This paper describes some observations on the association between broken homes and disturbed behaviour in children. It is based on a large group of children who have been studied since birth, and the observations reported here are preliminary notes for a more detailed statistical analysis in which it is proposed to study a variety of disturbing events occurring at different ages and to relate them to later behaviour. An earlier paper (Douglas and Turner, 1970) has shown that a number of different events in the third and fourth years of life, such as severe accidents or the birth of another child, are followed by a high prevalence of enuresis. I now propose to study one group of events—the permanent loss of a parent through death, divorce, or separation—in greater detail and in relation to delinquency and illegitimate births, as well as to bedwetting.

The information set out below comes from the National Survey of Health and Development, a long-term study of 5,362 young people now aged 23 (Douglas et al., 1968). They were all born in one week in 1946, and at one to two yearly intervals since then information has been obtained on their health, growth, and behaviour. This information comes from a variety of sources—health visitors, school doctors, school nurses, teachers, youth employment officers, the children themselves, and official records.

In the survey week, 15,000 children were born in Great Britain, and the follow-up sample was chosen by taking all children whose fathers were non-manual or agricultural workers, and a random sample of one in four of the rest. Illegitimate children and twins were left out. By 1964, death and emigration had reduced the original sample of 5,362 to 4,701, and this is the number on which the following observations are based.

**The Prevalence of Broken Homes**

Before considering the association between broken homes and disturbed behaviour, the number and types of break should be described. By the time the children were fifteen years old, 540 (11 per cent) of the families were broken. Death caused 296 breaks (197 fathers and 99 mothers died), and
divorce or permanent separation caused 244. In Table 1 it will be seen that
there was a concentration of divorce and separation in the early years.
The 89 per cent of families that remained intact include 264 (5·7 per cent)
in which it is known that the father was regularly away from home on at
least two nights a week, and 176 (3·7 per cent) in which he was frequently but
irregularly absent.
When a family splits up, the home circumstances often change greatly,
and Rowntree (1955) has described, in this sample, the deterioration in
housing and amenities that occurs. In the present paper I am more concerned
with the extent of family disruption. Table 2 shows that, up to the age of
fifteen, nearly half the children from broken families lived with their mothers,
who had not remarried, and only 16 were in institutions.

Table 1. Percentage Distribution of Deaths, Divorce and Separation by Age of Child at Break.

| Age of child at break (in years) | 0-6 | >6-11 | >11-15 | No permanent break |
|----------------------------------|-----|-------|--------|-------------------|
| Father's death                   | %   | %     | %      | %                |
| Mother's death                   | 0-9 | 0-5   | 0-7    | —                |
| Divorce or Separation            | 3-1 | 1-3   | 0-7    | —                |
| All types of break               | 5-4 | 3-3   | 2-7    | 88-6 100-0%      |

There are no statistically significant differences in either the number or
types of break when boys and girls are compared. The only outstanding
social class difference is that a high proportion of middle-class fathers were
regularly away from home—13 per cent as compared with 6 per cent of the
manual workers. This, of course, is largely explained by the inclusion of
commercial travellers in the middle-class group.

Table 2. Child's Position After Break

| Position After Break                        | %    |
|--------------------------------------------|------|
| No remarriage (living with mother)         | 46-4 |
| (living with father)                       | 12-3 |
| Remarriage—living with own parent          | 31-7 |
| Living with foster parents or relations    | 6-7  |
| In an institution                          | 2-9  |
| Total number of children from broken homes | 540  |

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INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON ENURESIS, DELINQUENCY AND ILLEGITIMATE BIRTHS

Only bedwetting, official delinquent behaviour, and illegitimate births are considered here, but other behaviour characteristics are being studied and will be reported on in later papers. As the patterns of association between enuresis and broken homes are similar for the two sexes, the data for enuresis for boys and girls have been grouped together. So few girls (35) were delinquent, however, that only the boys are considered. Conversely, few boys are known to have illegitimate children, and so this part of the discussion is limited to the girls.

Enuresis was studied for two reasons. Rowntree (1955), looking at the national survey families in the pre-school years, showed that broken homes were associated with high rates of enuresis. This observation needed follow-up at later ages and in the light of the additional information now available on the parents' remarriage. There is also a general clinical impression that the onset of bedwetting in a previously dry child is often associated with stress within the family. Delinquency and illegitimate pregnancies were chosen because they were two types of behaviour that could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be regarded as a consequence of expectations based on the known fact of family disruption and current theories of its sequels.

