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The “no-me children”: What and when did we know about immigrant children-parent separation?

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This op-ed is simply an annotated timeline and bibliography of some of the hundreds of articles on effects on children of parent-child separation. It has links to several illustrative videos and audio links. It makes only one comment. It is just facts. But it is not complete or comprehensive. The history goes back well before 1942 with the separations of American Indian and African American children's separations. However, going back more than 75 years to the middle of WWII and Nazi separations of Jewish, Roma and other children was about the time research on the research on the issue began.

1942 Harry Bakwin, Physician

Children in institutions experiencing only a brief period of maternal separation from their mothers were found to be psychologically disturbed. There was an “appalling” death rate of separated children.

Bakwin, H. (1942). Loneliness in infants. *American Journal of Diseases of Children*, 63(1), 30-40.

1943 Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham, Psychoanalysts.

Freud and Burlingham make the startling finding that separating children from their parents in England during the blitz is more damaging and traumatizing to the children than experiencing the bombing.

Anna Freud & Dorothy Burlingham. *War and Children*, Medical War Books.

1945/1946 Rene Spitz, Psychiatrist

Children were either raised without their mothers in well-run hospital or in prison with their mothers. 37% of the infants raised in a hospital died. None of the infants raised in the prison with their mother died.

Spitz, R. A. (1945). Hospitalism: An inquiry into the genesis of psychiatric conditions in early childhood. *The psychoanalytic study of the child*, 1(1), 53-74.

Spitz, R. A. (1946). Hospitalism; a follow-up report. *The psychoanalytic study of the child*, 2, 113.

Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VvdOe10vrs4>

1951 John Bowlby and James Robertson, Psychiatrists

Using data from multiple studies they documented failures in development and death rates of children separated from parents. In a classic case study they found the damaging effects of even a short separation for a child going to the hospital without her parents.

Bowlby, J. (1951). *Maternal care and mental health* (Vol. 2). Geneva: World Health Organization.

Video Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s14Q-_Bxc_U

1959 Harry Harlow, Primatologist

Studied love and found that infant monkeys prefer cloth surrogates over a wire surrogate that gives food. Monkeys separated from their mothers and raised with cloth surrogates nonetheless engaged in aberrant sexual and parenting behavior as adults.

Harlow, H. F., & Zimmermann, R. R. (1959). Affectional responses in the infant monkey. *Science*, 130(3373), 421-432.

Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbEdNJ-e-Yc>

1978 U.S. Government

The US ends their indigenous child removal from parent policies that were in place from just after World War II up until passage of the *Indian Child Welfare Act* in 1978.

1978 Ed Tronick, Developmental Neuroscientist and Clinical Psychologist

Found that a 2-minute non-response (Still-Face) by a mother to her infant generated distress and problematic cardiac and hormonal changes in infants. The memory of the experience lasted at least two weeks, dysregulated the infants' physiology and disrupted their positive play engagements with their mother.

Tronick, E., Als, H., Adamson, L., Wise, S., & Brazelton, T. B. (1978). The infant's response to entrapment between contradictory messages in face-to-face interaction. *Pediatrics*, 62(3), 403-403.

Mueller I., Sandman N., DiCorcia J., Sravish A., Duffy E., and Tronick, E. (2018, July). In a heartbeat: Infant memory for a stressful interaction with their mother at 4-months. Poster presented at, *The International Conference on Infant Studies* (ICIS), Philadelphia, PA.

Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apzXGEbZht0>

1989/Present U.S. Government

US refuses to approve the UN Charter of Children's Rights. The Charter of Children's Rights sets standards for education, health care, social services and penal laws,

and establishes the right of children to have a say in decisions that affect them. It is adopted by every country in the world, except Somalia and the USA.

1990 Seymour Levine

Squirrel monkey infants showed increased plasma cortisol (stress hormone that can damage the brain) after a 24-hour separation from their mothers. Infants separated for 4-days, showed “persistent” increase in plasma cortisol.

Wiener, S. G., Bayart, F., Faull, K. F., & Levine, S. (1990). Behavioral and physiological responses to maternal separation in squirrel monkeys (*Saimiri sciureus*). *Behavioral Neuroscience*, 104(1), 108.

Bayart, F., Hayashi, K. T., Faull, K. F., Barchas, J. D., & Levine, S. (1990). Influence of maternal proximity on behavioral and physiological responses to separation in infant rhesus monkeys (*Macaca mulatta*). *Behavioral Neuroscience*, 104(1), 98.

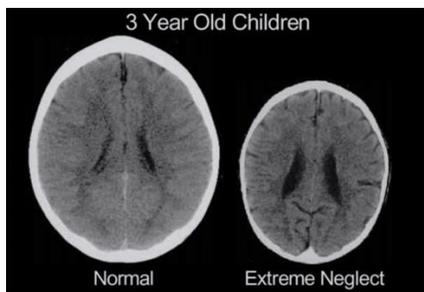
1995 President William Clinton

President Clinton signs the UN Charter of Children’s Rights. This is merely a symbolic act, as it has never been ratified by the senate. A number of Republican senators, claiming concerns about U.S. sovereignty, have consistently opposed ratification.

