

AN OUNCE OF CRIME PREVENTION:

MOTHER'S MILK INCREASES IQ, REDUCES NEUROLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Crime and delinquency are strongly linked to reduced IQ and neurological dysfunction. One of the simplest ways to reduce rates of both of these risk factors, according to growing evidence, may be to promote breast-feeding -- particularly by low-income mothers. Fortunately, a new study suggests, even poor, undereducated, single mothers can readily be encouraged to forgo the bottle in favor of the breast.

Nancy Brent et al. provided comprehensive breast-feeding information to 51 inner-city mothers (including those who initially said they planned to bottle-feed). Women who planned to breast-feed were counseled about how to do so, while women who planned to bottle-feed were advised about the benefits, to both mother and infant, of breast-feeding. Women who chose to breast-feed received lactation consultation for up to a year following their children's birth. A control group of 57 women received standard care which involved only optional breast-feeding classes before delivery, and postpartum instruction by nurses and doctors for mothers who chose to breast-feed.

Brent et al. say that 61 percent of women in the intervention group, as opposed to 32 percent of women in the standard-care group, breast-fed their infants. In addition, they report, "the median duration of breast-feeding was 84 days among women in the intervention group and 33 days in the standard care group."

Remarkably, Brent et al. say, "the intervention group of low-income women had a breast-feeding rate that exceeded the 1991 national breast-feeding rate of 52% for all women."

The potential importance of Brent et al.'s findings is shown by two studies suggesting that breast-feeding can protect against IQ deficits -- considered by many researchers to be the single most important risk factor for criminal behavior -- and neurological dysfunctions, which are seen in a large percentage of criminals.

In a 1994 study in *The Lancet*, C. I. Lanting and colleagues reported on a comparison of 135 nine-year-old children who had been breast-fed as infants, and 391 nine-year-olds who had been bottle-fed. "Children who had been formula-fed," they found, "were twice as likely to be diagnosed with a minor neurological dysfunction as those who had been breast-fed."

"Since the presence and severity of minor neurological dysfunction are related to behavioral and cognitive development at school age," Lanting et al. say, "these findings suggest that the type of feeding during the first weeks of life may have a role in... later neurobehavioral condition."

A 1992 study of pre-term babies, also reported in *The Lancet*, found that "children who had consumed mother's milk in the early weeks of life had a significantly higher IQ at 7-1/2 to 8 years than did those who received no maternal milk." A. Lucas and colleagues reported that "an 8.3 point advantage... in IQ remained even after adjustment for differences between groups in mother's education and social class."

The researchers noted that this advantage appeared to be due solely to biological, not social, effects of breast-feeding, as most of the premature babies had been fed mother's milk by tube. In addition, children of mothers who chose to breast-feed, but then were unable to, had IQ scores similar to those of children whose mothers elected to bottle-feed.

The researchers also reported that among babies whose mothers chose to provide breast milk, there was a significant dose-response relation between the proportion of mother's milk consumed and later IQ.

"Breast-feeding in a low-income population: program to increase incidence and duration," Nancy Brent, Beverly Redd, April Dworetz, Frank D'Amico, and Joseph Greenberg, *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, Vol. 149, No. 7, July 1995. Address: Nancy Brent, The Mercy Hospital of Pittsburgh, Dept. of Pediatrics, Mercy Children's Medical Center, 1400 Locust Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15219.

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"Neurological differences between 9-year-old children fed breast-milk or formula-milk as babies," C. I. Lanting, V. Fidler, M. Huisman, B. C. L. Touwen, and E. R. Boersma, *The Lancet*, Vol. 344, No. 8933, Nov. 12, 1994. Address: C. I. Lanting, Dept. of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Nutrition and Development Unit, University Hospital Gronigen, 9713 EZ Gronigen, Netherlands.

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"Breast milk and subsequent intelligence quotient in children born preterm," A. Lucas, R. Morley, T. J. Cole, G. Lister, and C. Leeson-Payne, *The Lancet*, Vol. 339, No. 8788, Feb. 1, 1992. Address: A. Lucas, MRC Dunn Nutrition Unit, Downhams Lane, Milton Road, Cambridge CB4 1XJ, UK.

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