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Experienced racism, attachment and the risk of offending among Dutch Caribbean women

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ABSTRACT

Dutch Caribbean-born women form one of the largest female ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands and are overrepresented in Dutch crime statistics. Experienced racism has been shown to weaken bonds to society and has been linked to (female) offending among African Americans. In the Netherlands and across the Caribbean research on experienced racism and offending is scarce. The current study examines the relationship between self-reported offending, weakened attachments and experienced racism among 328 Dutch Caribbean-born women. Results show that more experienced racism is related to both weakened attachments as to higher rates of self-reported offending across the life course.

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Attachment; Dutch Caribbean; experienced racism; risk factors of offending; women

Introduction

In the Netherlands, Dutch Caribbean women are overrepresented in official crime statistics. This is especially the case for those born in the Caribbean, who migrate to the Netherlands at some time during their lives (i.e., first generation immigrants). While first generation Dutch Caribbean women represent only 0.6% of the total population of women in the Netherlands (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017a) in 2016 they represented 2.5% of female crime suspects (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017b): five times as much as would be expected. Furthermore, these relatively high official crime figures seem to develop from a young age as Dutch Caribbean women are twice as likely to be recorded as persistent offenders by the age of 22 compared to native Dutch women¹ (Blokland, Grimbergen, Bernasco, & Nieuwbeerta, 2010).

International studies have shown experienced racism as one of the factors related to higher crime levels of black ethnic minorities across gender

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(Burt & Simons, 2015; Joosen, 2016; Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011). Some Dutch scholars have argued that the overrepresentation of Dutch Caribbean nationals' registered crime rates is due—at least in part—to practices of ethnic or racial profiling by the Dutch police (Çankaya, 2015) and criminal justice system (Weenink, 2008; Wermink, De Keijser, & Schuyt, 2012). This argument is underlined as well by the fact that Dutch Caribbean-born women make up 9.8% of the female prison population in the Netherlands (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016)—a percentage almost 20 times the percentage in the general population (0.6%)—while this relative percentage is much lower across the Dutch Caribbean islands (Maduro, 2014). However, as *self*-reported offending rates among Dutch Caribbean youths in the Netherlands are also relatively higher than those of Dutch natives (Van der Laan & Blom, 2011), it is unlikely that institutionalized racism within the Dutch criminal justice systems is the sole cause for this overrepresentation. Although Dutch Caribbean born women are clearly overrepresented among crime suspects and prisoners—especially in the Netherlands—very few criminological studies have incorporated or focused on risk factors of offending among these women (e.g., Jennissen, 2014; Joosen, 2018; Van San, 2010): let alone on the impact of experienced racism on this risk.

Impacts of experienced racism on offending

As the relationship between experienced racism and offending has not been explicitly studied in the Netherlands nor Dutch Caribbean, for the current study we base our theoretical framework on the *Theory of African-American Offending*. This theory is to some extent based on the idea that experiencing racism weakens ties to society, and in doing so, increases the risk of offending among African-Americans (Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011). This theoretical concept builds on Hirschi's (1969) *Social Control Theory*, which in general emphasizes the importance of social bonds that we experience in relation to other people and the society at large. Hirschi defined these social bonds as both interpersonal attachments (e.g., parents, peers, and partners) and commitment to—and involvement with—prosocial activities such as education and work. According to Unnever (2014), there are two forms of racism that are especially related to African American offending: (1) racial discrimination and (2) pejorative stereotypes.

First, experiences with racial discrimination have been proposed to lower bonds with those societal institutions that generally have been found to decrease offending, such as the educational system and the labor market (e.g., Apel & Horney, 2017; Verbruggen, Blokland, & van der Geest, 2012). For example, in the U.S. experiences with racism (in school) have been

found to create a pathway to offending by increasing the risk for delinquent peer associations (Unnever, Cullen, & Barnes, 2017; Unnever, Cullen, Mathers, McClure, & Allison, 2009). Similar predictive effects of racism on offending have been found among female youth (Burt & Simons, 2015; Loyd et al., 2019; Sutton & Simons, 2021). Second, being confronted with pejorative racist stereotypes adds to the risk of offending as the continued exposure to such stereotypes may lead to internalization of these negative perceptions. For example, in the media black women are also portrayed and typified as dominant, angry, dangerous/violent, and hypersexual (e.g., Brennan, 2006; Littlefield, 2008). Self-identification with such negative stereotypes could lead some individuals to the self-fulfilling prophecy of acting out their criminal label (Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011) “as they experience heightened states of low self-control, anger, and depression” (Unnever, 2014, p. 98).

Relation between experienced racism and other sociological risk factors of offending

In addition to the direct relation between experienced racism and offending risk among black ethnic minorities, several studies have shown the relation between experienced racism and other criminogenic factors. For example, experienced racism has been linked to school difficulties and delinquent peer association among African-American (wo)men (e.g., Sutton & Simons, 2021; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2008; Unnever et al., 2017). In the Netherlands such studies have not yet been conducted. There have been studies focusing on the potential impact of institutionalized racism within schools and the job market. One study in Dutch schools showed that ethnic minority children were victimized more often by racial slurs than their white class mates (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). At the same time studies showed that truancy and school drop-out rates are especially high among Dutch Caribbean-born women in comparison to Dutch natives and other ethnic minorities (De Boom, Van Wensveen, Hermus, Weltevrede, & Van San, 2012; Van San & De Boom, 2012). However, no study has linked such experienced racism to the relative high school dropout rates of Dutch Caribbean-born girls in the Netherlands. And while we know that unemployment and welfare dependency rates are higher among Dutch Caribbean youths compared to Dutch natives (De Boom et al., 2012), studies showing lower chances on job interview or employment among Dutch Caribbean women (Andriessen, Nievers, Dagevos, & Faulk, 2012; Dirkzwager, Blokland, Nannes, & Vroonland, 2015), did not investigate any link with (experienced) racism.

