



**MATERNAL DEPRIVATION
REASSESSED.**

**By Michael Rutter. Penguin Books, 1981.
2nd Edition, 218 pp. \$5.95.**

Michael Rutter's latest edition of *Maternal Deprivation Reassessed* is certainly not a book to curl up in bed with. At first glance it appears as a light paperback—not so. While running to a mere 218 pages it takes a determined and vitally interested reader to plough through the discussions of 765 pieces of research and writings; including 37 of Rutter's own.

Certainly *Maternal Deprivation Reassessed* "number 2" is an impressive survey of literature which comprehensively updates views and findings related to child development and care. Rutter moves on from his first edition, reviewing more literature and then relating this to practical considerations of day care, parenting and long-term effects of deprivation.

Unfortunately Rutter's information-packed book has one major flaw—its title. 'Maternal Deprivation' is a very emotive term. In the twenty years since John Bowlby published his views on *maternal deprivation* many myths and prejudices have been promoted. The debates relating to the value of day care and the role of women have left many mothers with feelings of guilt and inadequacy, and enabled governments to argue against the funding of good quality children's services.

One of the outstanding conclusions Michael Rutter reaches in this second edition is that 'mothering is a rather general term which includes a wide range of activities' . . . and that . . . 'it is perhaps preferable to concentrate on the various requirements for normal development rather than to attempt any artificial separation of functions which are specifically those of the mother' (p.30). This approach is supported by several findings throughout the book.

Given these conclusions it is disappointing that Rutter continues to give such an inappropriate term as

maternal deprivation the prominence of title and chapter headings.

Nevertheless, Rutter's review of the qualities required for normal child development has significant implications for the kind of care which should be provided both in the natural parent's home and elsewhere, as well as for government policy in relation to the provision of children's services.

Rutter considers six characteristics literature usually regards as necessary for adequate 'child development; 'a loving relationship, which leads to attachment, which is unbroken, which provides adequate stimulation, in which the mothering is provided by one person, and which occurs in the child's own family' (p.18). He discusses each of these qualities in turn, firstly assessing their bearing on parent-child relationships and then in relation to deprivation, both short-term and long-term effects.

Rutter's findings contain many pointers for improving the quality of care and the environment in which children develop. He finds that a loving relationship, not only with the mother, but within the whole family, enhances a child's development. The findings regarding attachment are more controversial; he states that Bowlby's arguments that children tend to have a bias to attach to one figure, is not supported in the literature. Further, he suggests that attachment varies according to the intensity of interaction and probably develops most readily when the adult's response is sensitive and appropriate (p.21). Rutter states that attachment may develop to people who in fact cause a child stress; a familiar response for people working with maltreated children. He concludes that while the most responsive person tends to be the one to whom the child is most attached, other familiar people, including siblings, are able to reduce stress for a child in a strange environment (p.40). Thus it is possible to diminish stress in hospitals or other strange environments by having a

'family' member present. Stress, Rutter also found, could be reduced if the setting was familiar. These findings add weight to arguments for the funding of child care centres with home-like environments and for the use of foster care as opposed to institutional care of children. They also support the argument for parental involvement in the provision of child-care.

Overall, Rutter argues that it is the quality of care given that matters. While acknowledging the disruptiveness of 'pillar to post' child-care arrangements, he asserts that the quality is more important than the place in which the care is provided. Rutter concludes that in the short-term, while disruption or distortion of existing bonds may lead to distress, it is lack of opportunities to develop bonds, together with lack of social, perceptual and linguistic stimulation which may lead to developmental retardation (p.54).

Rutter's discussion of the long-term effects of deprivation highlights the conclusion that 'in spite of claims in the past that the children of working mothers are likely to become delinquent or show psychiatric disorder, there is abundant evidence from numerous studies that this is not so' . . . and 'that children do not suffer from having several mother-figures so long as stable relationships and good care are provided by each. Indeed some studies have shown that children of working mothers may be even less likely to become delinquent than children whose mothers stay at home!' (p.63). Once more Rutter argues that it is the *type* of care which is significant.

