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### Child Protection Services: The Developmental Consequences of Arbitrary Removal (2020-2021)

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# “Child Protection Services: The Developmental Consequences of Arbitrary Removal” John Jackson (research inquiry example)

## Questions to Consider For Discussion and Reflection

In this research inquiry essay, Jackson presents sources that demonstrate the consequences for development for children who have been removed from their homes by Children’s Services. In order to better understand these developmental consequences, Jackson reviews sources that discuss physical, mental, and emotional consequences of removal. As you read Jackson’s essay, consider:

- While Jackson is careful to concede that there are some instances when removal of a child from their parents may be necessary, the essay takes a different point of view and perspective overall in looking at the negative consequences of removal. What are some strategies that Jackson uses to make this shift in perspective particularly effective for the reader? How can you think about shifting perspectives for the people or stakeholders involved in your research inquiry?
- Removal of a child by Children’s Services is an extremely emotionally-laden topic. How does Jackson navigate using *pathos* (or emotional appeals/emotional evidence) effectively? What does Jackson avoid in this discussion? How can you think about the balance of using emotional appeals in your own research inquiry? What specific emotions might be most appropriate to evoke for your readers, and why?
- In the conclusion, Jackson offers a different approach or alternative to removal of children from their parents or biological homes. What did this alternative suggestion make you think about in the conclusion? What further research would you like to know? How can you use this strategy of proposing an alternative solution or argument in the conclusion of your own research inquiry? What effect does this have in the conclusion?

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## Child Protection Services: The Developmental Consequences of Arbitrary Removal by John Jackson

The decision to take a child from their biological parents is made by one person. One judge, after hearing evidence from both sides, will determine whether or not a child is forcefully uprooted from their home. Sometimes, it is for the better. A child may have been taken from a home where they were abused or neglected, and given to a family that now loves them; however, this outcome is not always the case. The system keeps many children in foster care, moving them from house to house, separating siblings, and putting them into other potentially dangerous situations. The constant struggle faced by these children has a compounding effect on their mental health and development, and can impact them later as they age into adults. Many questions must be asked, evidence must be concrete, and abuse or neglect must be clear before a judge can make such an impactful decision on a child’s life. In removing a child from their

biological family, a judge runs the risk of undermining the child's development into adolescence and a healthy adulthood.

Whether it be the defense lawyers, the workers from the Administration for Children's Services (A.C.S.), the judges, or the parents who are facing the possibility of losing their children, this whole field of work is an extremely difficult place to navigate, and the biggest questions that circulate are 'when should a child be taken from their parents?' and 'what actions justify that decision in a courtroom?' Many unfair standards are set for parents who are looking to gain custody of their children. They are forced into many types of therapy and a long succession of court dates, which they must attend if they wish to hasten the process of getting their children back. There is seemingly no end to it all. This stress is faced not only by the parents, but by the children, too. In "The Separation," Larissa MacFarquhar (2017) reports that children are sometimes coerced into saying bad things about their mother by their foster mother. The system fights back against the parents trying to get their children back, just as the parents are trying to fight for their children. The system, which often holds bias towards poor and non-white families, makes it difficult for parents to win their children back. The compounding effects of all of this stress can have a direct impact on problems faced by these children later in life as adults. These problems can cause both minor and major stress and struggles in their adult lives. Often the suffering of children who are abused and/or neglected is not relieved but compounded when these children are removed from their homes.

The removal of a child from their home causes serious trauma during development. According to Noah Barish (2010) of the Juvenile Youth Project, "many sources acknowledge that separating a child from a parent for even a relatively short time can have a devastating emotional and physical impact on the child." The child can view the removal as a "rejection or loss", which then further creates issues with attachment as the child further develops. Issues of developing attachments with others can have a detrimental effect on the social life of a child as they turn into an adult, which can then further lead to more mental problems as they face social isolation and struggle to keep relationships. According to Peter Wolf, an expert witness in family court, "disruptions in the parent-child relationship may provoke fear and anxiety in a child and diminish his or her sense of stability and self" (qtd. in Barish, 2010). Removing a child from their parents, unless absolutely necessary, can negatively impact the child's sense of attachment, sense of identity, and ability to maintain good and stable relationships with themselves and others, such as friends or other caregivers.

