

The children of West Indian migrants

Michael Rutter, William Yule and Michael Berger

New research, in London and the Isle of Wight, erodes old preconceptions. Much concern about West Indian "problem" behaviour seems unjustified.

For many years London has been a cosmopolitan city with a mixed and changing population. During the last century, the Irish formed the largest immigrant group. After the second world war there was increased immigration from Europe, and in the 1950s there was a marked rise in the number of people coming from Asia and from the West Indies. There has been a tendency to regard the coming of these skins as a new phenomenon because their skins are not white. Politicians have said that new Commonwealth immigrants are a "problem," both because they are thought to be an "alien" culture within our midst, and because it is thought that they are a group with a high rate of "problem" behaviour. However, there is very little evidence on either of these points. Even if these naive and prejudicial views are rejected, it is important to determine the characteristics of the various groups which make up our heterogeneous population. In this way, the needs of families living in this country can be based on knowledge of their actual situation and requirements. An opportunity to do this arose out of a study of ten year old children living in one of London's inner boroughs.

The main purpose of the investigation was to see how far the needs of children living in a major metropolis differed from those living in an area of small towns. For the former, we studied an inner London borough (ILB) and, for the latter, the Isle of Wight (IOW). The same team of investigators used the same research instruments and research strategy. A two-stage procedure was followed. First, the total population of ten year old children (2,281 in London and 1,142 on the Isle of Wight) was screened. To do this, behavioural and social questionnaires were completed by teachers, and the children took group tests of non-verbal intelligence and reading.

Then, in the second stage, large subgroups (some 200 IOW children, 250 non-immigrant London children and 100 children from West Indian families in London) were intensively studied in a two to three hour interview with the child's parents, a shorter interview with his teacher, and individual psychological testing of the child. The three subgroups were a random sample from the general population, one in which the group tests indicated poor reading, and one where the screening questionnaires suggested emotional or behavioural difficulties. In order to avoid preconceptions, the investigators were not told which subgroup the child was in.

As there were no new Commonwealth immigrants on the Isle of Wight at the time of the study, ILB children from such families were excluded for the purpose of comparing the two areas. Nevertheless, as an integral part of the London population, they were studied in the same way. This gave an opportunity to look in more detail at the children from West Indian families (the largest new Commonwealth immigrant group in the borough

studied, accounting for 15 per cent of the ten year olds). The results are shown in the chart.

The first major finding was that non-immigrant London ten year old boys and girls showed many more difficulties than their counterparts on the Isle of Wight. The rates of specific reading retardation (ie, reading difficulties not attributable to low intelligence), of emotional difficulties and of disorders of conduct, were all at a level at least twice that in IOW children. A series of systematic validity checks confirmed that the ILB-IOW difference was a real and meaningful one. In short, it seemed that there was something about living in an inner London borough which was associated with, and probably led to, poorer educational attainment and more "problem" behaviour in the children. By comparing patterns of life in the two areas, it was possible to obtain some clues as to why this should occur. More of the London parents showed psychiatric disorder and more had appeared before the courts. Marital difficulties were more frequent and more of the children were taken into care. Families were larger and more were living in overcrowded homes which they did not own. Finally, schools had higher rates of pupil and staff turnover—factors shown to be associated with the children having poorer attainment and more behavioural problems. These findings identify important issues and questions, but further work is required to pinpoint the mechanisms by which inner city life has these effects.

With respect to London children from West Indian families, the main point of the ILB-IOW comparison is that the children are living in an area with a high rate of problems. This also applies to children born and bred in London, whose parents were also born and bred in London.

The West Indian sample, within the total ILB group, was defined in terms of children of parents who were both born in the West Indies. For this purpose we had first to use information from teachers; this proved to be reasonably accurate. There was a special interest in the comparison between children themselves born in the West Indies and those born in the United Kingdom to West Indian parents. The information from teachers proved much less reliable with respect to this distinction, and there was a distorting tendency for them to report "problem" children as born abroad when in fact they were born in this country. This finding casts considerable doubt on the validity of surveys based solely on teachers' information about the child's place of birth and it meant that we had to confine attention to parental reports on birth place.

Before comparing children according to where they were born, it was necessary to determine whether the family, educational and occupational background of the two groups was similar. We found that it was. However, obviously the children's life experiences differed. More of those born in the West Indies had experienced separations from their

families, but more of those born in the United Kingdom had experienced child-minding by non-relatives and more had been placed "in care."

