

**Long-term sequelae of early deprivation:
the young adult follow-up
of the English and Romanian Adoptees study**

Barbara Maughan

Long-term impact of early adversity

- social and emotional deprivation early in development assumed to carry long-term negative consequences for mental health
- animal studies support that view
- evidence from 'observational' studies in humans also supports, but interpretational problems:
 - *variations in type, timing and severity of exposures*
 - *confounding from continuing adversity*
 - *possible confounding from familial correlations between genetic & environmental risks*
- experiments not feasible – but various 'natural experiments' are - including placement of children in supportive family environments after periods in depriving institutional care

English and Romanian Adoptees study

- established by Professor Sir Michael Rutter
- traces development of children adopted into UK families after fall of Ceaușescu regime led to closure of institutions in Romania in early 1990s
- institutional regimes particularly depriving:
 - *poor hygiene, undernutrition, little personalized care*
 - *social and cognitive understimulation*
- children moved to UK 2 weeks-43 months of age
- adoptive families
 - *socio-economically advantaged, stable, supportive, caring*
- samples stratified to reflect differing lengths of institutional care
- children and families studied at ages 4, 6, 11, 15 and 23-25 years

English and Romanian Adoptees study - early findings

- profound developmental delay for most at entry to UK
 - followed by period of rapid recovery for many
- by age 6 years*
- children with < 6 months in institutions largely indistinguishable from comparison group of UK adoptees
 - many of those with longer exposure to deprivation showed significant cognitive and social impairment
 - *disinhibited social engagement*
 - *quasi-autism*
 - *inattention/overactivity*
 - *cognitive impairment*
 - emotional problems began to emerge in late childhood/adolescence
 - conduct problems not marked

Samples

	UK	Romanian < 6m	Romanian >6m
Entry to UK	52	66	98
Young adulthood	39	50	72
(ages 22-25)	(75%)	(76%)	(73%)

By young adulthood

- one adoption breakdown
- most families continued highly supportive
- no group differences in family SES, parent-child relationship quality, family support

Early onset neurodevelopmental problems: assessments

Autism spectrum symptoms

- developmentally appropriate items from Social Communication Questionnaire
 - *reciprocal social interaction*
 - *communication*
 - *repetitive and stereotyped behaviours*

Disinhibited social engagement

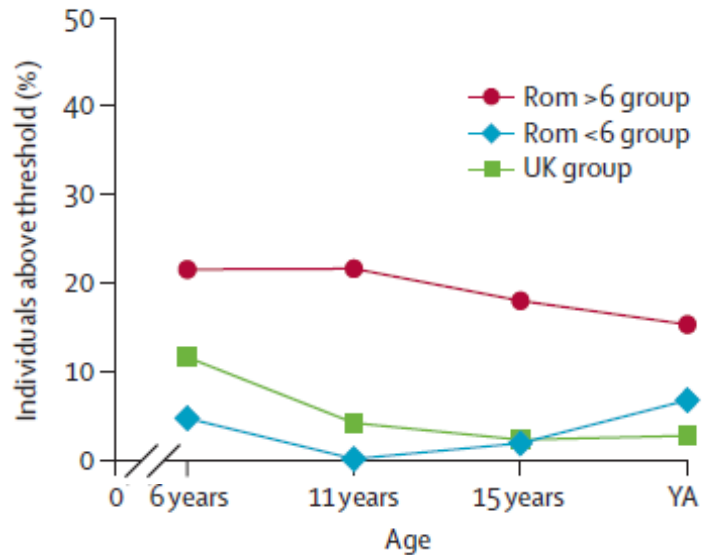
- interviews with parents: questions re interactions with strangers
 - *too friendly*
 - *inappropriate intrusiveness*
 - *lack of awareness of social boundaries*