Children in foster care disproportionately suffer from poor mental and physical health in comparison to their counterparts, who have not ever been faced with the difficulties of the foster care system. Studies interpreted by authors Turney and Wildeman (2017) show that children placed in foster care are, "three to five times more likely than children not placed in foster care to experience mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, behavioral or conduct problems, and Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder" (p. 118). These children disproportionately face mental health problems that give them an immediate disadvantage at life as they enter adulthood.

Continuous exposure to trauma during childhood is a main factor that contributes to developmental and social issues that continue on as these children grow into adults. According to Williams-Mbengue (2016), "it is estimated that 90 percent of children in foster care have been exposed to trauma." A study in one state showed that about one in four, roughly twenty five

percent, of such children had trauma bad enough that it required medical treatment. As Williams-Mbengue explains,

The term ‘complex trauma’ describes children's exposure to multiple or prolonged traumatic events, which are often invasive and interpersonal in nature. Complex trauma exposure involves the simultaneous or sequential occurrence of child maltreatment, including psychological maltreatment, neglect, exposure to violence and physical and sexual abuse.

The level of trauma faced is increased, in many cases, by the “removal of these children from their families” and other loved ones (Williams-Mbengue, 2017). Far from saving children from the harms they suffer at home, it appears that removing traumatized children from their homes is likely to harm them further.

Problems with intellectual or educational development can also arise. Moreover, “children's relationships and attachments to caretakers, friends, and teachers can be affected, further exacerbating difficulties they may experience in foster care” (Williams-Mbengue 2017). As they age into adulthood, many of these problems go unaddressed, and even the twenty five percent of children who need medical treatment for their trauma often don’t get it. These problems simply do not go away, and if left unchecked, will continue on with these children as they age, causing further difficulty in developmental issues as they continue into their adult life. In a terribly ironic way, children who have undergone traumatic experiences are more likely to struggle with bad coping mechanisms, from something as simple as overeating, to something as complex as addiction. The consequences of these bad coping mechanisms will affect them later in life, such as when these unhealthy mechanisms can lead to problems such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease (Williams-Mbengue 2017).

The mental health problems faced by these children can impact other areas of their life in the future. Children who have faced trauma through the foster care system are more likely to face future family instability, both with their biological family and with one that they may create on their own later in life (Turney & Wildeman p. 118). These children will be further exposed to socioeconomic problems and disadvantages, and due to this, are more likely to live in poor neighborhoods, dealing with the struggles of living in poverty (Turney & Wildeman p. 120). All of these factors can then compoundingly increase the mental, physical and emotional struggles already faced by these children.

For many reasons then, it is generally agreed that children should not be removed from their homes ‘-unless absolutely necessary-’. However, what constitutes absolute necessity? When it comes to removing a child from their home, the evidence must show that there is no other choice. The term “absolutely necessary” refers to a situation where a child is being seriously abused, neglected, and/or mistreated. The child’s life or personal health must be in imminent danger before a true decision can be made. Although it is smart to try and use preventative measures in these cases, absolute necessity means that there is no other option but to remove the child from their parents and find them a new home or put them in foster care.

It is important to address the problems children face early on in their lives so that they can grow without the difficulty of fighting against themselves and become successful, productive adults who function well in society. Research shows that undue stress leads directly to adverse effects on the lives of children as they develop, such as physical, mental, and emotional disorders. Maintaining good health is more difficult for children whose families are struggling, and they

need people to talk to, and a place where they can feel safe and flourish. Ultimately, it is the court's decision whether or not it is absolutely necessary for a child to be moved from their biological home. Considering the evidence, it might well be that the child could be helped more effectively and with considerably less risk if their whole family were helped and made whole.

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