Taken as a whole, the children of West Indian migrants had a rate of psychiatric disorder which was much the same as that in the children from non-immigrant (indigenous) families living in inner London. However, there were important differences in pattern, and to some extent in the frequency of difficulties. Whereas disorder at home did not differ, the West Indian children showed a somewhat higher rate of conduct problems (fighting, disruptive behaviour, stealing, and so on) at school. This was evident from both the teachers' questionnaire scores and the more discriminating interview with teachers, so that the difference seems to be a valid one.

In studies of non-immigrant girls, the usual picture is that emotional problems (fears, worries, unhappiness) are much more common than conduct problems. However, this was not the case among West Indian girls, where conduct disorders predominated, as they did in all the boys (both West Indian and indigenous).

There are a variety of reasons why West Indian children might show more behavioural difficulties at school. These include their often lower educational attainment (see table 1); the disparity be-

Table 1: Reading attainments (months)

| | Indigenous | children in West Indian families | |
|---------------|------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| | | UK born | WI born |
| | | to UK before 8 years | to UK after 8 years |
| average score | 115.4 | 107.0 | 97.0 |
| | | 97.0 | 94.1 |

tween home and school patterns of discipline; the effects of racial prejudice; and the consequences of their being more likely to attend schools which had

high rates of pupil turnover, absenteeism and children from poor homes. However, it should not be assumed that the disorders of conduct in West Indian children had the same significance as those in indigenous children. Among United Kingdom children, it is usual for youngsters with conduct disorders to have difficulties in getting along with other children and to show some emotional disturbance. This was less apparent in West Indian children, who, even in school, showed no more emotional difficulties and no more difficulties with their fellows than did indigenous children. This suggests (but does not prove) that the conduct disorders in West Indian children were less deeply entrenched.

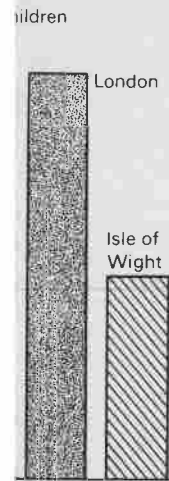
Interestingly, the rate of conduct disorders in West Indian children did not differ according to their place of birth. It seemed that although the maladaptive experiences associated with an upbringing in the United Kingdom differed in pattern from those associated with life in the West Indies, the level of "bad" experiences was probably much the same. Most of the children had come to Britain several years earlier and although many were said to have shown difficulties shortly after migration, these were usually no longer in evidence. In this connection, it is important to bear in mind that the study was restricted to ten year old children. Clinical experience suggests that youngsters coming to Britain during adolescence to join their parents may experience many more problems.

The picture with regard to educational attainments was different in several respects. In the first place, attainments were generally considerably lower in West Indian children than in indigenous children. Thus, the mean score for West Indian children on the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability was 13 months below that of children from non-immigrant

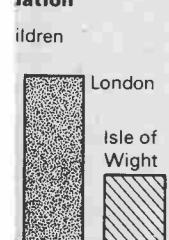
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London and Isle of Wight comparisons

Emotional/behavioural problems



Specific reading attainment



Peter Bristow

is article is based
three papers due to
ear in the *Journal
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Psychiatry*: M.
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families (which, in turn, was almost a year below age level).

However, the second important finding is that, within the West Indian group, attainment differed markedly according to the child's place of birth. Children born in this country had a reading age ten months above their counterparts born in the West Indies, despite the fact that the educational-occupational level of the parents in the two groups was similar. The reality of this difference was confirmed by examining the connection between reading level and duration of time in this country. The children who came to Britain before they were eight years old were reading at a level which was six months above those who came after the age of eight.

There are a variety of possible reasons for the difference in attainment scores according to place of birth. Malnutrition in early life is much commoner in the West Indies than it is in Britain and this may affect intellectual development. The disruption of moving from one cultural setting to another may also have an effect. A further variable concerns the children's early life experiences. Nevertheless, it seems that the experience of schooling in this country may be one of the main factors behind the better reading attainments of children born here.

However, attention must also be paid to the finding that the educational attainments of children born in this country to West Indian parents were still below those of the indigenous population. Again, there are many possible reasons for the difference. West Indian children were liable to attend less favourable schools, and West Indian families tended to have many more children and live in worse social circumstances (both are factors known to be associated with low attainment).