Rutter gives attention to the issue of day care and, overall, supports the view that day care of children is certainly not harmful and in fact can be of positive value. Firstly he disputes that findings of studies of institutional care can necessarily be related to day care. It is the quality of care rather than the fact that the child is away from the natural parent that counts. Where 'pillar to post' arrangements are made then Rutter

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suggests that the lack of continuity and stability can be stressful (p.177). Rutter states that 'good quality day care does not disrupt a child's emotional bonds with his parents and even day care for very young children does not usually result in serious emotional disturbance' (p.178).

The above conclusions deserve to be highlighted and should relieve many a working parent of the guilt associated with using child-care services. Rutter stresses that these conclusions are based on studies of good day-care centres and that further research needs to be carried out to assess the effects of various aspects of care. Unfortunately few parents in Australia can be assured that the care their children receive from others is of good quality, while government funding of children's services continues to decline in real terms.

All the above influences affect the development of an individual. Rutter suggests that while early disadvantages may be overcome with extra child-care and attention, later experiences can also modify positive early experiences.

Rutter briefly touches on the influences affecting parents. Significantly, he mentions the effects the social environment may have on parenting, making special mention of research which found that 'parenting problems were more frequent in the presence of housing difficulties' (p.205).

The second edition of *Maternal deprivation re-assessed* is a significant review of current thinking related to child-care. Hopefully, it will provide the impetus to redirect debates about childcare to a useful and relevant level. The book's focus on all the qualities needed for normal development, rather than on the mother is welcome. Rutter's book provides the data which should be the foundation of government policy in relation to the provision of funds to ensure that all children have access to the best kind of care whether it be in their

own homes or elsewhere.

Lynne Wannan
Municipal Liaison Officer
City of Ballarat



STAYING MARRIED

By Warwick Hartin. Hill of Content, Melbourne, 1980. 100 pp. \$4.95.

An excellent book on marriage. A must for professionals working with couples or families in distress. Warwick Hartin gives a well stated and comprehensive overview of the dilemma of modern marriage and offers hope to those willing to work on their relationship.

Important aspects of the marital relationship such as expectations before and after marriage, mate selection, the disparity between dreams and reality, are dealt with in a simple effective style, with ample use of illustrations. The book as a whole is reassuring to couples in demonstrating cause and effect, both for the individual and his problems, as well as the dynamics of the relationship. Removing blame leaves the way open to assess the present situation, and make use of the practical suggestions for improving the relationship offered in Chapters 4-7.

The model of marriage suggested as meeting the needs of many people in our society, is that of the companionship marriage. This can be described as a relationship of equals which offers psychological and emotional closeness, maintained by the willingness of both

partners to work towards increased understanding of each other. To quote "In the main we are not wrong to expect what we do from marriage; we are only wrong in expecting that what we want can be achieved without pain, struggle, hurt, coping with disappointments, misery at times, and all of the conflict of giving up childish behaviour and growing up".

The book would meet the needs of couples who are well educated and motivated and can transfer theory into practice. Its scope of influence can be widened considerably if it is used as an adjunct to counselling or as a resource for marriage growth groups.

The cost by present standards is very reasonable, however the binding of the reviewer's copy did not last through the first reading.

Gerlinde Spencer
Training & Supervision Co-ordinator
of the Family Life Movement's
Marriage Counselling Service in N.S.W.



TOWARDS A LIFE OF LOVING

By Fr. Don Burnard. Hill of Content, Melbourne, 1980. 2nd edition. 189 pp. \$6.95.

The necessity for a second edition of Fr. Burnard's book on pre-marriage education speaks for itself. Fifteen years of experience in the field is reflected in the insights of both theory and a living encounter with thousands of couples. Don Burnard is a realist. He explodes the myth that marriages are made in heaven. There is a call for partners in a relationship to think. Pertinent