Psychological risk factors for offending among Dutch Caribbean women

Psychological factors that increase the risk for offending are not limited to the experience of mental health problems, such as low self-control, trauma, substance abuse, depression, anger, and anxiety (e.g., Gibbons et al., 2012; Jones, Ortiz, & Renner, 2020; Loyd et al., 2019; Lynch et al., 2017), but also include the quality of relationships a person can develop and sustain throughout life. Concerning these interpersonal bonds, social control theory defines a lack of attachment as one of the key elements that increase the risk for offending. One who does not feel attached to others has nothing to lose and is therefore not bound by society's unacceptance of criminal behavior. Poor parenting is seen as the root cause for a lack of—or *insecure*—attachments and an increased risk for offending (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Hoeve et al., 2009).

According to Bowlby's *Attachment Theory* (1969), early childhood experiences with inconsistent and/or rejecting primary caregivers (i.e., harsh, abusive, and neglectful parenting) lead to insecure parent-child attachment relationships. These negative caregiving experiences are translated into negative expectations of the *self* and/or of the *other* that are internalized as cognitive models (Internal Working Models; IWMs). Through the *broaden-and-build* principle these IWMs function as a blueprint for later relationships with peers and romantic partners (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), and therefore influence an individual's ability to form relationships throughout the life course (Steele & Siever, 2010). Insecure parent-child attachments have been related to later offending (Hoeve et al., 2009), an increases risk for externalizing behavior problems in childhood (Kochanska & Kim, 2012; Pasco Fearon, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Van IJzendoorn, Lapsley, & Roisman, 2010), decreased academic performance (Moss & St-Laurent, 2001), low self-esteem (McCormick & Kennedy, 1994), poor emotion regulation (Dykas & Cassidy, 2011; Spangler & Zimmerman, 2014), adult psychopathology (Steele & Siever, 2010; Van IJzendoorn et al., 1997), and substance abuse (Allen, Hauser, & Borman-Spurrell, 1996). In turn these factors have all been related to offending (Alink & Egeland, 2013; Brook, Brook, Rubenstone, Zhang, & Saar, 2011; Henry, Knight, & Thornberry, 2012; Johansson & Kempf-Leonard, 2009; Pihet, Combremont, Suter, & Stephan, 2012; Trzesniewski et al., 2006).

A psychosocial approach to the concept of attachment

There has been an absolute absence of studies including experienced racism as a risk factor for offending among Dutch Caribbean women, while both sociological and psychological risk factors of offending have been found consistently more prevalent among this group of first-generation immigrants in the Netherlands as among (Dutch) Caribbean nationals in the Caribbean. Although more and more studies on racism and offending

among African American women appear (e.g., Sutton & Simons, 2021) these results cannot be merely translated to the situation of Dutch Caribbean women, however, an exploration of the relationships between racism and offending is in dire need due to an increasing societal debate on institutionalized racism in the Netherlands.

The current study is innovative for its psychosocial approach that explains why a poor or insecure attachment—to both society as a whole and the separate individuals in it—can be seen as a risk factor of offending among Dutch Caribbean-born women. Sociological factors such as experienced racism, a lack of (higher) education or work—often resulting in debts, poverty and reliance on welfare—weaken ties to society and therefore increase the risk for offending (Hirschi, 1969; Unnever et al., 2009). From a psychological perspective, it seems possible that Dutch Caribbean-born women are at increased risk for attachment-related interpersonal difficulties, such as involvement with negative peers and/or romantic partners.

Current study

In the current exploratory study the impact of experienced racism and a broad array of other potentially criminogenic factors on the risk of offending will be studied among Dutch Caribbean-born women. More specifically, the current study includes a total of 23 potential risk factors covering the following domains: (a) experienced racism, (b) personality characteristics, (c) peers, (d) education, (e) economic marginalization, (f) childhood family situation and upbringing, (g) motherhood, (h) romantic partner relationships, and (i) mental health. Although some studies have studied the gendered impact of factors such as self-control and delinquent peer affiliation (e.g., Johansson & Kempf-Leonard, 2009; Turanovic, Reisig, & Pratt, 2015), to our knowledge no prior study included such a broad range of sociological and psychological factors including more gender-neutral- (i.e., economic marginalization or mental health) and gender-specific factors (violent victimization) to predict offending in a female Caribbean sample. In addition, while most quantitative criminological studies on risk factors for adult offending among Caribbean nationals have used officially registered crime data (C. Bailey, personal communication, July 21, 2017), the current study focused on self-reported offending instead.

Materials and methods

Sample

A total of 332 Dutch Caribbean-born women participated in an interview for the study “Caribbean Women & Crime” on risk factors of offending

among Dutch Caribbean-born women. Women were approached and interviewed in the Netherlands (45.1%), Curacao (26.5%), and Aruba (28.3%); in the general population (72.3%), in prison, or through probation services (together 27.7%). The majority of 204 (62.2%) women was born in Curacao, 110 (33.5%) in Aruba, 10 (3.0%) in Bonaire, 3 (0.9%) in St. Maarten, and 1 (0.3%) in Saba. Four women were excluded from final analyses due to procedural faults in data collection; leaving a final sample of 328 women. The mean age at the time of interview was 42.78 years ($SD = 15.72$; range 18–83).

Procedure

General population

In the Netherlands, the general population was approached with flyers in the streets of the three largest cities, resulting in 23 interviews. Furthermore, a total of 333 randomly selected Dutch Caribbean women in a smaller urban city received a letter and flyer on the study, with the announcement that one of our interviewers would come by to provide more information on the study. We employed female interviewers, who spoke the native creole (i.e., Papiamentu) and/or were of Dutch Caribbean origin themselves. Of the total of 333 approached, 79 (23.7%) participated: giving a combined general population sample of 102 women in the Netherlands.