The children from West Indian families differed from indigenous ILB children in their early life experiences. In particular, more had experienced child-minding by non-relatives. A study by M. Pollack has also shown that young West Indian children tend to have fewer toys and less play and interaction with their parents. In addition, there are other possible social, cultural, genetic and nutritional differences. Further investigation is needed here and action should be taken to reduce the rate of adverse influences among West Indian families.

In order to understand the meaning of such differences in behaviour and attainment, and to appreciate family needs, it is necessary to go beyond rates of difficulties and to ask about home circumstances and patterns of family life. As part of the second stage of intensive study, the parents of all groups were interviewed at home by experienced interviewers. Systematic data were obtained on family events, activities and home circumstances and also on feelings, emotions and attitudes (see table 2).

In terms of educational background, the West Indian parents were broadly similar to the indigenous parents, but in spite of this, significantly more West Indian fathers and mothers had unskilled or semi-skilled manual jobs. We had no measure of racial discrimination in terms of job opportunities, but in view of the PEP study findings, there can be no doubt that such discrimination exists and limits job opportunities for United Kingdom citizens of West Indian origin. The West Indian fathers had a generally similar pattern of working hours to the

Table 2: Homes and jobs

| families | home ownership | over crowding | working wives | non-manual job (father) |
|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| | % | % | % | % |
| West Indian | 44 | 50 | 81 | 4 |
| non-immigrant | 18 | 20 | 53 | 20 |

indigenous fathers, but many more West Indian wives had jobs outside the home. The West Indian wives also worked significantly longer hours than the indigenous wives.

As might be expected from their lower occupational status, the West Indian families had less satisfactory housing conditions. Overcrowding was twice as frequent, and a higher proportion of families did not have, or had to share, the basic amenities of hot running water; a bathroom, lavatory and kitchen. Particularly when they first came to this country, many of the West Indian parents had to live in the most dreadful privately rented accommodation, often at exorbitant rents. Nevertheless, in one respect, a major change had taken place following migration. Nearly half of the West Indian families owned their own home compared with less than one in five of the indigenous families. Even when multiple occupancy dwellings were excluded, there were still more West Indian families who owned their homes. In spite of discrimination in housing and other adverse circumstances, the West Indian families had done a great deal to improve their situation. The price was that wives had to work long hours and the property was often old, poor quality, and bought under disadvantageous financial arrangements. Nevertheless, the fact remains that nearly half the West Indian families had joined the property-owning section of the community. The extent to which house ownership will bring advantages in the long term will depend on the length of lease of the property (an item on which we have no information), the remaining life of the building, the value of property in the area and national housing policies.

A further difference between the West Indian and non-immigrant families concerns family size (see table 3). Three fifths of the West Indian mothers had at least five children, a rate over double that for indigenous mothers. This was frequently associated with overcrowding in the home and, in

Table 3: Families and children

| families | 5+ children | child-minding | not club in evening | makes own bed |
|---------------|-------------|---------------|---------------------|---------------|
| | % | % | % | % |
| West Indian | 59 | 40 | 41 | 92 |
| non-immigrant | 21 | 5 | 17 | 39 |

view of the known associations between large family size and low reading attainment, may also have serious educational consequences. We did not ask about families' use of, or attitude towards, family planning services but clearly these services should be made freely available to those West Indian families who wish to use them.

Many more children in West Indian families had experienced child minding by non-relatives during the pre-school period and more had taken into the care of the local authority. We had no measure of the quality of such childminding but other studies (see Brian Jackson, "The childminders" *NEW SOCIETY*, 29 November 1973) have shown that it is often lacking in many important respects. Obviously this must be a cause for concern but in our view any drive to eliminate illegal child-minding (suggested by some, but not by Brian Jackson) would not provide an adequate answer. In the first place, the families have a need for pre-school care and if good quality nurseries and schools are not available they have no alternative but to fall back on child-minding. However, at least as important is the fact that the lack of toys and play opportunities in the child-minding situation seems to reflect a lesser emphasis in West Indian families on the importance of play in children's development. The relative lack of

parent-child interaction in the pre-school period has sometimes been interpreted as a lack of caring, but our findings suggest that is mistaken. We found that West Indian parents were deeply concerned for their children and usually had good, warm relationships with them. In this respect they did not differ from indigenous parents. Furthermore, they were concerned about their children's education and took steps to help them with their schoolwork. It is essential that we should be more careful not to suppose that the Anglo-Saxon methods of child rearing are necessarily better than others (in many respects they are not). Nevertheless there is evidence of the value of play and adult-child interaction in aiding intellectual development during the pre-school period and attempts to help West Indian families need to be made in this context.

