A new study looks at the disadvantages that are passed down from care leavers to their children and examines how we can help to break this intergenerational cycle.

1. The current situation

82,000 children in England are currently in care. Being placed in care can be traumatic for children because of:
- the experiences that caused the placement
- separation from their family
- the experience and stigma of being in care

Our study explores what happens when these children grow up and become parents themselves.
- How do they cope with being parents?
- Do their children suffer similar disadvantages?
- Is the government doing enough to support them?

2. What is life like for care leavers when they become parents?

Care leavers suffer a range of disadvantages when they become parents:
- Social and economic disadvantages
  - They are more likely to:
    - live in poverty: 47% vs. 25%
    - have no or low level educational qualifications: 38% vs. 11%
    - live in a workless household: 24% vs. 12%
    - live with a violent partner: 14% vs. 6%
- Health disadvantages
  - They are more likely to:
    - be a smoker: 53% vs. 25%
    - have poor/fair health: 30% vs. 16%
    - have high-level depressive symptoms: 26% vs. 13%
    - feel like they never get what they want in life: 20% vs. 9%

3. The impact on the children of care leavers is complex

Educational disadvantages are not always observed, but mental health disadvantages are evident, suggesting prolonged and indirect emotional scarring.

When comparing them to children from similar backgrounds whose parents did not spend time in care, children of care leavers are just as likely to:
- gain +5 GCSEs at Grade 4-9 at age 16
- be in education, employment or training post-16
- aspire to go to university and to have a professional occupation

However, mental health issues are still evident even after considering their socio-economic status and educational attainment. Compared to their peers with similar characteristics, the children of care leavers are more likely to:
- have carried out acts of self-harm: 36% vs. 26%
- report a high number of hyperactivity symptoms: 25% vs. 15%
- have been diagnosed with depression by a doctor: 18% vs. 9%
- have attempted suicide: 1% vs. 6%

4. How do some mothers beat the odds?

We need to learn from care leaver mothers who show resilience.

These resilient mothers were more likely than other care leaver mothers to:
- live in more secure housing in less deprived areas
- be in employment
- have achieved higher qualification levels
- have experienced a stable foster care placement

5. What needs to change?

The government can help all who have experienced care to have better lives by:
- extending the eligibility for state support beyond age 21, to enable care leavers to stay with their foster family or in state care for longer
- improving educational provision for children who are in care, and provide support for life-long learning for them and their children
- providing care leavers with safe and secure housing in neighbourhoods that are familiar to them
- offering access to ongoing mental health assessments and treatment, recognising that mental health issues can be passed from one generation to the next

To read the full study, and to find out more about our recommendations, please visit: https://cls.ucl.ac.uk/childrenofcareleavers