Inattention/overactivity

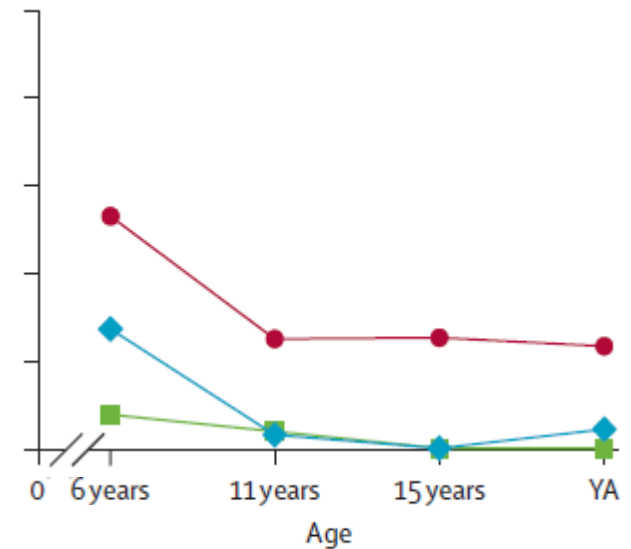
- hyperactivity, sustained attention, distractibility

Early onset neurodevelopmental problems

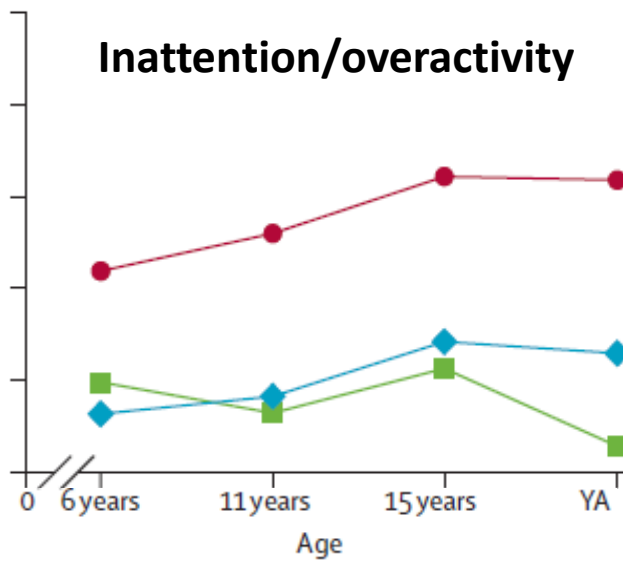