In Aruba CBS provided us with a selection of 100 addresses (no names) on which—based on census data—the likelihood was high that at least one woman fitting the inclusion criteria² would reside. Based on these criteria, the 100 addresses were randomly selected, while evenly spread over the entire island covering the five main residential areas of Aruba. We employed native Aruban interviewers, who collected data in the period from September 2015 to May 2016. However, to increase the response we also approached neighboring houses when nobody at the selected address wanted to participate or fitted the selection criteria. In total 71 interviews were conducted with the general population on Aruba.

In Curacao we could not attain address information from CBS to base our sampling on. Instead, we randomly selected three streets in a selection of 31 neighborhoods divided across all three main geographical areas on the island. Local interviewers were instructed to approach the first house on the left, then cross and approach, the third house on the right and to repeat this skip pattern until the end of the street. Data was collected from October 2015 until September 2016 and resulted in 66 interviews. All participants in the general population received a compensation in the value of 20–25 euros (depending on local equivalent), for which they signed a

receipt form. Interviews were mainly conducted at respondents' homes and were always held in private.

Criminal justice system population

To increase the likelihood for self-reported offending, the study was also set up in two out of three Dutch female prisons which together held the largest population of Dutch Caribbean inmates. From June 2015 to August 2015 Dutch Caribbean women were approached in person on the prison floors by a Curacaoan female interviewer. Potential participants received similar information as the general population and were explained that the decision not to participate would have no effect on their trial, sentence or treatment in prison. Interviews took place in private settings without the presence of guards or other prison staff. All 48 female respondents received compensation for their participation in the form of a phone card with a value of 5 euros.

In Aruba the number of Dutch Caribbean women incarcerated was too small to set up the study in prison. In addition, we were not granted access by the prison director. Therefore, we approached and interviewed women through the Probation Service, resulting in a total of 23 interviews with Dutch Caribbean-born women who had been incarcerated or convicted in Aruba. In Curacao we were allowed to interview incarcerated women ($n=9$) in the local prison (SDKK). Women were approached and interviewed according to similar procedures as in the Netherlands, however, compensation was equal to that of the general population in Curacao (50 guilders). Furthermore, similar to Aruba we managed to approach ex-incarcerated or convicted women through the Probation Services on Curacao. A total of 12 additional women were interviewed through the Probation Services; resulting in a total sample of 21 women, who had been in contact with the criminal justice system in Curacao.

All (332) interviews were conducted in the language of choice (Dutch, Papiamentu, Papiamentú, or English), with materials and forms also available in these four languages. Prior to the start of the interview participants received information on the aim and importance of the study and were told that participation was voluntary. Also, consent forms were signed, which emphasized confidentiality of the data and the right to withdraw participation at any time during or after the interview. The Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Law (CERCO) of the VU University Amsterdam approved the study design, including interviewer protocols. All interviews consisted of an elaborate life-history calendar and an additional questionnaire containing the following topics: education and employment history, income, poverty, childhood neglect, parental discipline, physical

and mental health, social support, romantic attachment, partner violence, parenting, self-control, self-reported offending, and experienced racism.

Measures

Self-reported offending

The outcome measure of self-reported life-time offending was based on the Dutch Self-reported Delinquent Behavior Questionnaire (Donker & Slotboom, 2005). Respondents indicated per item if—and when yes how often—they had committed a particular offense during their lifetime. Answer categories were 0 *never*, 1 *once*, 2 *twice*, 3 *three or more times*, and 4 *10 or more times*. The following types of offenses were included in a total of 30 items: (a) vandalism, (b) theft, (c) (violent) threats, (d) violent or sexual offenses and assault, (e) possession of weapons, and (f) drug dealing or smuggling. Internal consistency of the questionnaire was good with a Cronbach's alpha of .85. A total score was calculated over all 30 items. Due to extreme skewness, a dichotomous variable was computed based on a median-split (2 or higher). In addition, a second dichotomous variable was calculated for habitual offenders. Those who reported a score of 4 (10 or more times) for at least one item were scored as 1 on this variable. Last, three dichotomous variables were created to indicate whether respondents had ever committed: (a) a property or other type of offense, (b) a violent or sexual offense, and/or (c) a drug-related offense. As described under Procedures, across each country women were approached in the general population, the prison system and/or the respective probation services. However, it is important to stress that the group comparisons as used in the analyses were not based on their sampling group but on their self-reported scores on offending. All descriptives across each of the outcome and predictor variables are presented in Table 1.

Experienced racism

The predictor variable experienced racism was measured with a translated and adapted version of *The Schedule of Racist Events* ([SRE]; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996). Respondents were asked to indicate on a 6-point Likert scale (0 *never* to 5 *very often*) whether they had experienced discrimination based on their skin color by, for example, teachers, employers, police officers, shop owners, or neighbors. The questionnaire comprised the first 17 items and was used to indicate life-time experiences. This adaptation was made to shorten the questionnaire, keep all answer categories identical across items, and to focus solely on the experiences, as opposed to the subjective impact. The reliability of the scale was very good with a Cronbach's alpha of .92. A total score was calculated which was skewed with 27.1% of

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of outcome and predictors variables.

