

More preemies born among the poor

Pregnant women who are poor are more likely to deliver a very preterm baby than more affluent women, even though both groups typically receive equal care, a new British study shows.

The University of Leicester research team said their findings show the need to learn more about the association between economic status and pre-term birth.

For the study, the researchers looked at 7,449 very preterm infants and calculated a "deprivation score" for each infant and mother. They found that mothers from the most deprived areas were nearly twice as likely to have a very preterm infant (less than 33 weeks' gestation) than mothers from the least deprived areas. In addition, the number of infant deaths due to very preterm birth was nearly twice as high in the most deprived areas.

However, according to the report published in the Dec. 2 online edition of the BMJ, all of the very preterm infants had similar survival rates and levels of neonatal care. So, while there are socioeconomic-related disparities in preterm birth rates, deprivation doesn't appear to be a barrier to accessing and receiving neonatal care.

This indicates that gaining a better understanding of the link between deprivation and risk of preterm birth should be a major research priority, the study authors said.

"It seems highly likely that such work could lead to public health strategies that would reduce the costs not only of neonatal care but also attached to the long-term health problems suffered by some of these babies," they concluded.

(Source: HealthDay News)

New Zealand man injects sleeping wife with HIV

WELLINGTON (AFP) — An HIV-positive man in New Zealand has admitted injecting his blood into his sleeping wife and infecting her with the virus which can cause AIDS, a newspaper reported Sunday.

Court documents detail how the man twice pricked his wife with a sewing needle laced with his infected blood, and how she once caught him handling a syringe full of his blood.

The man, 35, admitted infecting his wife, 33, and faces up to 14 years imprisonment when he is sentenced in the Auckland High Court early next year.

The man discovered he was HIV-positive, but his wife and children were not, during health checks imposed on them when the family arrived in New Zealand in 2004.

The woman said she wanted to maintain the relationship for the sake of the children.

She described how in May last year she discovered a sting-like mark on her left thigh and two days later she awoke to a stinging feeling in her leg.

During a routine check-up four months later she found she was HIV-positive and confronted her husband who admitted dipping a needle in his blood and pricking her with it.

"All he said (was) he was sorry. He said: 'I used needles on you because I wanted you to be the same as me so that you can live with me and you won't leave me,'" she said.

Why we cry: The truth about tearing up

The lowdown on tears: Why some cry easily, others don't cry, and how to handle all those tears.

Before you know it, you're getting teary -- again.

You may be one of those people who cry at the drop of a hat -- not to mention weddings, birthday parties, your kids' school plays, and the humane society public service announcements showing those adorable dogs in need of new homes.

Or you may be the type who can't remember when you last cried.

Either way, crying often catches the often-teary eyed or the usually stoic off guard -- striking at a time or place where you don't want to weep -- and others don't want to watch you weep.

Just ask New England Patriots coach Bill Belichick, normally stoic, who got teary as he announced the retirement of his star linebacker Tedy Bruschi. Or Hilary Clinton, whose tears one night on the 2008 presidential campaign trail were splashed across TV screens.

Football coaches and politicians crying in public may reflect a society that's evolving to become a bit more comfortable with emotion. But crying in front of people can still be awkward for the person crying and people around them.

What's behind our crying? Why do some people cry so much more or less readily than others? And what's the best way to handle all those tears? Is there a way not to cry when it's totally inappropriate, such as in response to your boss declining that request for a raise? Researchers

and therapists who study crying share what they've learned -- and what still puzzles them.

Why do you cry?

The "why" of crying may seem obvious and straightforward: You're happy or sad. But that's too simplistic.

"Crying is a natural emotional response to certain feelings, usually sadness and hurt. But then people (also) cry under other circumstances and occasions," says Stephen Sideroff, PhD, a staff psychologist at Santa Monica--University of California Los Angeles & Orthopaedic Hospital and clinical director of the Moonview Treatment Center in Santa Monica, Calif.

For instance, he says, "people cry in response to something of beauty. There, I use the word 'melting.' They are letting go of their guard, their defenses, tapping into a place deep inside themselves."

Crying does serve an emotional purpose, says Sideroff, also an assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at the UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine. "It's a release. There is a buildup of energy with feelings."