1997 Bruce Perry, Neuropharmacologist

Dramatic differences in brain growth (Fronto-orbital circumference) found in neglected children. On average this brain region of neglected children was only in the 10th percentile, while physical measures such as height and weight were less affected (“only” 30-40th percentile).

Perry, B. D., & Pollard, R. (1997, November). Altered brain development following global neglect in early childhood. In *Proceedings from the Society for Neuroscience Annual Meeting (New Orleans)*.



2004 Michael Meaney, Epigeneticist

Rat pups that received low maternal care (licking and grooming, arched-back nursing) show differences in the epigenome of the glucocorticoid receptor (GR) gene compared to offspring that receive high maternal care. Those differences persisted into adulthood and significantly affected the offspring’s stress responses.

Weaver, I. C., Cervoni, N., Champagne, F. A., D'Alessio, A. C., Sharma, S., Seckl, J. R. & Meaney, M. J. (2004). Epigenetic programming by maternal behavior. *Nature neuroscience*, 7(8), 847.

Video Link: <https://learn.genetics.utah.edu/content/epigenetics/rats/>

2006 Regina M. Sullivan, Developmental Neuroscientist

Infants without their mothers learn fear and leads to amygdala activation and a hormonal stress response.

Moriceau, S., & Sullivan, R. M. (2006). Maternal presence serves as a switch between learning fear and attraction in infancy. *Nature neuroscience*, 9(8), 1004.

2007 Charles Nelson, Developmental Psychologist, Charles Zeanah, Psychiatrist, Nathan Fox, Developmental Psychologist.

Children in Romanian orphanages show aberrant brain development. The cognitive outcome of children who remained in institutionalized care was significantly below that of never institutionalized children and children that were placed in foster care.

Nelson, C. A., Zeanah, C. H., Fox, N. A., Marshall, P. J., Smyke, A. T., & Guthrie, D. (2007). Cognitive recovery in socially deprived young children: The Bucharest Early Intervention Project. *Science*, 318(5858), 1937-1940.

Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCeWr8OFuEs>

2010 Nim Tottenham, Psychologist

Children who experienced orphanage care show changes in amygdala volumes (involved in experiencing emotions, "alarm-circuit"), poorer emotion regulation, and increased anxiety. More than 50% of the children who experienced orphanage rearing met criteria for a psychiatric disorder. These changes in limbic circuitry may underlie residual emotional and social problems experienced by children who have been in institutionalized care.

Tottenham, N., Hare, T. A., Quinn, B. T., McCarry, T. W., Nurse, M., Gilhooly, T., & Thomas, K. M. (2010). Prolonged institutional rearing is associated with atypically large amygdala volume and difficulties in emotion regulation. *Developmental science*, 13(1), 46-61.

2011 Xiaoli Hu, Zoologist

Rhesus monkeys were followed for 3 years during normal social life after a short maternal separation during infancy. After 1.5- and 3-years monkeys showed lasting differences in hair cortisol, abnormal behavioral patterns, decrease in locomotion and increases in stereotypical behaviors compared with the mother-reared monkeys.

Feng, X., Wang, L., Yang, S., Qin, D., Wang, J., Li, C., & Hu, X. (2011). Maternal separation produces lasting changes in cortisol and behavior in rhesus monkeys. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 108(34), 14312-14317.

2018 Christopher Lapish, Neuroscientist

Young rats that were separated from their mothers for 24-hours showed significant behavioral, as well as biological and physiological, brain abnormalities in adulthood.

Janetsian-Fritz, S. S., Timme, N. M., McCane, A. M., Baucum II, A. J., O'Donnell, B. F., & Lapish, C. C. (2018). Maternal deprivation induces alterations in cognitive and cortical function in adulthood. *Translational psychiatry*, 8(1), 71.

2018 Barry Lester, Developmental Psychologist

Less breastfeeding and less handling increased DNA methylation of *NR3C1* gene and decreased cortisol reactivity. As in rodents, maternal care in humans alters the epigenome of offspring through behavioral programming, which, in turn, alters HPA stress reactivity.

Lester, B. Conradt, E., J., LaGasse, L., Tronick, E., Padbury, J. Marist, C. (2018). Epigenetic Programming by Maternal Behavior in the Human Infant. *Pediatrics*, in press

2013/present - US government and its agencies under several presidents, Obama, Trump and perhaps other presidents, separates immigrant parents and children. Audio Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bzbiWJ2er2Y>

Conclusion

Even brief separations of a young child from her or his parents generate acute and long lasting damage to their behavioral, psychological, emotional, physiologic, and brain functioning and lifelong development.

To paraphrase Donald Winnicott, a pediatrician and psychiatrist, a period of separation beyond the child's ability to manage precipitates an unbearable anxiety. Having no way to make meaning of his mother's absence, it is as if she no longer exists. And if she no longer exists, the child's sense of his own existence falters. An experience that goes beyond terror, sadness, or rage, it produces a feeling that "there is no me."

A Comment

Will the separated immigrant children be the "there is no-me children" and "no-me adults" because of our policy of separation? We, as Americans, as human beings do exist. If we fail to end our government's policy and practice of separating children and parents we will not be able to say we "did not know" or that we were just "taking orders". We will become the "no-me people".

Thank you for your consideration,



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