

MEDICINE

Chances of Getting Polio Related to Eye Color

► THE CHANCES of getting polio seem to be related to hair, eyes and skin color, at least for the Caucasian race.

An "unexpected correlation between susceptibility to poliomyelitis and genetic traits indicated by pigmentation" is reported in *Science* (June 25) by Dr. Wallace L. Minto of River Edge, N. J.

He studied 1,183 persons stricken with crippling infantile paralysis. Of these polio patients, only one had blonde hair, blue eyes and fair skin, and only 17 had blond hair and brown eyes. The remaining 1,165 had brown or black hair and eyes.

These ratios, he points out, differ "significantly" from the occurrence of light pigmentation in the general population.

Patients with fair complexion had relatively light cases of poliomyelitis, and only two of them suffered any permanent injury, his study showed.

Dr. Minto believes that the variation in polio susceptibility he found should be taken into account in any statistical study of the value of polio vaccines.

Science News Letter, July 10, 1954

PSYCHOLOGY

Civilized Life Effects

► SOFT LIVING under civilized conditions is making men unfit for combat stress.

This is a possible implication of experiments reported to a symposium at the Roscoe B. Jackson Memorial Laboratory, Bar Harbor, Me., by Dr. Carl P. Richter of Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore.

Dr. Richter worked with rats, not men, and measured the changes occurring when the vicious Norway rat was brought into the laboratory and bred under domesticated conditions. However, there is a possibility of similar changes in humans as a result of social living, he indicated.

Fighting makes changes in the body chemistry of rats, Dr. Richter found. Nota-

Questions

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ble was a cutting down of adrenal lipids and other substances.

Comparable changes were found in men after combat, by a team of scientists working at the battle front in Korea; the stress of combat causes dehydration of the body and a shortage of adrenal hormones, they found.

The laboratory rat behaves differently from his wild cousins in Baltimore's alleys, Dr. Richter indicated. He is less ready to fight and he does not fear humans. He matures sexually at an earlier age, and he has not the same tendency to breed at certain seasons.

Physically, the laboratory rat's pituitary glands are bigger and his adrenal cortex is smaller. It is the adrenal gland, particularly, that helps the body to handle emergencies. Removal of pituitary, sex glands or adrenals has a much greater effect in reducing the activity of the laboratory animals than such operations have on wild rats.

Although these effects are produced by living and breeding in a laboratory environment, or, in the case of man, in a world of televisions, automobiles and innerspring mattresses, Dr. Richter does not attribute them to the inheritance of acquired characteristics as would the Russian scientists.


He concludes that the changes have occurred as the result of "conscious and unconscious selection for fertility and tameness." Probably the laboratory technician does not breed the wild rat that continually fights and bites the hands that feed him.


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