

Preterm children have similar temperament to children who were institutionally deprived

12 November 2019, by Alice Scott

A child's temperament is affected by the early stages of their life. Researchers from the University of Warwick, the University of Tennessee, University of Southampton and Kings College London have found children who were born very preterm (under 32 weeks gestation) or very low birthweight (under 1500g) had similar temperamental difficulties in controlling their impulses, to children who experienced institutional deprivation.

The paper "A Comparison of the Effects of Preterm Birth and Institutional Deprivation on Child Temperament," published today, 12 November in the journal *Development and Psychopathology* highlights how different adverse experiences such as preterm birth and institutional [deprivation](#) affect [children's](#) temperament in similar ways, resulting in greater risk for lower self-control.

The team of researchers, from the University of Warwick, University of Tennessee, University of Southampton and King's College London looked at children who were born very preterm, or very [low birth weight](#) from the Bavarian Longitudinal study, and children who experienced at least six months of institutional deprivation—a lack of adequate, loving caregivers—in Romanian institutions from the English and Romanian Adoptees study, who were then compared to 311 healthy term born children and 52 non-deprived adoptees, respectively.

The researchers found that both groups of children had lower effortful control at six years.

This is the first study that directly compares the effects of severe [preterm birth](#) and extended institutional deprivation, and suggests that self-control interventions early in life may promote the development of children after both risk experiences.

Prof Dieter Wolke from the Department of Psychology at the University of Warwick

comments: "Both, early care either in an incubator or deprivation and neglect in an orphanage lead to poor effortful control. We need to further determine how this early deprivation alters the brain."

Lucia Miranda Reyes, from the Department of Child and Family Studies at the University of Tennessee comments: "These findings suggest that children's poor effortful control may underlie long-term social problems associated with early adverse experiences; thus, improving their self-control may also help prevent these later problems."

More information: Lucia Miranda Reyes et al. A Comparison of the effects of preterm birth and institutional deprivation on child temperament, *Development and Psychopathology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1017/S0954579419001457](#)

Provided by University of Warwick

APA citation: Preterm children have similar temperament to children who were institutionally deprived (2019, November 12) retrieved 21 November 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-11-preterm-children-similar-temperament-institutionally.html>

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