

Baby boxes back in Eastern Europe

A court case in Germany where a mother was prosecuted for killing her baby by throwing it from a fifth-floor balcony is boosting demand for baby boxes across Central and Eastern Europe. Germany already boasts 99 baby boxes; a heated box, monitored by nurses behind a stainless steel hatch with a handle. Inside the box there are blankets for a baby and a letter explaining who to call if the mother or other guardian changes her or his mind. Critics of the system include the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which states that children have a right to know who their parents are and that right is denied to the foundlings left in baby boxes. The backers say that baby boxes save lives and so increase rights. (*BBC News*, 26 June 2012, bbc.in/Q6Cyex)

Love is addictive

Love and desire are matters of the head not the heart according to a new study. Psychology professor Jim Pfaus, a co-author of the study, said: 'Love and desire activate specific but related areas in the brain.' The area activated by sexual desire is usually activated by things that are inherently pleasurable, such as sex or food. The area activated by love is involved in the process of conditioning by which things paired with reward or pleasure, are given inherent value. That is, as feelings of sexual desire develop into love, they are processed in a different place in the striatum. This is also the part of the brain associated with drug addiction. Pfaus explains there is good reason for this. 'Love is actually a habit that is formed from sexual desire as desire is rewarded. It works the same way in the brain as when people become addicted to drugs.' (*The Journal of Sexual Medicine* 2012;9:1048-1054 bit.ly/z7Jlav)

Carers' health suffering

Two in five unpaid carers are sacrificing their own health by putting off medical treatment to care for an ill, frail or disabled loved one a survey for *Carers' Week* has shown. The survey, completed by 3,400 carers, showed that caring had a negative impact on 83% of carers' physical health, with 36% of carers sustaining a physical injury (such as back pain) through caring. A further 87% said caring for a family member or friend has had a negative impact on their mental health. The eight *Carers' Week* charity partners say this is further evidence of a growing care crisis and are calling for better financial and practical support for the 6.4 million unpaid carers in the UK. (*Carers' Week* 18 June 2012 bit.ly/KMIV3H)

The weight of nations

Increasing obesity could have the same implications for world food energy demands as an extra half a billion people living on the earth according to research published in the journal *BMC Public Health*. The team estimated the total weight of people on the planet and found that North America, which is home to only 6% of the global population, is responsible for more than a third of the obesity. Researchers calculated that if all countries had the BMI distribution of the USA, the increase in human biomass of 58 million tonnes would be equivalent in mass to an extra 935 million people of average body mass, and have energy requirements equivalent to that of 473 million adults. (*BMC Public Health* 2012;12:439 bit.ly/Lzpfjg)

A father's love

Fatherly love is critical to a person's development according to research about the power of parental rejection and acceptance in shaping our personalities. The report published in *Personality and Social Psychology Review* looked at 36 studies involving more than 10,000 participants. The authors found that in response to rejection by their parents, children tend to feel more anxious and insecure, as well as more hostile and aggressive toward others. The pain of rejection – especially when it occurs over a period of time in childhood – tends to linger into adulthood, making it more difficult for adults who were rejected as children to form secure and trusting relationships. (*Personality and Social Psychology Review* 2012;16:103-115 bit.ly/LZqIsz)

Mental health costs

Mental illness now accounts for nearly a half of all ill health suffered by people under 65 and it is more disabling than most chronic physical disease. Yet only a quarter of those involved are in any form of treatment according to a report published by the London School of Economics. The report presses for new priorities in commissioning to overturn the inequality within the NHS in the way it treats mental illness as compared with physical illness. The report states 'More expenditure on the most common mental disorders would almost certainly cost the NHS nothing... This is mainly because the costs of psychological therapy are low and recovery rates are high' and because 'effective mental health treatment can also generate other large savings to the government, for example by increasing employment or improving the behaviour of children'. (*The Centre for Economic Performance's Mental Health Policy Group*, June 2012 bit.ly/KeysfS)

Measles eradication

Global efforts to cut the number of deaths from measles have fallen short of World Health Organisation (WHO) targets. Despite rapid progress in measles control from 2000 to 2007, delayed implementation of accelerated disease control in India and continued outbreaks in Africa have stalled momentum towards the 2010 goal of 90% reduction in measles mortality. According to a report in *The Lancet* intensified control measures and renewed political and financial commitment are needed to achieve mortality reduction targets and lay the foundation for the global eradication of measles. (*Lancet* 2012;379:2178 bit.ly/JwZwen)

Born to be wild?

There are many environmental causes of anti-social behaviour in adolescents, however an article in *The Lancet* explores recent research findings that there are significant genetic pre-determinants for the likelihood of adolescents developing antisocial behaviour. The research goes as far as suggesting it may be possible to determine the likelihood of criminal activity later in life. This begins to sound eerily like the plot of *Minority Report*, a film in which criminals are apprehended before they commit a crime and raises questions of free will and determinism. (*Lancet* 2012;379:395 bit.ly/zxAILZ)