Variables	Total sample	
	%	<i>M(SD)</i>
<i>Outcomes</i>		
Offending	49.1	
Repeat offender	18.6	
Ever property or other offense	48.2	
Ever violent offense	31.4	
Ever drug offense	18.3	
<i>Predictors</i>		
Age		42.78 (15.72)
Self-control		3.55 (0.70)
Social support—past year		3.51 (0.70)
School drop-out	29.6	
Delinquent friends	17.4	
Experienced racism	49.4	
Poverty—past year	47.3	
Benefits—last month	23.8	
Mental health symptoms	49.7	
Mother of at least one child	76.5	
Children from two or more partners	24.7	
Partner violence victimization	7.0	
Partner violence perpetration	13.4	
Partner violence—bidirectional	36.6	
Romantic attachment insecurity	49.4	
Anxiety	48.5	
Avoidance	49.1	
Uninvolved biological parent < 12	30.2	
Biological mother < 12	15.2	
Biological father < 12	27.4	
Physical neglect < 12	49.4	
Emotional neglect < 12	48.8	
Biological mother	47.3	
Biological father	48.8	
Harsh discipline < 12	47.0	
Biological mother	45.4	
Biological father	43.0	

Note. Percentages for variables offending, racism, financial struggles, mental health symptoms, emotional and physical neglect (separate for biological mother and father), harsh discipline (separate for biological mother and father), and romantic attachment (anxiety and avoidance) are based on median split dichotomous variables; unless otherwise specified variables reflect lifetime exposure.

respondents reporting no experienced racism during their entire lives. A dichotomous variable was calculated based on a median-split (total score of 5 or higher), which was used in the analyses.

Self-control

A questionnaire of 12 items was used to measure self-control along three subscales, namely impulsivity/short-term orientedness, risk taking, and temper: based on the Low Self-Control Scale (Grasmick, Tittle, Bursik, & Arneklev, 1993 in Meldrum, Young, & Weerman, 2012³). Responses were filled out on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 *completely agree* to 5 *completely disagree*. Two items were reverse-coded so that higher scores on all items indicated higher levels of self-control. The scale was sufficiently

reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .70. A mean score was calculated which was normally distributed.

Social support

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988) was used to measure to which degree respondents experienced social support in the prior 12 months. Three items were added to this scale, namely whether respondents could talk about their problems with a professional care provider, an institution, or a person from their religious organization or church. These items were added to also include more formal support network systems. Items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 *completely disagree* to 5 *completely agree*, with higher scores indicating more perceived social support. The reliability was good with a Cronbach's alpha of .86. An overall mean score on social support was computed, which was normally distributed.

School drop-out

Being a school drop-out was defined as not obtaining a diploma or degree that would give respondents a starting qualification. Adolescents younger than 18 without starting qualification are not allowed to work full time and have to be enrolled in full time education according to Dutch (Caribbean) law. Thus, not obtaining a starting qualification was operationalized as being a school drop-out as the minimum level of education had not been successfully achieved by participants. Participants who indicated their highest obtained diploma was lower than necessary for a starting qualification were scored as 1 *yes*, on the dichotomous variable *school drop-out*. Eight participants selected the answer category "other" which was recoded into 0 *not a school drop-out*. Of the total sample 29.6% of participants were scored as school drop-out.

Delinquent friends

On the life history calendars respondents indicated per year segment whether or not they had affiliated with delinquent peers. A dichotomous variable was created to indicate whether or not women had ever affiliated with delinquent peers across their lives, which was the case for 17.4% of women in the sample.

Poverty

With a total of seven items pertaining to the past 12 months (prior incarceration) the level of poverty or financial struggles was measured. Items were formulized as follows: (a) I had difficulties making ends meet, (b) I

was not able to replace broken things, (c) I had to borrow money for necessary expenses, (d) I had to sell possessions to a pawn shop, (e) I had a bailiff come at the door to collect on a debt, (f) I did not have money for food, (g) I was not able to pay my bills. Respondents scored each item on a 3-point scale labeled 0 *never*, 1 *sometimes*, and 2 *often*. A total score was calculated which was not normally distributed with 76.5% of respondents experiencing at least some poverty in the prior year. Therefore, a median split variable was computed based on a cutoff of higher than two. The reliability of the scale was good with a Cronbach's alpha of .79.

Benefits

A single dichotomous item on the questionnaire requested participants to indicate whether they had received income in the form of any type of benefits in the prior month (or before incarceration), which was the case for 23.8% of women.

Mental health

To measure psychological symptomatology as indicator of mental health we administered a translated version of the SCL-10R (Müller, Postert, Beyer, Furniss, & Achtergarde, 2010; Rosen et al., 2000). This shortened version of the Symptom Checklist 90-Revised (SCL-90-R; Arrindell & Ettema, 1981), consisted of 10 items covering all nine original subscales, namely: depression, psychoticism, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive, interpersonal sensitivity, somatic, phobic avoidance, hostility, and paranoia. Respondents indicated per item to what degree they had experienced these symptoms during their lifetime on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 *never* to 4 *very often*. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .78 showing a good reliability. A total score was computed which was not normally distributed. Thus, a median split variable was created based on a cutoff score of 7.

Intimate partner violence (IPV)

We measured IPV with four items based on the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979). Respondents were asked on a 3-point scale (0 *never*, 1 *once*, 2 *more than once*) to indicate to what degree they had used the following strategies to deal with conflict with any prior or current romantic partner during their life: (a) throw something, (b) push, (c) hit or kick, or (d) threaten with knife or gun. All items were administered twice; once relating to the partners' behavior, once relating to the respondents' behavior. First, dichotomous variables were calculated for any type of IPV victimization (43.6%) and perpetration (50.0%). Regarding more serious forms of IPV 21.8% of respondents were ever hit or kicked by a partner

(perpetrated 21.5%) and 11% was threatened with a knife or gun (perpetrated; 7.8%). However, as bidirectional IPV is a common phenomenon (for a review see Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Misra, Selwyn, & Rohling, 2012), this can cause overlap between variables. Therefore, three mutually exclusive dichotomous variables were computed for analyses: IPV victimization only, IPV perpetration only, and bidirectional IPV (i.e., reporting both perpetration and victimization).