It can also be a survival mechanism, notes Jodi DeLuca, PhD, a neuropsychologist at Tampa General Hospital in Florida. "When you cry," she says, "it's a signal you need to address something." Among other things, it may mean you are frustrated, overwhelmed or even just trying to get someone's attention, which DeLuca and other researchers call a "secondary gain" cry.

On top of that, crying may have a biochemical purpose. It's believed



to release stress hormones or toxins from the body, says Lauren Bylsma, a PhD student at the University of South Florida in Tampa, who has focused on crying in her research.

Lastly, crying has a purely social function, Bylsma says. It often wins support from those who watch you cry. Sometimes, crying may be manipulative -- a way to get what you want, whether you're asking a friend to go shopping with you, your spouse to agree to a luxurious vacation, or your child to get their math homework done.

Crying out loud: Who's most likely?

Women tend to cry more than men do, most experts concur. "Women have more permission to cry. To some degree it's changing," Sideroff says. But not entirely. "It's still viewed by many, particularly men, as a sign of weakness," Sideroff says.

When it comes to crying habits, the population as a whole is on a spectrum, experts say, with some crying easily and others rarely. Experts aren't exactly sure why, though temperament probably plays a role. "Some people are just more prone to crying," Sideroff says. "Others ignore or are not as fazed by certain things (that provoke tears in criers)."

People with a history of trauma have been found to cry more, Sideroff says. That's especially true, he says, if they dwell on that past. "If you keep referring back to the past of trauma or emotional pain, it will generate more feelings of hurt."

Women who report anxiety, as well as those who are extroverted and empathetic, are more likely to say they

feel comfortable crying, according to Bylsma. Those were the results of a study Bylsma and others published in Personality and Individual Differences in 2008.

Benefits of a good cry?

People often refer to a cry as a good cry and say they feel better afterward.

But is that always true?

Usually, but not always, says Bylsma. In a study of nearly 200 Dutch women, Bylsma found that most did say they felt better after crying. But not everyone. "We found that individuals who scored higher on (measures of) depression or anxiety were likely to feel worse after crying."

Exactly why isn't known, she tells WebMD. It could be that those who are depressed or anxious simply don't derive the same benefits from crying as others do.

Coping with crying

If you're not a world-class crier but are often around those who cry, it can make you feel awkward, useless, or just uncomfortable. That's because when someone cries, it shows their vulnerability, Sideroff says. "I think in general, people are uncomfortable with vulnerability." When the crier exhibits vulnerability, Sideroff says, "it's shifting the level of intimacy of the environment." Just being in that more intimate environment makes the other person uncomfortable in some cases, he says.

So, how can you -- and how should you -- respond to a crier? Here are four tips:

Be aware that if you do nothing, you can make the crier feel worse, Bylsma says.

Try to do something supportive. What that is depends on the situation and how well you know the person. "So hugging someone you aren't very close with might not be appropriate, while simply listening in an empathetic way would be suitable," Bylsma says.

Don't assume you know how to comfort them. "The less intimate the relationship, the more it is appropriate to begin by asking how you can help and be supportive," Sideroff says.

Know that criers who tear up in a very large group generally feel more uncomfortable than those who cry in front of one or two people they're familiar with. But even in a large group, the criers welcome support from those they didn't know well, Bylsma has found.

Trying not to cry

Sometimes, it's just not cool to let the tears flow -- you are trying to put up a brave face while accompanying a loved one to a medical treatment, for instance. Or your boss has just told you your hours will be cut in half.

What to do? Bylsma has this advice:

Try to postpone the cry but don't cancel it altogether. Suppression isn't good.

Excuse yourself, find an appropriate place, and cry.

If you can't leave the situation, postpone the cry and stem the tears with a positive distraction. It would depend on the person and the situation, but she suggests watching a funny video. If you're in the middle of a doctor's office, you might grab a magazine and read.

(Source: webmd.com)

Baby boom of mixed children tests South Korea

YEONGGWANG, South Korea — Just a few years ago, the number of pregnant women in this city had declined so much that the sparsely equipped two-room maternity ward at Yeonggwang General Hospital was close to shutting down. But these days it is busy again.

More surprising than the fact of this miniature baby-boom is its composition: children of mixed ethnic backgrounds, the offspring of Korean fathers and mothers from China, Vietnam and other parts of Asia. These families have suddenly become so numerous that the nurses say they have had to learn how to say "push" in four languages.

