**Institutional Care**

****A further method of assessing the effects of privation (failure to form an attachment) has been studies of children who have spent their early years in institutions.

**Key study – *Tizard and Hodges (1989)***

**Aim:** To investigate the effects of long term institutional care.

**Procedure:** This was a natural experiment, studying 65 children bought up in a children's home in America until the age of 4 (all had been placed in care before the age of 6 months). During this time the children were unable to form an attachment to any of the adults as staff were discouraged from doing so to prevent upsetting the children when they left the job.

By age 4, 24 had been adopted, 15 restored to their birth parents, and the rest stayed in the institution. All three groups were compared to a control group of ‘normal’ children raised in their own homes.

Data was collected using questionnaires, and by interviewing children, parents and teachers at age 4, 8 and 16**.** However, it should be noted that only 39 (out of 65) participants were left in the study at age 16, due to attrition.

**Results:**

* At the age of 4, the children hadn’t formed attachments.
* At age 8 and 16, most of the adopted children had formed close attachments, as strong as those in the control group, with their adopted parents. The children who returned to their own homes had formed poorer attachments than the adopted group.
* At 8 and 16, both the adopted and restored groups had difficulties at school; they more attention seeking and had problems forming relationships with other children.
* More than two thirds of the children who remained in the institutions were described at four and a half years old as ‘not caring deeply about anyone’, and many were attention seeking. At 8 years old, many had serious problems at school.

**Conclusions:**

j0185604The attachments that the adopted children formed with their adoptive parents suggest that, contrary to Bowlby’s claim, the effects of privation can be reversed to some extent. However, the problems that the adopted children experienced at school suggest that some of the effects of privation are indeed long lasting. The characteristics of the children who stayed in the institutions, and the problems experienced by the other two groups suggest that the lack of an early close relationship with one particular person could contribute to later social and emotional problems.

**Institutional Care**

**Key study – *Rutter et al (2007)***

This is an on-going **longitudinal** study which began in 1998.

**Aim:** To investigate whether good quality care after adoption can make up for very poor early institutional experiences.

**Procedure:** 111 Romanian orphans were adopted into British families.  Rutter wanted to see if good care could compensate for the privation the children had suffered before the overthrow of the Communist dictator Ceaucescu.

This has been run as a natural experiment with age of adoption being the naturally occurring independent variable (IV).  Rutter is studying three groups:

·         Adopted before the age of 6 months

·         Adopted between 6 months and 2 years

·         Adopted after the age of two (late adoptees).

**Results**: Rutter found evidence of disinhibited attachment behaviours in the Romanian adoptees, most commonly in the children who were adopted at an older age. He defined disinhibited attachment as ‘a pattern of attention-seeking behaviours with a relative lack of selectivity in social relationships’ – in other words, children are more likely to seek attention from all adults, even strangers and make inappropriate physical contact without checking back to the parent in a stressful situation. Disinhibited attachment was extremely rare in UK-born adoptees and children who were adopted at a younger age. This evidence shows that children who have spent longer in institutions are more likely to display signs of disinhibited attachment.

**Conclusions:** The effects of early privation do not seem to be completely irreversible (as suggested by Bowlby), but children exposed to institutional privation are more likely to make a fuller recovery if adopted into a caring environment at an earlier age.

As a result of this research, Rutter suggested that Bowlby’s ‘critical period’ could be better described as a ‘sensitive period’; meaning that, although there is an optimal period for forming attachments, it is not impossible to form them after the age of 2 and a half if the child is adopted into a warm and loving environment.