

52. They suffer a greater than normal incidence not only of intellectual impairment but also of personality disorders, emotional disturbance and social maladjustment.¹⁹ Their behaviour is more likely to be hyperactive, confused and disorganized.²⁰ They experience more than normal difficulties in adjusting to school routine.²¹ They are more likely to have reading disabilities. They appear to be vulnerable "to developmental deficit in almost every area".²²

53. The long-term effects of prematurity have been studied over a period of ten years. There was little doubt that low birth weight, prenatal conditions likely to cause fetal hypoxia, and methods of delivery which might result in minimal brain damage, were all "quite significantly associated" with disturbed behaviour seven years later.²³

54. Premature birth does not act alone in affecting the future behaviour of the child. Nor does minimal brain damage. The sensory and maternal deprivation due to prolonged hospitalization after birth can have an adverse effect. The developing personality of a child can be seriously harmed if it feels rejected by its parents, if it is neglected or abused physically or emotionally.

55. Socio-economic factors also play a role in determining how such an infant will develop. Post-natal events and the environment in which it grows can either help to repair or exacerbate the disadvantages present at birth.²⁴ Sensory stimulation in early life is important to the normal development of the personality of the child.²⁵ If the child's environment is poor, intellectual growth may be stunted.

56. The premature infant, therefore, comes into the world with more than the normal difficulties to face. Its problems are, unfortunately, often increased by the treatment it is given in hospital. Necessary care for its survival and physical development puts its emotional development at risk. It is separated from its mother, placed in an incubator, and denied the normal opportunities for handling, cuddling and mothering. One of our witnesses described the predicament of the premature infant and its mother in the usual hospital setting:

"... the hospital has discouraged the visiting of the mother, as it interrupts the hospital routine when, in fact, the mother should be right there with that 'premie', with hands through the incubator. That is being discouraged very drastically."²⁶

This isolation of the infant thwarts the normal development of strong attachment or bonding to the mother, and is often the beginning of a trail that leads later to its physical abuse or neglect. "We know there is a much higher incidence of abused children among the premature group."²⁷ "Premature babies are seven times as likely to be abused in childhood by their parents as other children".²⁸ A major reason for this greatly increased chance of abuse is that "after a couple of months of