

Briefings

edited by DAVID P. HAMILTON

Brain Food?

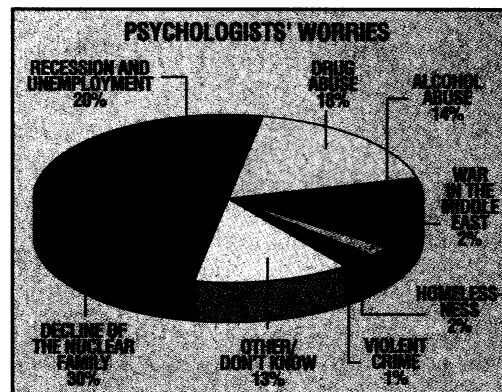
A report recently published in Britain has created new controversy over an old subject: attempts to improve children's IQs through nutritional supplements.

Criminologist Stephen Schoenthaler of California State University in Turlock claims the study demonstrates that children's nonverbal IQs can be raised significantly by giving them double the current Recommended Daily Allowances (RDAs) of vitamins and minerals. The findings have stirred up considerable public attention in England, where they were announced on 28 February and published in the journal *Personality and Individual Differences*. The journal's editor,

Psychological Risk Assessment

Quick—what's the biggest threat to the mental health of Americans? Office stress? Indoor radon? Noisy car alarms?

The American Psychological Association (APA) psychologists go for yet grander problems. According to a just-released survey conducted last December of the APA's membership, a slight plurality (30%) of the respondents believe the "decline of the nuclear family" is the biggest threat to Americans' mental equilibrium. Close behind were recession and unemployment (20%), drug abuse (18%), and alcohol abuse (14%). The threat of war in the Middle East (2%) and homelessness (2%) were nearly lost in the noise.



And hardly any psychologists worry about stress from the office. Then again, why would they?

psychologist Hans Eysenck, is a coauthor.

The double-blind experiment involved three groups of children and a control group. The subjects were given a dietary supplement of 23 vitamins and minerals over 13 weeks. Schoenthaler claims that vitamin and mineral supplements raised children's nonverbal IQ scores by an average of 3.7 points. (The

gains were greatest for children in the lowest socioeconomic groups.) Oddly, the effect is reported only for supplements equalling 100% of Recommended Daily Allowances and did not show up for the groups receiving 50% or 200% of RDAs.

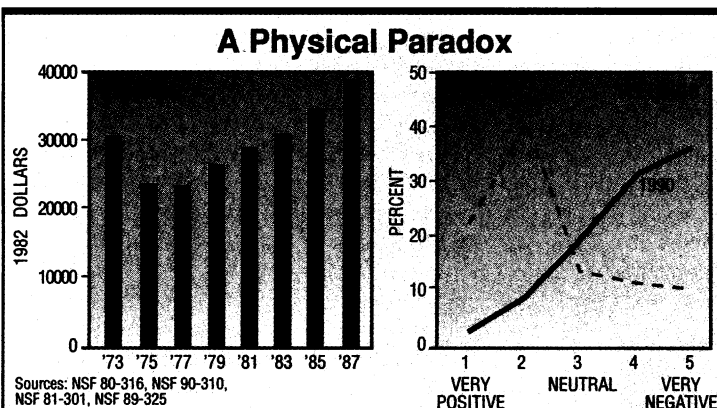
Schoenthaler is now planning a follow-up study with a group of 538 people aged 18-25. This time he's going to triple the vitamins and reduce the minerals in the group getting the most supplements. He says he suspects that too many minerals have a toxic effect.

Although Schoenthaler says the findings have been widely hailed, *Nature* sharply criticized the study in its 7 March issue, saying that of 87 comparisons conducted between subjects and controls, only seven yielded significant results. And the findings have so far been virtually ignored in the United States.

the 10,000 superconducting magnets that will guide and focus the SSC's proton beam. Participating schools will get their names engraved on a plaque fixed on their magnet, and will receive an Adopt-a-Magnet newsletter with frequent updates on the magnet's status and any tests to which it might be subjected.

The program doesn't end there. Six elementary school teachers from Texas have developed an entire Adopt-a-Magnet curriculum, including puppets, songs, games, experiments, physical education activities, and music and video cassettes. (Unfortunately, no autographs from the physicists.) More seriously, the program includes overviews on the history and applications of magnetism, the atomic structure of matter, superconductivity, and particle detectors and accelerators.

The SSC Laboratory stands to reap obvious benefits from this program. After all, what budget-cutting legislator could resist a tearful letter from an eight-year-old begging him not to decommission his school's magnet? It does, however, leave a somewhat unsettling image: If the program is a success, can we look forward to tiny glow-in-the-dark magnets in our cereal boxes?



There's a crisis in funding for basic science research—or is there? Take physics: "Young physicists are experiencing serious difficulties obtaining research support," states an article by Roman Czujko, Daniel Kleppner, and Stuart Rice in the February issue of *Physics Today*. To buttress their argument, the authors conducted a survey of young physics faculty members last year and report that only 11% felt that federal support for research was adequate. In contrast, 63% of physicists surveyed in 1977 said they were satisfied with funding levels (chart on right).

But in congressional testimony last week, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute president and former National Science Board chairman Roland Schmitt noted that in 1977, the year most physicists said things were hunky-dory, per capita federal funding for the physical sciences was at almost the lowest point in more than a decade (chart on left)—a finding Schmitt found "curious." Schmitt does not deny that physicists feel hard pressed to obtain research support, but he argues that structural factors of the research enterprise—issues such as who does the research, who pays for it, and where it is done—might go further to explain young scientists' malaise than money alone.

Selling the SSC to the Next Generation

Taking their cues from Hollywood, the managers of the Superconducting Super Collider (SSC) have decided it's time to start a fan club to help win the hearts of young people—and perhaps those of their elders on Capitol Hill.

Focusing their attention on the hardware, rather than people, the SSC Laboratory has created the Adopt-A-Magnet program, which allows elementary schools to "adopt" one of

Getting Around the Cosmic Censor

Physicists are anxiously looking for shortcomings in a paper published in the 25 February