The quality of family relationships did not differ between the West Indian and indigenous groups. Nor were there any differences in rates of parental mental disorder or criminal behaviour. This is in keeping with previous studies which have emphasised the generally law-abiding behaviour of British adults who were born in the West Indies. Furthermore, contrary to popular belief, the family patterns in the two groups were, in most respects, closely similar. In both, the "nuclear family" was the norm and most consisted of stable marriages which had lasted for a dozen or more years. For the most part, West Indian fathers were as much involved with their families as were native Londoners. In these respects the West Indian families seemed to share the prevailing cultural patterns.

However, in one respect the patterns of discip-

line did differ. West Indian children were expected to help more at home and they were generally more self-reliant. On the other hand, they were rather more restricted in their social activities. There are no grounds for supposing that this pattern is necessarily better or worse than that in the indigenous families. But it was different and this has implications. West Indian parents often complained that discipline in schools was lax and inefficient. Conversely, teachers sometimes felt that West Indian parents were unduly harsh. Both judgments might be softened and greater cooperation achieved if each appreciated the reality of the cultural difference in attitude to discipline. As it is, the children may find the disparity between what is expected at home, and what is expected at school, both confusing and troublesome.

All too often we react to other groups on the basis of preconception and prejudice. One of the aims of our study has been to replace this by knowledge on actual similarities and differences between cultural groups. We have found that much of the concern about high rates of "problem" behaviour in West Indian parents and children is unjustified. The pattern of educational attainments is greatly influenced by where the child is born, but real concern is still needed about the attainments of some children and the measures being taken to help. Many of the stereotypes about West Indian families, based on the state of affairs in the West Indies, do not apply to families living in this country. Nevertheless, there are differences which need to be understood if we are to achieve mutual respect and if the families who need help are to obtain it.

Drugs and deterrence in New York

Carol Trilling and Graeme Newman

New York State has imposed harsher penalties for having or selling drugs. But is there any hope of making deterrence stick?

In January 1973, Governor Nelson Rockefeller introduced a new anti-drug law to the residents of New York State. Its aim was "to make the selling or conspiracy to sell hard drugs, the possession or conspiracy to possess large quantities of narcotics and the commission of violent crimes by persons who had ingested hard drugs punishable by the mandatory sentence of life imprisonment." What this meant, basically, was that anyone found guilty of selling or possessing any quantity of any "narcotic" drug, including marijuana, or hallucinogens, or amphetamines; would, if aged over 19, be sent to prison for the remainder of his life. Furthermore, he would not be permitted to plead guilty to a lesser charge, or be eligible for probation or parole considerations. In addition, the bill would make it a new crime to commit any number of "conventional" offences while having knowingly taken one of these unlawful drugs.

The bill tried to make the penalties for possessing and selling drugs equal, or more severe, than those for more serious crimes. Convictions for murder, assault, burglary and so on, were to be put on a par with the possession and/or sale of even small quantities of "dangerous" drugs.

The new law was considered a backward step by most liberal politicians and academic criminologists in the United States. This was especially so after the mass of research produced there over the past 15 years had concluded that some kind of "legislation" of drugs was needed, and a punitive approach was not appropriate. However, the bill was easier to understand when one remembered that American drug legislation had generally been punitive, with only a recent and temporary trend towards "treatment" rather than punishment.

In some countries, such as Britain, drug use is considered a medical problem; and in some developing countries, certain forms of drug use, like opium, have been (until recently) quite acceptable. However, in America the use of opium and other addicting drugs has traditionally been seen as criminal. The Harrison Act, 1914, prohibited drug possession by any person not registered as addicts, except for "legitimate medical purposes," and provided harsh and punitive penalties.

While the Harrison Act was being passed, there were reputed to be 400,000 addicts in the United States. Before the act, these addicts had been able to buy their necessary drugs legitimately and in-

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