Autism spectrum symptoms



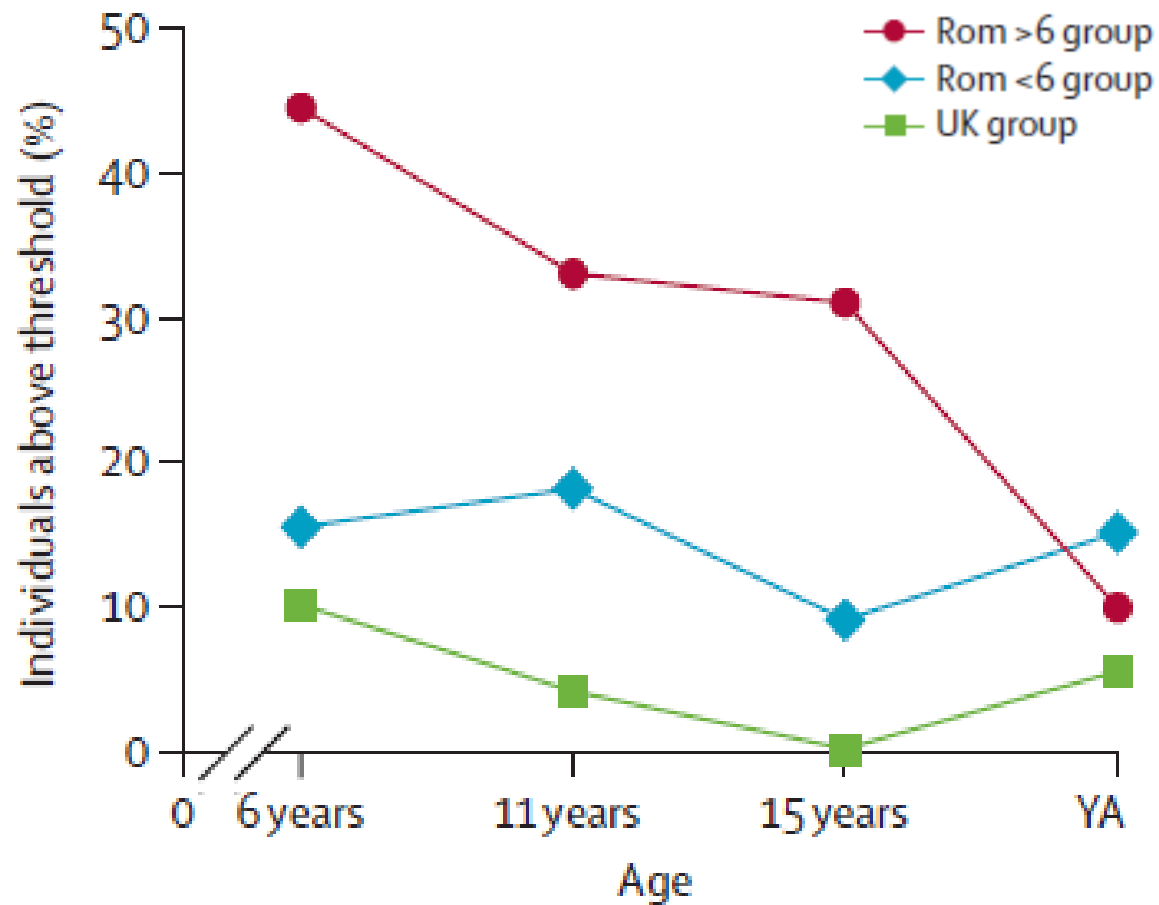
Disinhibited social engagement



Inattention/overactivity

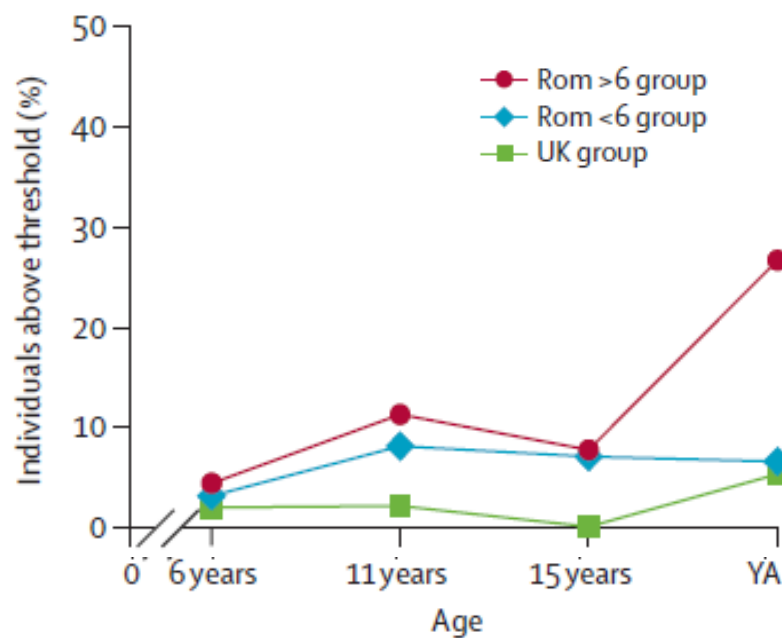


