

The Children of Vulnerable Black Parents Brought in Care: A Comparison Study

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The study explores the question of whether a group of mothers separated from their parents in upbringing, will be at greater risk of being unable to provide their own children because of the insecure attachment which may have determined their placement away from their own homes.

The sample is drawn from a large group of parents assessed in Child Care Proceedings, because of the difficulties they were experiencing caring for their children. African, Caribbean and Mixed Raced Mothers who were born in Britain were included. The vulnerable group was identified by a history of being in care for four years or more during their upbringing. The comparison group did not have any experience of being in care at any time and none had been detained in a secure facility. The great majority of both groups were unemployed, receiving income support and living in local authority housing. The groups were similarly distributed by unskilled/semiskilled socio-economic background, but more of the vulnerable were younger in age and fewer of them had been married.

During their upbringing, mothers in vulnerable and comparison groups were equally exposed to domestic violence, an upbringing with a step-parent and exposure to physical or sexual abuse. The vulnerable mothers were more likely to have been exposed to a childhood experience associated with parental difficulty or childhood adversity and less than 10% admitted to a close relationship with their mother or with their father. The vulnerable were far more likely to give a history of truancy and school exclusion and to have had difficulties of control, as well as difficulties with the police or with illicit drugs. Parenting assessments proved that the vulnerable were more at risk of displaying impulsive behaviours and more suffered serious personality difficulties than comparison mothers.

The children of the vulnerable were more likely to experience *neglect*, but no more likely to be physically abused. Vulnerable mothers were far more likely to leave a child alone and be discovered for doing so.

Insecure attachments might have been common in the children of the study, but only a third of the children from both groups complained of feeling rejected by their mothers. It is of interest that behavioural problems, marked psychological difficulties and identity confusion were equally distributed in both groups. Following Care Proceedings one in four of the children was rehabilitated in both groups.

The implications of these findings are discussed.