It is a similar story across South Korea, where hundreds of thousands of foreign women have been immigrating in recent years, often in marriages arranged by brokers. They have been making up for a shortage of eligible Korean women, particularly in underdeveloped rural areas like this one in the nation's southwest.

Now, these unions are bearing large numbers of mixed children, confronting this proudly homogeneous nation with the difficult challenge of smoothly absorbing them.

South Korea is generally more open to ethnic diversity than other Asian nations with relatively small minority populations, like neighboring Japan. Nevertheless, it is far from welcoming to these children, who are widely known here pejoratively as Kosians, a compound of Korean and Asian.

"We bring these children into the world, but sometimes I worry," said Kwak Ock-ja, 48, head maternity nurse at Yeonggwang General, where a third of the 132 births so far this year have been of children of mixed background, up from almost none a decade ago. "Prejudice against these families is something society must resolve."

The surge in births of mixed children is the product of the similarly explosive growth here in marriages to foreigners, as a surplus of bachelors and the movement of eligible women to big cities like Seoul have increasingly driven Korean men in rural areas to seek brides in poorer parts of Asia.

In addition, a preference for male babies has helped skew the population so there are fewer native-born women to marry.



The Ministry of Public Security says the total number of children from what are called multicultural families in South Korea rose to 107,689 in May of this year from 58,007 last December, though the ministry said it might have slightly undercounted last year.

That is only about 1 percent of the approximately 12 million children in South Korea under the age of 19. But if marriages to foreigners continue to increase at their current rate -- they accounted for 11 percent of all marriages here last year -- more than one in nine children could be of mixed background by 2020, demographic researchers say. The trend is even more pronounced in rural areas, where most of these marriages take place. Among farming households, 49 percent of all children will be multicultural by 2020, according to the Agricultural Ministry.

This increase is coming as South Korea's overall birthrate has fallen to about 1.22 children per woman of child-bearing age, one of the world's lowest rates. While many Koreans say they hope that the rising number of mixed children will help rejuvenate their rapidly graying society, they also say they fear that a failure to assimilate them could create the sort of poor, alienated underclass of ethnic minorities they see in the United States and Europe.

The increase has also begun to prompt a national soul-searching here about what it means to be Korean. While most of these children have Korean fathers and Korean citizenship, their dual ethnicity still gives them an uncertain status in a society where membership was long seen as being based on blood.

"The hard reality of our low birthrate is forcing us to realize that we can't be homogeneous anymore," said Park Hwa-seo, a professor of migration studies at Myongji University in Seoul. "It isn't easy, but there is no turning back but to embrace these more diverse families."

The increase of mixed-background children is so recent that relatively few have even reached elementary-school age. Still, signs of strain are already appearing.

(Source: nytimes.com)



UN says climate finale may have happy ending

COPENHAGEN (AP) — Delegates converged Sunday for the grand finale of two years of tough, sometimes bitter negotiations on a climate change treaty, as UN officials calculated that pledges offered in the last few weeks to reduce greenhouse gases put the world within reach of keeping global warming under control.

Yvo de Boer, the UN's top climate official, said on the eve of the 192-nation conference that despite unprecedented unity and concessions, industrial countries and emerging nations need to dig deeper.

"Time is up," de Boer said. "Over the next two weeks governments have to deliver."

Finance — billions of dollars immediately and hundreds of billions of dollars annually within a decade — was emerging as the key to unblocking an agreement that would bind the global community to a sweeping plan to combat climate change.

Nations also must need to commit to larger emission reductions, de Boer said.

South Africa on Sunday became the latest country to announce an emissions target. It said over the next 10 years it would reduce emissions by 34 percent from "business as usual," the level they would reach under ordinary circumstances. By 2025 that figure would peak at 42 percent, effectively leveling off and thereafter begin to decline.

"This makes South Africa one of the stars of the negotiations," said the environmental group Greenpeace.

President Barack Obama's decision to attend the conclusion of the two-week conference, after phone consultations with other heads of state, was taken as a signal that an agreement was getting closer. He originally planned to make an hours long stop in the Danish capital this week.

More than 100 heads of state and government have said they will attend the last day or two, making Copenhagen the largest and most important summit ever held on climate.