Brief descriptions are needed for our definitions of enuresis, delinquency and illegitimate births. The bedwetters are identified as those who at 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, and 15 years of age were reported by their parents as having wet their beds on at least one occasion during the month preceding the interview (Bransby et al., 1955). The limit of one month was imposed in an attempt to reduce variation in the length of recall. Even so, some mothers may have forgotten the occasional wet bed even if it had occurred within the preceding month. Other children may have been occasional bedwetters whose last incident had fallen outside the set limit. For these reasons a division into primary and secondary enuretics has no meaning and instead I have given at each age the proportion of children who wet their beds at that age or at any later age. Information on enuresis was not available for all children, and the figures given below are based on a total sample of 3,393 boys and girls. The delinquent boys are those who, between the ages of 8 and 17, were either cautioned by the Police or brought before the Courts and sentenced for an offence. For illegitimate births up to the age of twenty-one we have relied on answers given by the survey girls. There was no practical way of obtaining this information from official records. The number of illegitimate births reported is, however, close to the number expected in a sample of this size and age.
ENURESIS AND FAMILY BREAKS

Figure 1 shows, at ages from 4½ to 15 years, the association between enuresis and different types of break during the first six years of life. The curve for the unbroken families refers to those that were intact at all ages up to fifteen and in which the father was not regularly away from home.

Death of the mother, divorce, and separation are all associated with high rates of bedwetting which persist up to the age of fifteen. At each age, children from broken homes are approximately twice as likely to wet their beds as are children from unbroken homes. The death of a father is, however, not associated with increased bedwetting at any age, the apparently higher rates at nine and eleven years being no greater than might occur by chance.

At all ages except fifteen, the differences between the rates of enuresis

Fig. 1. Bedwetting and early family disturbance (0–6 years).
in the unbroken families and those broken by divorce or separation or by the death of the mother are statistically significant at the level of $P < 0.001$. The differences at fifteen are also significant if the comparison is limited to children whose mothers have remarried or who are separated from both parents and living in foster homes or institutions.

Some further differences emerge when the children of divorced or separated parents are grouped by whether they were living with a mother who had not remarried, with a mother who had remarried, or in foster homes or institutions (Fig. 2).

The highest prevalence of enuresis at each age was found in the group who were in institutions or foster care. The prevalence of enuresis was also high at 4½ years in both the groups of children who were living with their mothers. It remained high at later ages if the mothers remarried but if they did not

![Fig. 2. Bedwetting and early divorce or separation (0-6 years).](image-url)
remarry it fell by the age of eleven to approximately the same level as in the unbroken families and was still at this level when the children were fifteen years old.

**ILLEGITIMATE BIRTHS**

The proportion of illegitimate births to survey girls up to the age of twenty-one is shown in Fig. 3. The girls are grouped by the type of family breakdown and the age at which it occurred. High rates of illegitimacy are found among girls from families that broke up when they were six years or younger, and are highest for breaks caused by death. The death of a mother seems to carry the highest risk of a girl having an illegitimate pregnancy. However, the numbers are small, and the differences are not statistically significant (e.g. early breaks compared with unbroken $0.1 > P > 0.05$). The patterns of difference are, however, in many ways similar to those shown below for delinquent boys and are part of a consistent body of evidence that should not be ignored because it is not within the accepted levels of statistical significance.

**DELINEQUENT BOYS**

The proportion of boys who were officially delinquent is related in Fig. 4 to the type of break and to the age at which it occurs. Numbers are small, and the only significant differences are those between the proportions of delinquents in unbroken families and in families which broke up in the first

![Fig. 3. Illegitimate births to survey girls and family disturbance.](image-url)
six years. Taken as a group, boys in these families have a significantly higher risk of delinquency than boys in unbroken families ($P < 0.001$) and a
significantly higher risk is also found if the comparison is with the children of divorced and separated parents only. The apparently increased risk associated with death of a parent might well have occurred by chance.

Official delinquent behaviour is much less frequently recorded for middle-class than for manual working-class boys, and the further division of the broken families into these classes provides an interesting contrast (Fig. 5).

In each class, family breaks are associated with high rates of delinquency but the association is proportionately greater in the middle than in the manual working class. Middle-class boys from broken homes have rates that are four times as high as those from unbroken homes, whereas manual working-class boys from broken homes have rates that are only twice as high. This social class difference, which is found in other types of disturbed behaviour, raises questions that are now being studied in the national survey sample, and it would be premature to try to answer them in this paper.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This is very much a preliminary communication and it is inappropriate at this stage to try to relate these findings to the large body of theory and many retrospective studies that have been concerned with the relationship between insecurity in early life and later problems of behaviour.

So far, the outcome of this longitudinal study of 4,701 children is clear. Family breaks during the first six years of life are associated with poor bladder control up to and including the age of fifteen, with an increased risk of having an illegitimate baby (for the girls) and with an increased risk of being cautioned by the Police or sentenced by the Courts (for the boys). The sequelae to a broken home depend on what happens after the break. The greatest excess of enuresis is recorded for the children who were fostered or in institutions, and the least for those who remained with their mothers and did not have a stepfather. There are, of course, many other factors that have not been taken into account: the necessity for women to go out to work when their husbands leave them, the often profound deterioration in home circumstances, and the amount of support given by relations. These we hope to include in a subsequent and more widely ranging analysis.

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