Adult romantic attachment

The Revised Experiences in Close Relationships questionnaire (ECR-R; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000) was used to measure adult romantic attachment. Securely attached individuals typically score low on both these dimensions as they have positive internal working models of the self and of others (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Individuals scoring high on anxiety experience fear of abandonment and rejection, and in response desire close proximity and intimacy with a partner. Individuals scoring high on avoidance value self-reliance, and in response minimize the importance of attachment relationships and feel uncomfortable with closeness and dependence on a partner (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Studies have shown that individuals who are insecurely attached (i.e., avoidant or anxious) to a partner are at greater risk to experience aggressive conflicts in relationships (e.g., Karakurt, Keiley, & Posada, 2013). The ECR-R consists of 36 items spread evenly across both dimensions. Respondents were asked to indicate on a 7-point Likert scale (1 *strongly disagree* to 7 *strongly agree*) to what degree items reflected the way in which they generally experienced romantic relationships. Several items were recoded to compute a total overall attachment score, and two total scores for anxiety and avoidance separately. For all three total scores, higher scores indicated greater levels of attachment insecurity. Reliability of the scale overall (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$), and of the subscales anxiety and avoidance (both with a Cronbach's α of .88) was good. However, as the total scores were not normally distributed, median split variables were created to include in the analyses.

Neglect

The Child Neglect Questionnaire (Stewart, Kirisci, Long, & Giancola, 2015) was administered in an adapted form. First, only the subscales for physical neglect and emotional neglect were included to limit the number of items. Second, the questions were reworded in order for respondents to fill out their own experiences prior the age of 12 in retrospect. Several items were either omitted due to overlap in content with other items (e.g., Taken to

dentist when you had a problem?), difficulty with translations (e.g., Told you they liked the things you did?), or because they were culturally irrelevant for the Caribbean (e.g., Made sure you had a warm coat in the winter?). In addition, two cultural specific items were added: (a) Did your parents do your hair? (physical neglect subscale), and (b) Did the responsibilities you had fit with your age at that time? (emotional neglect). Last, all original included items for emotional neglect were administered separately for the biological mother and biological father. These adjustments resulted in a total of 37 items that were rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 *never* to 3 *often*, or in case of an uninvolved biological parent as *not applicable* (recoded into 0). Except for two items (i.e., left alone without any adult around; allowed to eat fast food whenever you wanted), items were reverse coded to ensure that higher scores implied more experienced neglect in childhood. A total score was calculated overall and per subscale. Furthermore, for emotional neglect total scores were also calculated for biological mother and father separately. Overall the Cronbach's α was .93 for the total neglect score, .69 for physical neglect, and .94 for emotional neglect.

Harsh discipline

A measure for harsh verbal and physical discipline was created consisting of four items which were administered separately for the biological mother and father. Items referred to the way in which biological parents had disciplined the respondent prior to the age of 12 whenever she would do something bad or would not listen, and were formulated as follows: (a) yelled or shouted at me, (b) hit me with her/his hands, (c) hit me with an object, and (d) kicked me. Items were scored on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 *never* to 3 *often*, or in case of an uninvolved biological parent as *not applicable* (recoded into zero). Three total scores were calculated: overall, and separately for biological mother and father. A total of 81.1% of respondents reported at least some harsh discipline in childhood: 75.9% by mothers, 43% by fathers (items referring to biological fathers were more often scored as not applicable). Due to the skewedness of the responses, median split variables were computed for all three total scores. Reliability was sufficient for the total scores overall (Cronbach's $\alpha = .69$), and for the biological mother (.73) and father (.72) separately.

Uninvolved biological parent(s)

As actual parental investment—especially in the Caribbean matrifocal (extended) family structures—is not necessary reflected by the living situation (i.e., mother-headed household), having an uninvolved parent was

regarded as an important control factor to include. The variable was operationalized through the answer category *not applicable* for the included questionnaires on parental neglect and harsh discipline in childhood. This answer category was used when items could not be answered due to the fact that parents had not been involved in respondents' upbringing. Two separate dichotomous variables were computed for biological mothers and fathers, reflecting whether on any of the items in these two questionnaires (i.e., neglect and discipline) the response not applicable had been selected. Additionally, a combined variable was computed for growing up with an uninvolved parent. A total of 50 (15.2%) respondents had an uninvolved biological mother, while 90 (27.4%) respondents had an uninvolved biological father. Overall, 30.2% of respondents had an uninvolved parent prior the age of 12.

Results

Univariate relationships between experienced racism and other predictors⁴

Regarding continuous predictors, bi-serial correlation coefficients were calculated which showed that the group of women who experienced more racism were older ($r = -.22, p < .01$), and had lower levels of self-control ($r = -.20, p < .01$). As for the dichotomous predictors, odds ratios were calculated as risk estimates. Experienced racism increased the odds for delinquent peer associations, poverty and psychological symptoms. The group of women with more experiences with racism more often had delinquent peer associations ($OR = 3.52, p < .01$), experienced more poverty ($OR = 2.26, p < .01$), and reported more psychological symptoms indicating lower mental health ($OR = 2.50, p < .01$). Furthermore, the group of women with more experiences of racism reported more IPV perpetration in their romantic relationships ($OR = 2.20, p < .05$) and more attachment insecurity ($OR = 2.10, p < .01$): both regarding attachment anxiety ($OR = 2.26, p < .01$) and avoidance ($OR = 2.15, p < .01$) as compared to the group of women with less experienced racism.

Univariate relationships between predictors and outcomes

Univariate relationships between predictor variables and outcomes are presented in Table 2. Variables that increased the likelihood for the occurrence of each of the five outcomes (i.e., overall offending, repeat offender, property/other offense, violent offense, or drug offense) were age, experiencing racism, low self-control, delinquent peer association, poverty, mental health symptoms, and bidirectional IPV. Experiencing physical neglect in childhood increased the likelihood of all outcomes except for ever committing a

Table 2. Univariate relationships of predictors with outcomes, $N = 328$.