Cognitive impairment

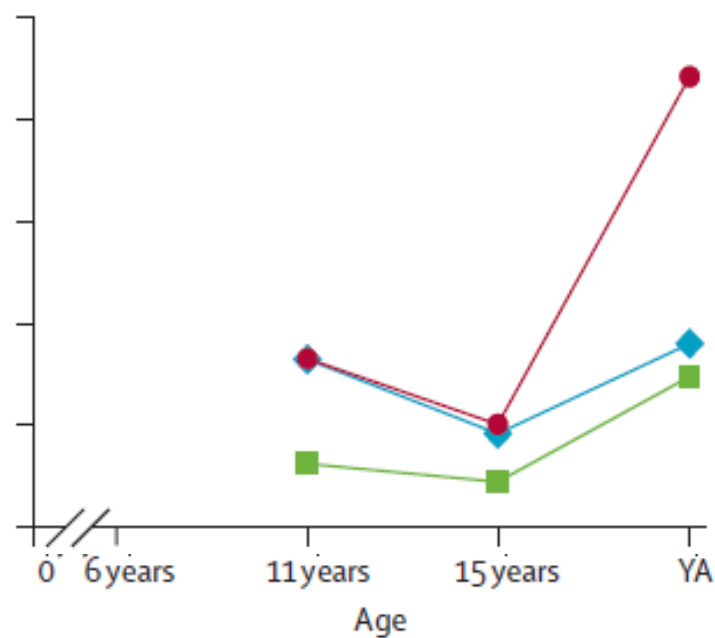


Emotional problems

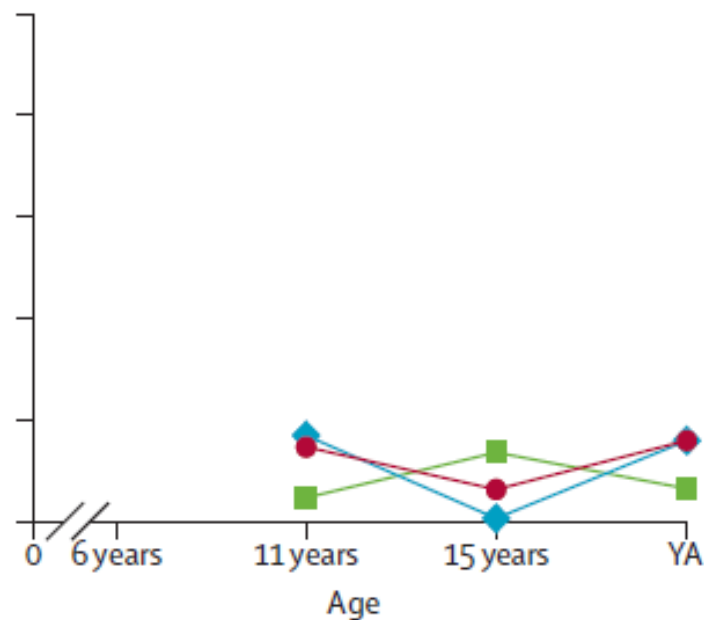
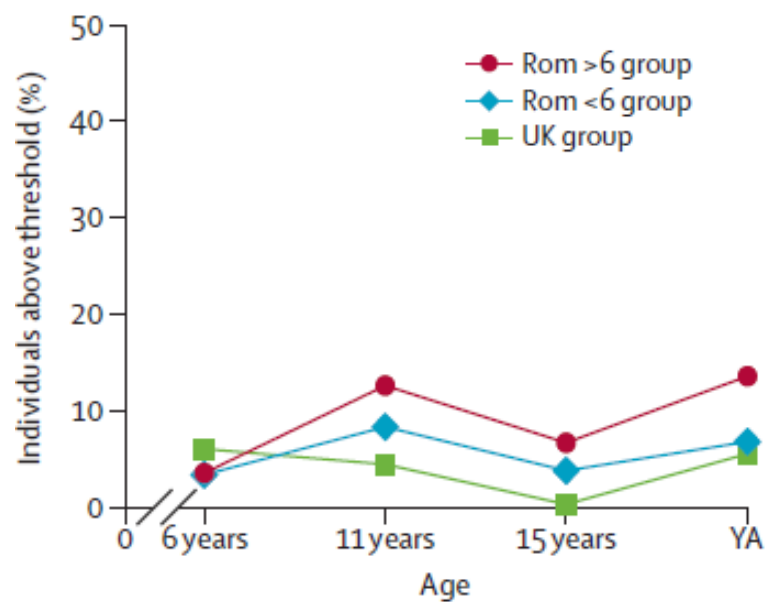
Parent report



