

The Rene Spitz Study



- Children in hospitals, even for brief periods of separation from their mothers, and children in institutions were found to be psychologically disturbed (Bakwin, 1942; Bowlby, 1959, 1973).
- In the 1940s Rene Spitz reported on his experience with children in a foundling home, comparing them with children in the nursery of a penal institution (1945, 1946) .



Prisoners and their children sun themselves on a porch at Massachusetts' Reformatory for Women (as it was then known) in Framingham in March 1945.

Spitz study
Subject LAM – aged 9 months 6 days;
deprived of mom in founding home for 6 months



- The physical conditions in the foundling home were better than those in the penal institution, but the illness and death rates were higher.
- Although developmentally the foundling home infants were superior, after a year of institutionalization they were inferior to those in the prison setting.
- Within two years, 37 percent of the foundling home children were dead (only 2 from disease) this rate rose the next year as well; all the prison children were alive five years later.

What was the difference?

The difference between the two settings was that in the prison the children's mothers cared for them, while in the foundling home the children were cared for by professional nurses.

References

Patterson and Hidore (1997) The primary prevention of psychosocial disorders: A person/client-centred perspective. *The Person-Centered Journal*, Volume 4, Issue 1