Variables	Offending	Repeat offender	Property offense	Violent offense	Drug offense
Age	-.36**	-.23**	-.34**	-.30**	-.28**
Self-control	-.36**	-.36**	-.32**	-.37**	-.27**
Social support	-.06	-.07	-.02	-.01	-.12*
<i>Dichotomous predictors:</i>					
School drop-out	1.22	1.32	0.90	1.35	3.00**
Delinquent friends	8.70**	6.27**	16.19**	3.30**	4.75**
Experienced racism	2.78**	3.99**	3.34**	2.40**	2.93**
Poverty	1.89**	1.79*	1.93**	2.02**	2.05*
Benefits	1.81*	1.60	2.04**	1.52	1.49
Mother of at least one child	0.99	1.04	0.82	0.80	0.81
Children from two or more partners	1.41	2.39**	1.48	1.30	2.05*
Mental health symptoms	2.32**	2.93**	2.38**	3.01**	2.16**
IPV victimization	0.95	0.92	0.99	0.76	1.26
IPV perpetration	1.99*	0.97	1.34	2.02*	1.18
IPV bidirectional	2.80**	3.42**	2.65**	3.19**	2.54**
Attachment insecurity	1.85**	1.61	1.80**	2.26**	1.55
Anxiety	1.48	1.12	1.37	2.12**	1.38
Avoidance	1.55*	1.51	1.76*	1.15	1.23
Uninvolved biological parent	1.29	1.81*	1.21	0.93	1.72
Biological mother	1.04	1.68	0.90	0.73	1.32
Biological father	1.26	1.51	1.25	0.91	1.55
Physical neglect	1.59*	2.97**	1.71*	1.34	2.01*
Emotional neglect	1.37	1.66	1.34	1.24	0.83
Biological mother	1.71*	2.12**	1.58*	1.14	1.46
Biological father	1.24	1.66	1.27	1.11	0.77
Harsh discipline	2.38**	2.34**	2.31**	2.78**	1.26
Biological mother	1.63*	1.96*	1.66*	2.40**	1.15
Biological father	1.15	0.59	1.00	1.39	0.51*

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

For the variables age, self-control, and social support bi-serial correlation coefficients are reported; for other univariate relationships OR's are presented as risk estimates.

violent offense. Insecure romantic attachment was significantly related to more overall offending, ever committing a property/other-, and violent offense. Harsh discipline in childhood (by a biological mother) was related to all outcomes, except for ever committing a drug offense. Emotional neglect by a biological mother increased the likelihood for offending overall, being a repeat offender, and ever committing a property or other offense. As the overlap between subscales and overall total scores for attachment anxiety, uninvolved biological parent, emotional neglect, and harsh discipline was too prominent, only the subscales and the separate variables for biological mother and father were included in the final multivariate analyses.

Multivariate predictors of self-reported delinquency outcomes

Results from the first logistic regression for overall offending showed that individuals in the group reporting more offending were also significantly younger ($OR = 0.96$), were more likely to have delinquent friends ($OR = 3.88$), experienced racism ($OR = 1.67$), and emotional neglect by a biological mother in childhood ($OR = 1.80$); they also reported lower levels

of self-control ($OR=0.43$). Regarding the outcome variable for repeat offenders, the results from a second logistic regression showed that repeat offenders were also younger ($OR=0.97$), had lower levels of self-control ($OR=0.33$), and were less likely to have experienced harsh discipline by a biological father ($OR=0.45$). Furthermore, repeat offenders more often: had affiliated with delinquent friends ($OR=2.31$), experienced racism ($OR=3.27$), experienced emotional neglect by a biological father ($OR=2.86$), had an uninvolved biological mother prior the age of 12 ($OR=3.03$), and experienced bidirectional IPV ($OR=2.03$). The third logistic regression, in which predictors were regressed on the outcome variable committing a property (or other) offense, showed that those who were younger ($OR=0.97$), had delinquent friends ($OR=7.41$), less self-control ($OR=0.54$), experienced more racism ($OR=2.14$), and received benefits in the prior month ($OR=1.93$) were significantly more likely to have ever committed a property (or other) type of offense. Respondents who had ever committed a violent offense were also significantly younger ($OR=0.96$) and reported less self-control ($OR=0.40$). However, they were more likely to have experienced harsh discipline by a biological mother ($OR=2.12$), as well as IPV perpetration only ($OR=3.52$) or bidirectional IPV ($OR=2.96$). Lastly, the results from the logistic regression analysis for the outcome of ever committing a drug-related offense showed that in addition to the impact of age ($OR=0.95$), delinquent friends ($OR=2.65$), and self-control ($OR=0.59$), those who dropped out of school ($OR=3.77$) were more likely to have committed a drug offense, while those that had experienced harsh discipline from a biological father ($OR=0.38$) were less likely to have reported a drug offense. Information regarding all model fit and test-statistics are presented in [Table 3](#).

Discussion

The current study focused on psychological and sociological risk factors of offending among Dutch Caribbean-born women. We aimed to identify the direct impact of experienced racism on the risk of offending, while controlling for potential other predictors, and to investigate the univariate relations between racism and other potential risk factors. Furthermore, the study examined whether the impact of risk factors diverged across different offense types. Univariate results showed that women who experienced more racism also reported more offending regarding each of the five outcome measures. Additional multivariate results showed that while controlling for an array of other sociological and psychological predictors of (female) offending, experienced racism had a significant direct effect on the overall measure of offending. Moreover, women who experienced more

Table 3. Forward logistic regression with all outcomes, $N = 328$.

