High levels of socio-economic deprivation can cause 'disorganised attachment' in young children, warn forty international experts.

**Attachment theory**

... helps explain how our early experiences influence the ways we behave when we feel frightened. It is used by thousands of social workers and clinicians to help them understand families facing adversity.

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Is it safe to turn to my dad and my mum for comfort when I’m scared?

**Disorganised child attachment**

- Parent unresolved trauma
- Repeated, unpredictable, long term separations from main caregiver
- Ongoing parental behaviour that alarms the child
- Five or more socio-economic risks ... poverty, bad housing, social isolation, mental health problems, domestic violence, drug addiction
- Abuse of the child

Assessment of disorganised attachment is often mistakenly used to screen for child abuse. But several pathways – not just abuse – may lead to disorganised attachment.

About one third of children who are abused do not show signs of disorganised attachment.

And many disorganised children are not being abused. This classification alone must not be used to guide child protection decisions.

About two thirds of children exposed to five or more socio-economic risks show signs of disorganised attachment.

Action to reduce adversity PLUS evidence-based caregiving interventions can tip the balance and substantially improve family life and children’s mental health.

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**LEARN ABOUT APPROPRIATE INTERVENTIONS FOR ATTACHMENT DIFFICULTIES:** See NICE guideline NG26. www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng26