

**Title:** Life-history factors and inequalities in affective disorders : a cohort study

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**Abstract:**

As minor affective disorders claim a substantial proportion of the considerable NHS commitment to psychiatric illness, there is a strong argument for examining their origins. In the example investigated, over 3,000 36-year-olds from the MRC National Survey of Health and Development, high rates of disorder were found in men who were "hard up", in rented accommodation, in unskilled manual jobs, who had been divorced or separated, or whose husbands were unemployed. Factors from early life (family disruptions, parental and own illness, special schooling, behaviour problems, introversion, neuroticism and menstrual pain), differing for men and women, were found to be predictive of later symptoms of anxiety and depression, and these contributed to the inequalities described. Although recent stressful events were significantly associated with individual differences in symptomatology, they did not account for a substantial part of the identified group difference. Nor could the role of early factors be adequately explained by heightened vulnerability to such events. However, several "mediators" were found in data on occupational, marital and fertility histories and records of ill-health in early adulthood, which formed pathways between childhood risk and inequalities in adult life. These features of early adulthood may be important because they involve reciprocal transactions between endogenous factors and environment, which can eventually lead to high risk circumstances and affective disorder. More detailed studies could identify the complex causal processes underlying these associations and hopefully would contribute to preventive strategies.