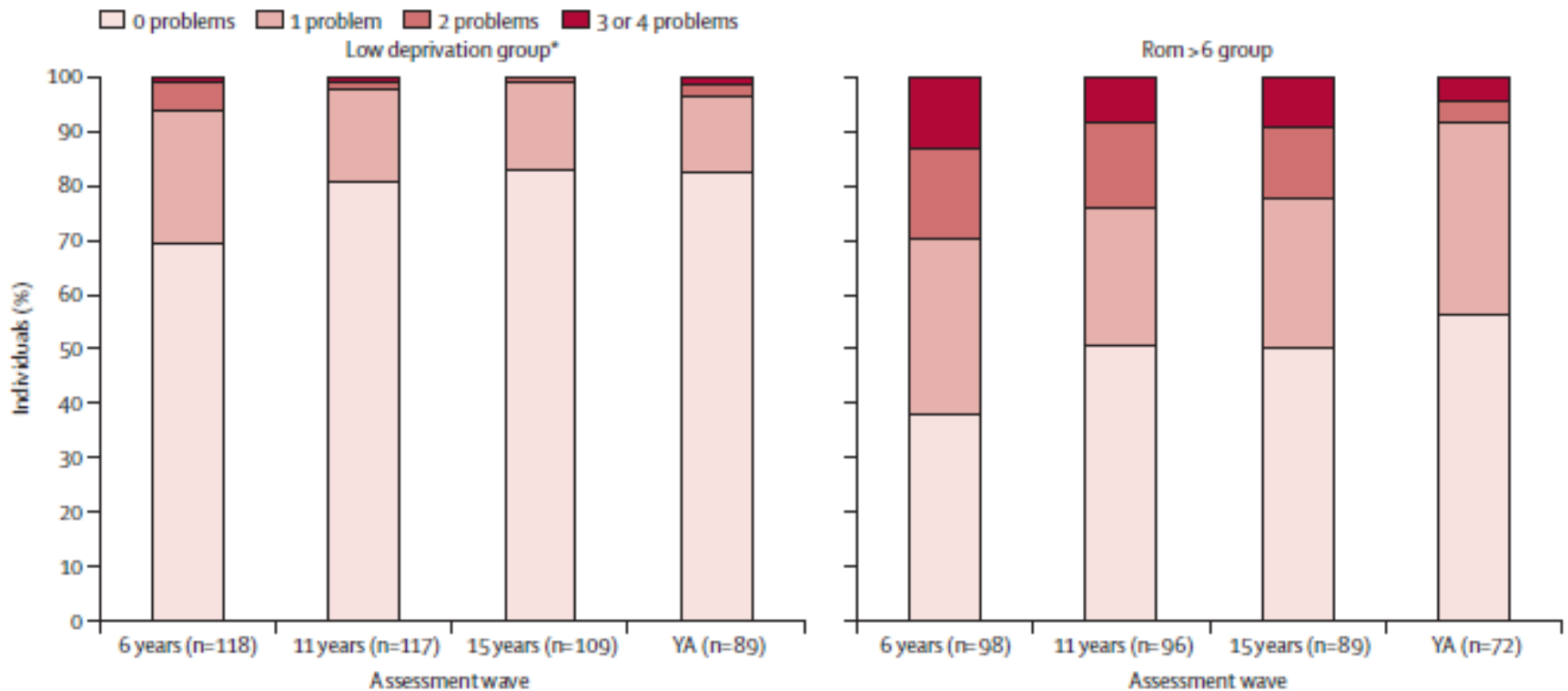
Self report



Conduct problems



Multiple difficulties



21% no problems at any assessment

Conclusions

- time-limited exposure to severe early adversity can have lasting impact despite radical change in environment
- differing impacts in different developmental domains:
- 3 domains (DSE, quasi-autism, inattention/overactivity) appear to form early onset, persistent and impairing deprivation-specific core
- early cognitive impairments: evidence for greater plasticity
 - *institutional care works in different way re cognition?*
 - *adoptive environments provide more powerful remediating context?*
- emotional problems: later onset
 - *down-stream consequences of early onset difficulties?*
 - *latent vulnerability to effects of later stress?*

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Sonuga-Barke et al (2017). Child-to-adult neurodevelopmental and mental health trajectories after early life deprivation: the young adult follow-up of the longitudinal English and Romanian Adoptees study. *Lancet*, 389, 1539-1548

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