

Births Up 9 Months After the Blackout: Hospitals Report Rise in <span ...

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Births Up 9 Months After the Blackout

By MARTIN TOLCHIN

A sharp increase in births has been reported by several large hospitals here, nine months after the 1965 blackout.

Mount Sinai Hospital, which averages 11 births daily, had 28 births on Monday. This was a record for the hospital; its previous one-day high was 18. All four of its delivery rooms and 14 labor rooms were constantly occupied.

At Bellevue there were 29 new babies in the nursery yesterday, compared with 11 a week ago and an average of 20. Columbia-Presbyterian averages 11 births daily and had 15 Monday; St. Vincent's averages 7 and had 10; Brookdale averages 10 and had 13, and Coney Island averages 5 and had 8. However, New

York and Brooklyn Jewish Hospitals reported that their number of births was normal.

Asked to comment on the increase in births, Paul Siegel, a sociologist, said:

"The lights went out and people were left to interact with each other."

Mr. Siegel is directing a National Opinion Research Council study of the impact of the blackout on 1,300 persons.

The blackout started at 5:27 P.M. on November 9. The power failure plunged nearly the entire city into darkness, along with parts of eight states and one Canadian province. It affected 30 million persons.

In areas where the lights were restored in two to three

hours the birth rate was reported normal yesterday. In some sections of the city, however, the lights remained off until 7 A.M. on Nov. 10.

Sociologists and obstetricians were reluctant to attribute the birth increase to the blackout. Some said, however, that the disruption in routine caused by the blackout and the absence of television might have contributed to the phenomenon.

"I know the exact date of conception of two patients," said Dr. Richard Hausknecht, an associate attending obstetrician at Mt. Sinai. "It was the night of the blackout."

Dr. Hausknecht, who specializes in fertility problems, said some couples who had

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sought vainly to conceive were apparently successful on the night of the blackout. He added:

"It's quite possible that there were a number of unplanned pregnancies."

Dr. Robert W. Hodge, a sociologist and co-director of the study, said:

"Our data show that most people wound up at home. They didn't have access to a major source of amusement—television. Under the circumstances, it's not unreasonable to assume that a lot of sex life went on."

A total of 273 days have elapsed since Nov. 9. Eastman's Obstetrics, the standard textbook, states that birth occurs 270 days from the last ovulation or 282 days from the last menstrual period. A gradual rise occurs 10 days before and after these intervals and a plateau is reached for eight days.

Dr. Christopher Tietze, director of the National Committee on Maternal Health, said:

"I am skeptical until I see data from the entire city. There can be daily fluctuations in individual hospitals that can be misleading. If it should be true, I would think it's because people may have had trouble finding their accustomed contracep-

tives, or just because it was dark."

There were 16 birth at Mt. Sinai yesterday, 13 at Columbia Presbyterian and 10 at St. Vincent's, all above average.

The number of births was reported normal in Nassau and Suffolk Counties, many of whose commuters were stranded in the city Nov. 9, in Newark and Jersey City, which were not affected, and in hospitals in Albany, Rochester, New Haven and Providence, where the lights went on in mid-evening.

At Mt. Sinai, however, the obstetrical floors were the scene of frantic activity as nurses hurried through the wards and incubators were speedily wheeled in and out of the delivery rooms.

"We've been on our toes every minute of the day, night and evening," said Elizabeth Brandl, nurse supervisor. "I can't remember it ever being this bad."

The administrator of a municipal hospital where births had increased recalled newspaper articles that had said the electrification of rural villages in India had markedly reduced the birth rate.

Several sociological studies of the blackout are now being made by, among others, Columbia, Cornell, and Ohio State Universities.

When the studies were announced last fall, sociologists said they regarded the blackout as a great event that had abruptly and radically altered the life conditions of 30 million persons. They said they were certain its effects would provide a rich mine for behavioral, sociological and psychological discovery.