic for stealing, whilst the other half because they were emotionally maladjusted. Some of the 'thieves' were diagnosed as 'affectionless psychopaths'; none of the emotionally maladjusted were. The results from this study are significant, 86% of those diagnosed as 'affectionless psychopaths' had experienced early and prolonged separations from their mothers, whereas very few of the non-psychopathic thieves had experienced such separations. The results exemplify that children are affected by bond disruption in early development. Bowlby later in 1952 drew up the 'Maternal deprivation hypothesis' acknowledging the results he had found earlier. In this hypothesis, Bowlby focuses on the effects of deprivation and the needs of a child. The hypothesis states that if a child has not been able to form "a warm and continuous attachment with his primary care giver" (mother), then he will find it difficult forming relationships with other people. In latter life the child will have increased chances of having emotionally disturbed behaviour (e.g. bed wetting), intellectual retardation, and also in childhood physical underdevelopment. Concerns about the long-term effects of separation were given an impetus by Bowlby's report in 1944 that delinquency was associated with young children's separation from their mother. He suggested that the separation was the cause of the delinquency. Bowlby developed the idea that if an infant was unable to develop a 'warm, intimate and continuous relationship with his mother' then the child would have difficulty forming relationships with other people and be at risk of behavioural disorders. This became known as the 'maternal deprivation hypothesis'. One source of evidence was his own research, but there were a number of other studies conducted around the time of the Second World War that indicated a key role for separation. There are various issues to be considered. First, much of the evidence used to support the idea came from studies of children in institutions where they were deprived in many ways. Therefore, it may not be maternal deprivation, but other forms of deprivation, which affected subsequent development. Second, not all research has found that separations led to maladjustment. A later study by Bowlby et al (1956) found no such ill effects. A group of children with tuberculosis was studied. They were under the age of 4 when they were first hospitalised. The nursing regimes tended to be strict and the care impersonal, but many of the children were visited weekly by their families (i.e. bond disruption was minimized). Information was obtained about these children when they were between 7 and 14 years old. They were assessed by psychologists and their teachers were also interviewed. When the children who had TB were compared with a control group of children who had not been in hospital, it was found that there were no differences in terms of delinquency or problems in forming social relationships. Therefore, it would appear that separation does not inevitably have harmful effects, as long as bond disruption is minimized. Attachments can be explained in terms of learning theory or Bowlby's theory. Classic and operant conditioning suggest that infants will become attached to the person who feeds them, either by becoming a conditioned stimulus (association) or a secondary reinforcer (drive reduction). However, research doesn't support this reductionist view. Bowlby argued that attachment behaviour is innately adaptive. According to Bowlby, social releasers are important during a critical period of

development and later relationships are based on the internal working model. However, Bowlby's theory cannot explain all individual differences, nor the fact that individuals tend to form different kinds of relationship later in life. Secure attachment is claimed to be of prime importance for emotional and social development. Therefore if separation harms attachment, we would expect to see differences in terms of social and emotional development in those children placed in day care. Clarke-Stewart et al. (1994) investigated the relationship between time spent in day care and quality of attachment in over 500 children. They found that 15 month-old children who experienced 'high-intensity' childcare were equally distressed when separated from their mothers in the Strange Situation as 'low-intensity' children. This suggests that attachment was not affected by the experiences of separation. A recent study conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) sheds more light on this. They examined over 1,000 infants and their mothers at age 6 months and again at 15 months. The mothers were interviewed and the infants were observed at home and, where possible, in day care. The findings showed that those infants with extensive day-care experience did not differ from infants without day care in terms of the distress they exhibited during separations from mother in the Strange Situation. This suggests that the day-care experience had no immediate effects on attachment. Also, the study did not find any differences in terms of the age of the infants when they first started day care, the amount of day care, or the type of care. However, they did find effects in relation to maternal sensitivity and responsiveness. Infants were less likely to be secure when low maternal sensitivity or responsiveness was combined with poor quality childcare, more than minimal amounts of childcare, or more than one care arrangement. In other words, a build-up of negative factors did create problems. Egeland and Hiester (1995) found an interesting interaction effect. This study looked at about 70 children, about half of whom entered day care before the age of 1, and the rest remained at home with their mothers. All the children came from impoverished backgrounds. Security of attachment was assessed in the Strange Situation around the age of 1, and then the children were assessed again at the age of 5 and a half years old, in a structured observation session. Day care appeared to have a negative effect for secure children, but had a positive influence for insecure children. One might be able to explain this in terms of the fact that insecurely attached children needed compensatory education, and therefore benefited from day care, whereas the securely attached children did not require this extra attention. However, later reports on socio-emotional development found no differences between the two groups. These findings again suggest that what appears to matter is not the day-care experience itself, but the conditions under which it may be positively beneficial. This hypothesis although it is beneficial, is not quite accurate as much of the evidence for this theory came from children which were institutionalised and therefore deprived in many ways, not just maternal, it could also be physically. Also not all research shows that separation leads to maladjustment, in 1956 Bowlby found no such ill effects caused. In 1981, Rutter suggested that behavioural problems were the result of broken homes causing disharmony, rather than the separation. Rutter did a study on over 2,000 boys aged between 9 and 12, who had all experienced separation whether it be from physical illness, death of mother, psychiatric illness, or discord within the family. Rutter found that the boys were four times more likely to become delinquent rather than when separation was caused by illness. This supports Rutter's hypothesis that it is family discord rather than separation on its own, which cause delinquency and emotional maladjustment.