

PSYCHIATRY

Burns Affect Emotions

Children who are severely burned often become emotionally crippled and their mothers psychologically disturbed, disrupting family relations—By Elizabeth Mirel

► CHILDREN who are severely burned in home accidents are often emotionally crippled for the rest of their lives.

Their mothers are likely to become psychologically disturbed, and crucial family fights may break out, scientists reported to the American Orthopsychiatry Association in Washington, D. C.

A select group of children who had been severely burned were studied by Dr. Aldo Vigliano, Dr. Wayne Hart, and social worker Frances Singer, of the University of Kansas Medical Center. Some of the children were obsessed by memories of their burns and treatments. Years after the accident, they vividly pictured being engulfed by flames. They remembered the pain of the skin grafts and the fear of being scarred and ugly, of losing their hair or having their ears burned off.

Some children put the whole experience out of their minds, saying it did not even bother them. By refusing to remember their very real experience, they were never able to adjust to it.

Others were overly concerned about their bodies and were confused about their own masculinity or femininity, the scientists reported.

The mothers were generally extremely worried and depressed. They blamed themselves for their children's injuries. Believing it would be selfish, they had never talked about their worries and fears and anxiety had built up inside them. The eruption of family conflicts often resulted.

These disturbances might be prevented if mother and child could be given psychological help right after the accident. Just "talking it out" would be good for the mother. Through psychological counselling, the child might be able to arrive at a better understanding of what has happened to him. In this way, his fears could be calmed.

Most persons are aware of the pain and fear that follow a severe burn but the psychological consequences have not been previously studied in the United States.

• Science News Letter, 83:179 March 23, 1963

Disturbed Family Test

► TRY THIS quick test to find out if your family life is a success.

Dr. Norman W. Bell, chief of the social science department, McLean Hospital, Belmont, Mass., told the American Orthopsychiatry Association meeting in Washington, D. C., that the following criteria may be useful in evaluating family relationships:

1. Have your early troubles with your in-laws faded into the background, or do they still come up in arguments? Healthy families can joke about past tensions, but in

disturbed families, the husband or wife holds the past against his partner and uses it as evidence to prove there is a grudge against him.

2. Do you live near your wife's or your husband's family? Living close to one set of relatives may allow husband or wife to pit that family against the mate. If this happens, marital troubles are bound to crop up.

3. Are you and your wife or husband fond of the same relatives? In well families, spouses usually have the same tastes in relatives. Disturbed families tend to have disagreements over who prefers and who dislikes which relative.

4. Are you oversensitive about giving equal time, attention, affection, gifts, etc., to both families? There are realistic differences in the needs and abilities of each set of relatives. Disturbed families may not recognize this and worry about keeping their time and energy balanced.

5. What new kinds of relationships were established after the birth of your first child? In well families the birth of the first baby cements the unity of both groups of kin, while in disturbed families, the baby often gets assigned to one side or the other, as old grudges are brought up again.

Dr. Bell presented these "tentative conclusions" about family functioning against the background description of family relationships in other cultures.

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Questions End Tensions

► A WAY TO BREAK the U.S.-Russian deadlock is to start asking questions about the assumptions that underlie our defense policy, Prof. Charles E. Osgood, director of the Institute of Communications Research, University of Illinois, told the meeting of the American Orthopsychiatry Association in Washington, D. C.

Americans and Russians agree on the disarmament schedule of "nuclear weapons first, pop-guns last," he said. Yet the disarmament talks have gone no further than arguing about the number and type of on-site inspections that will be needed once disarmament occurs.

Even though it seems "emotionally and morally best" to purge the world of nuclear weapons first, there is "not much likelihood of the major powers' giving up their main weapon," Prof. Osgood told SCIENCE SERVICE.

To start disarmament with ground forces and lead up to the atomic weapons may be a more workable alternative. Holding on to an arsenal of nuclear weapons until the end could give security and make other kinds of disarmament easier to achieve.

International tensions might also be relieved if the U. S. questioned its "bad-guy" image of Russia. We "do not have to have trust" to begin with, Prof. Osgood said, but by taking small cultural, scientific or diplomatic steps to reduce tension, trust can come and the cold war may be "unfrozen."

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Pregnancy Fears Normal

► THE STRANGE WORRIES, fears and desires of pregnant women are all quite normal, Dr. Caroline A. Chandler of the National Institute of Mental Health, Bethesda, Md., told the American Orthopsychiatry Association in Washington, D. C.

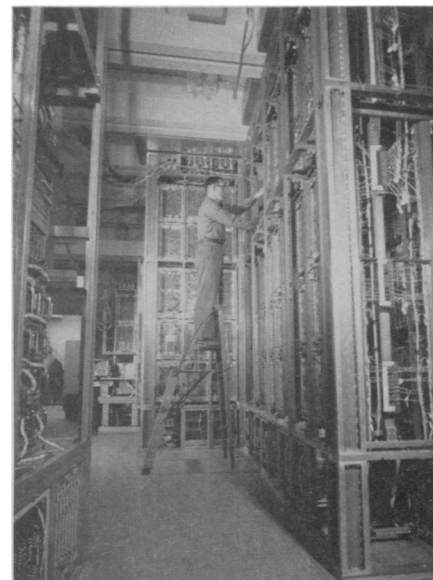
If a woman is anxious about having a blind or deaf baby, if she is worried that her child may not have two arms, two legs and five fingers and toes on each hand and foot, she is not about to have a nervous breakdown. A mother's inability to nurse her child does not mean she has rejected the baby.

It is time to "break loose from this illness-oriented point of view," Dr. Chandler said. Pregnancy and early motherhood are normal periods of stress.

But if a woman receives no sympathetic help with her problems at this time, they may increase and have disastrous effects on the child and on her marriage, Dr. Chandler reported.

Counseling or short-term psychotherapy may help lessen tensions, and make child-bearing and child-rearing easier.

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University of Illinois

ILLIAC II—Harold E. Lopeman, electronics engineer, is working on the arithmetic unit of the new electronic computer at the University of Illinois. Successor to Illiac I, now retired, it can solve in 12 seconds problems that would take a mechanical desk calculator 10 years to complete and Illiac I, 18 minutes.