Variables	$B(SE)$	p	OR	95%-CI
<i>Outcome 1: Offending—median split</i>				
Age	−0.04 (0.01)	.000	0.96	[0.95–0.98]
Delinquent friends	1.36 (0.43)	.002	3.88	[1.67–9.00]
Self-control	−0.84 (0.21)	.000	0.43	[0.29–0.65]
Racism	0.51 (0.26)	.051	1.67	[1.00–2.79]
Emotional neglect—biological mother	0.59 (0.26)	.026	1.80	[1.07–3.00]
Constant	2.89 (0.86)	.000	48.81	
<i>Outcome 2: Repeat offender</i>				
Age	−0.30 (0.01)	.026	0.97	[0.95–1.00]
Delinquent friends	0.84 (0.39)	.031	2.31	[1.08–4.94]
Self-control	−1.10 (0.28)	.000	0.33	[0.19–0.58]
Racism	1.18 (0.38)	.002	3.27	[1.55–6.88]
Uninvolved biological mother	1.11 (0.47)	.018	3.03	[1.21–7.58]
Emotional neglect—biological father	1.05 (0.37)	.004	2.86	[1.39–5.88]
Harsh discipline—biological father	−0.79 (0.36)	.029	0.45	[0.22–0.92]
IPV-bidirectional	0.71 (0.35)	.041	2.03	[1.03–4.02]
Constant	1.72 (1.12)	.124	5.59	
<i>Outcome 3: Property or other offense</i>				
Age	−0.03 (0.01)	.000	0.97	[0.95–0.98]
Delinquent friends	2.00 (0.51)	.000	7.41	[2.75–19.95]
Self-control	−0.62 (0.21)	.003	0.54	[0.36–0.81]
Racism	0.76 (0.26)	.004	2.14	[1.28–3.59]
Benefits	0.66 (0.32)	.040	1.93	[1.03–3.61]
Constant	2.79 (0.85)	.001	16.28	
<i>Outcome 4: Violent offense</i>				
Age	−0.04 (0.01)	.000	0.96	[0.95–0.98]
Self-control	−0.92 (0.22)	.000	0.40	[0.26–0.61]
Harsh discipline—biological mother	0.75 (0.28)	.007	2.12	[1.23–3.65]
IPV—perpetration	1.26 (0.41)	.002	3.52	[1.57–7.88]
IPV—bidirectional	1.08 (0.31)	.000	2.96	[1.61–5.43]
Constant	2.85 (0.87)	.001	17.32	
<i>Outcome 5: Drug offense</i>				
Age	−0.06 (0.14)	.000	0.95	[0.92–0.97]
Delinquent friends	0.97 (0.38)	.011	2.65	[1.25–5.60]
Self-control	−0.53 (0.25)	.036	0.59	[0.36–0.97]
School drop-out	1.33 (0.35)	.000	3.77	[1.91–7.42]
Harsh discipline—biological father	−0.97 (0.35)	.006	0.38	[0.19–0.76]
Constant				

Note. As forward logistic regression analyses were performed, only the significant predictors are presented; Outcome 1: $R^2 = .26$ (Cox & Snell), .35 (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2(5) = 98.63$, $p < .001$; Outcome 2: $R^2 = .24$ (Cox & Snell), .39 (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2(8) = 91.37$, $p < .001$; Outcome 3: $R^2 = .27$ (Cox & Snell), .36 (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2(5) = 104.60$, $p < .001$; Outcome 4: $R^2 = .24$ (Cox & Snell), .34 (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2(5) = 90.26$, $p < .001$; Outcome 5: $R^2 = .20$ (Cox & Snell), .32 (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2(5) = 72.30$, $p < .001$.

racism were more likely to be classified as repeat offenders and reported more property offenses.

Concerning the other potential risk factors of offending, women who reported more offending during their life were younger, were more likely to have ever associated with delinquent friends, reported lower levels of self-control, more experiences with racism and more emotional neglect from their biological mother during childhood. Furthermore, on top of comparable effects for age, delinquent peer affiliation, self-control, and racism, the group of women who were classified as repeat offenders were more likely to have had a biological mother who was uninvolved in their upbringing, an emotionally neglecting biological father, and were more

likely to have experienced bidirectional partner violence. In addition, repeat offenders reported *less* harsh discipline by their biological fathers as compared to the rest of the sample.

When examining the other predictors per offense type significant differences emerged. The variables age and self-control increased the risk across offense types, with those younger and with lower levels of self-control more likely to have committed offenses. Affiliation with delinquent peers did increase the likelihood of property and drug offending, but this was not the case regarding violent offending. In addition, women who reported drug crimes were more likely to have dropped out of school. Furthermore, those who had ever committed a property (or other) type of offense were more likely to currently rely on state benefits as source of income. The women that reported violent offending, were more likely to have experienced violent intimate partner relationships characterized by both IPV perpetration and bidirectional violence. Interestingly, while violent offenders reported more experiences with harsh discipline by biological mothers, drug offenders reported *less* harsh discipline by biological fathers as compared to those who did not commit these respective offense types.

The effect of harsh discipline by biological mothers on violent offending is in line with previous studies investigating the relationships between the acceptance- and use of corporal punishment and the increased levels of violence across the Caribbean (see Bailey, Robinson, & Coore-Desai, 2014). However, as earlier international studies have shown, even when cultures accept corporal- and harsh discipline strategies as normative, the negative impacts on children's anxiety, aggression, and overall development remain (e.g., Gershoff et al., 2010; Lansford et al., 2005). Still corporal punishment is seen as an acceptable and normative form of parental discipline across the Caribbean. For example, a study by Bailey et al. (2014) showed that although over a third of teachers across four Eastern Caribbean islands believed that corporal punishment in school had negative effects on the psychological development and aggression levels of children, still almost all children (up to 92.4%) reported to have ever been given lashes as punishment. Thus, the current study underlines the use of harsh discipline practices (especially by mothers) as a potential risk factor for adulthood violent offending among Caribbean women.

