

# ADULTIFICATION BRIEFING



## What is adultification bias?

'The concept of adultification bias is when notions of innocence and vulnerability are not afforded to certain children. This is determined by people and institutions who hold power over them. When adultification bias occurs outside of the home it is always founded within discrimination and bias.

There are various definitions of adultification, all relate to a child's personal characteristics, socio-economic influences and/or lived experiences.

Regardless of the context in which adultification takes place, the impact results in children's rights being either diminished or not upheld.' (Davis and Marsh 2020)



## Where do we see adultification bias?

**Race-** Research tells us that Black children are most likely to experience adultification bias due to race, ethnicity and racism acting as compounding factors that hinder child protection responses and professional curiosity (Davis 2019; Davis and March 2020; Farrer 2022) Whilst this may be the case it is important to consider and understand that it can also be present for all children and young people. Some of these are outlined here:

**Domestic abuse-** The non-abusive parent may have a limited support network and therefore lean heavily on the child for support. The child may feel responsible for offering that support as well as caring for siblings.

This can lead to professionals to see these children as more resilient and overlook their vulnerabilities and their need for additional support.

**Poverty-** Children living in poverty whose families may be struggling to provide for them may be given additional responsibilities to contribute to the whole family financial wellbeing. Taking on these responsibilities that would normally be for the adults in the home can lead them to be seen as more adult both in the home and by professionals who might describe them as being 'resilient' or more 'mature' than their peers. This can lead to the child's needs being overlooked.

**Homelessness-** Children at risk of, or who are experiencing homelessness may have no other choice but to take on more adult roles. The impact of this on the child's wellbeing can then be missed by professionals as they appear to be 'coping well' with their situation.

**Transgender-** Biases held towards transgender children can lead to hostile attitudes towards them both in the home and by professionals. This can lead to their basic care needs being unmet and overlooked. Research tells us that transgender girls can be adultified and be seen as presenting as more adult like, confused and potentially sexually predatory, leading to their needs as children being neglected.

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'Adultification erodes children's rights and leaves them at a greater risk of harm due to a dereliction of safeguarding duty from individuals and organisations. When adultification is present, child welfare is not of paramount concern and professional inquiries and interactions can actively and passively cause harm' (Jahnine Davis 2022)



We also need to consider how we view children who are young carers who may feel overwhelmed by their additional responsibilities but are seen as 'mature' and 'helpful' and how easily their needs as children and vulnerabilities are overlooked. Unaccompanied minors may also experience responses similar to those of children experiencing homelessness due to a lack of choice in taking on more adult roles to care for themselves and any siblings they may travel with.

Jahnine Davis describes adultification as reducing 'professional and organisational responsibility to safeguard and protect children, yet increases the responsabilisation of children to safeguard themselves'

The Child Q Local Safeguarding Child Practice Review (2022) (<https://chscp.org.uk/portfolio/local-child-safeguarding-practice-review-child-q/>) is an example of how the wellbeing and support needs of the child were overlooked by professionals and their decision making was instead lead by, and focused on responsibility. Child Q was seen as the risk in this situation where substance misuse was suspected, rather than being at risk, with the focus being on her potential breach of school rules rather than what this could mean for her wellbeing and safety.

## How can we identify and work to improve practice and the existence of adultification bias, whether this is conscious or unconscious?

- Be committed to self-reflection. Be honest with yourself about your biases, assumptions and gaps in knowledge
- Create and use reflective spaces within our working day
- Reflect on, review and challenge tools, theories and approaches you use, are they inclusive?
- Be centred on the child and family's needs. Rather than focus on behaviours, consider issues of stability and what the behaviours might be telling us

### Further reading :

**[Adultification-bias-within-child-protection-and-safeguarding Listen- up Research](#)**