The positive effect regarding harsh discipline by biological fathers was unexpected and is not in line with existing empirical work regarding harsh discipline and the cycle of violence (for review see Widom & Wilson, 2015). However, this finding could imply as well that drug offending women—and those habitually offending—were more likely to have uninvolved biological fathers as there were more fathers than mothers for whom a score of not applicable was recoded into zero on the measure for

harsh discipline. This is underlined by the univariate analyses between these two predictors. Respondents with an uninvolved biological father were significantly less likely to have experienced harsh discipline. In other words, the “positive” impact of harsh discipline could be a mere reflection of the fact that these fathers were in fact uninvolved—and therefore less harsh—in the upbringing and disciplining of respondents who reported drug offenses. Nonetheless, although research has been pushing the impact of single motherhood on offspring’s offending risk (Van San, 2011), the current study did not support a direct relationship between delinquent behavior and growing up with an uninvolved biological father.

Still, it does seem to make sense that within the Caribbean’s matrifocal family structure, having an uninvolved biological mother carried more weight in creating later pathways to, in particular, habitual offending. Furthermore, these results point to the importance of nuance when examining the impact of biological mothers and fathers in the lives of Caribbean-born women: not involvement per se is the predictor, but the way in which parents *are* involved. Emotional neglect and harsh discipline increased the risk for offending (in case of mothers) as well as the (univariate) risk for other negative life experiences in later life such as delinquent peer association, dropping out of school, insecure romantic attachments and bidirectional intimate partner violence.⁵

Attachment seems to play a pivotal role in these relationships. Starting in childhood, the first attachment experiences between parent and child can directly increase the risk of offending when involving neglect and harsh (physical) discipline, but also indirectly increase the risk of offending by leading to insecure attachments to the primary caregiver(s) (e.g., Hoeve et al., 2009). The cognitive models (Internal Working Models; IWM’s) that results from these first experiences can form a negative frame of reference regarding relationships which increases the risk for later negative peer affiliation, insecure attachments to partners, and partner violence. Furthermore, insecure attachments, both in childhood as in adulthood, have been related to decreased self-control and lowered mental health (e.g., Gilliom, Shaw, Beck, Schonberg, & Lukon, 2002; Steele & Siever, 2010), which are both factors that increase the risk for offending in general as well as in the current study.

The current study presented a rich body of quantitative data on potential predictors of self-reported offending among Dutch Caribbean-born women. In doing so, this study is the first to show a direct relationship between experienced racism and self-reported offending among (Dutch-)Caribbean-born women, while controlling for other potential predictors. Results showed that both sociological (i.e., experienced racism, poverty, school drop-out, delinquent peers) and psychological indicators (i.e., poor

parenting, lack of self-control, insecure and violent partner relationships, and poor mental health) of poor attachment were related to offending. From the sociological perspective, these results are in line with earlier defined pathways of African American offending (Unnever et al., 2017). From the psychological perspective, these results underline the importance of secure parent-child attachments, the negative impact neglect and harsh discipline have on these attachments, and how insecure attachments can form a blueprint for later difficulties in establishing positive peer and partner relationships (e.g., Karakurt et al., 2013; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007); thereby directly and indirectly increasing the risk of offending.

Taken together with the univariate relations between experienced racism and other predictors a psychosocial model emerges in predicting offending among Dutch Caribbean women. Experienced racism was associated with more poverty, less self-control, lower mental health, more delinquent peer association, more partner violence perpetration, and higher levels of attachment insecurity: all factors also directly related to an increased risk of offending among Dutch Caribbean-born women. Thus, the results from the current study suggest an intricate and potentially cumulative impact of the (lack of) bonds and attachments Dutch Caribbean women can experience throughout the life course with parents, teachers, peers, partners, and the society at large. Furthermore, the results show direct links between these experiences and lowered mental health and self-control: two essential factors that are necessary to develop and sustain attachments and bonds, both to individual people and society. Future studies are encouraged to investigate such pathways to crime with more prospective research designs to establish causal pathways to delinquency among Dutch Caribbean women, and men.

Limitations

The current study faced several limitations. First, all data in the study was self-reported, which could have caused for a bias in responding due to cultural and social desirability, related to topics such as offending. Second, the data in the current study was cross-sectional and reported in retrospect over experiences during the entire lifetime. As the age range of respondents varied this might imply that the older respondents might have experienced more difficulties in recalling events and experiences from their younger years and/or childhood. Unfortunately, we cannot conclude on causality regarding the relation between potential risk factors and offending based on these current findings. More research on potential causality is therefore encouraged. In addition, it is important for future research to take into account the heterogeneity of the various Dutch Caribbean islands. The

current study could not reliably test the relationships between predictors and delinquency outcomes separately across the six Dutch Caribbean isles, which would be a strong recommendation for future studies. Last, the current study did not include a comparison between women currently living in the Netherlands and those residing in the Caribbean. A subgroup of Dutch Caribbean nationals migrates more than once between the Netherlands and the Dutch Caribbean or even between different Caribbean islands during their life time. Merely including current residence to take into account the difference in context would not do justice to the intricate migration movements of some Dutch Caribbean women. Therefore, we recommend the study of the multifaceted impact of migration on the risk of offending among Dutch Caribbean women in future studies.

Notes

1. The term native Dutch refers to individuals who have two biological parents born in the Netherlands.
2. Participants had to be at least 18 years old and born in the Dutch Caribbean: Curacao, Aruba, Bonaire, St. Maarten, Saba, or St. Eustatius.
3. Specific formulations of items can be requested from the corresponding author.
4. An overview of all univariate relationships between combinations of two predictors for the total sample can be requested from the corresponding author.
5. A full overview of univariate relationships between all predictors can be requested from the corresponding author.

Declaration of interest statement

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