

Children in Care: a Follow up of Criminality and Mortality

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Sample Details

- 450 children admitted
- Of these 163 left care within 35 days
- 170 still in care at two years
- 46 still in care at five years
- 149 of the 163 = THE SHORT STAY
- 152 of the 170= THE LONG STAY

Table 1: Convictions after leaving care and persistency of offending behaviour by the long-stay children

LONG-STAY GROUP	<i>Number</i>	Conviction after leaving care	Six or more convictions
Boys	85	44 (52%)	17 (20%)
Girls	67	9 (13%)	0
TOTAL	152	53 (35%)	17 (11%)

Table 2: Types of offences committed by the long-stay children

OFFENCE CATEGORY	DETAIL	% (N=362)
Violent crime	ABH, assault, child abuse, sexual assault	16
Property crime	Criminal damage, burglary, theft, shoplifting, receiving	66
Drug offences	Possession, dealing	6
Driving offences	TWOC, drink driving, no licence or insurance, driving while disqualified	6
Fraud	Fraud, pretence	6

Table 3: Ages on entry to care of the long-stay group

Age on entry to care	Long-stay (N=152) %
Under 1	3
1-4	16
5-9	15
10-15	61
16-16+	4
	100

Table 4: Reasons for entry to care and conviction rates for the long-stay group

Reasons for entry to care	<i>Number</i>	Criminal convictions after leaving care	Recidivist
Voluntary agreement	24	38%	13%
Neglect	58	21%	1%
Moral danger	8	13%	0%
Beyond control	15	20%	27%
Truancy	11	64%	36%
Delinquency	28	68%	25%
Matrimonial reasons	6	33%	0%
Long term family placement	2	0%	0%

Table 5: Criminal convictions for children entering care for different reasons for the long-stay group

Long-stay group	<i>Number</i>	Criminal conviction(s) after leaving care
Abuse/neglect	66	20%
Difficult behaviour	54	54%
Family breakdown	32	34%

Table 6: Convictions for boys and girls entering care for different reasons for the long-stay group

Long-stay group	<i>Number Boys</i>	Criminal conviction(s) after leaving care Boys	<i>Number Girls</i>	Criminal conviction(s) after leaving care Girls
Abuse/neglect	33	33%	33	6%
Difficult behaviour	33	70%	21	29%
Family breakdown	19	53%	13	8%

Table 7: Conviction rates for children entering care for different reasons and staying for five years

	<i>Number</i>	Criminal conviction(s) after leaving care
Voluntary admission	4	25%
Neglect	25	20%
Moral danger	1	0%
Beyond control	2	50%
Truancy	2	50%
Delinquency	6	50%
Matrimonial reasons	2	0%
Long term family placement	2	0%
TOTAL	44	25%

Table 8: Patterns of offending before entry, during their stay and after leaving care of the long-stay children

Conviction history	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
None before, during or after	83	55
Convictions:		
Before, during and after	20	13
Before, during but not after	6	4
Before but neither during nor after	7	5
Before, not during, but after	7	5
Not before but during and after	9	6
Neither before nor during but after	18	12
Not before, but during, but not after	2	1
TOTAL	152	100%

Table 9: Convictions after leaving care and persistency of offending behaviour among the short-stay children

SHORT-STAY GROUP	<i>Number</i>	Conviction after leaving care	Six or more convictions
Boys	78	21 (27%)	9 (12%)
Girls	71	6 (8%)	1 (1%)
TOTAL	149	27 (18%)	10 (7%)

Table 10: Age on entry to care for the short-stay children

Age on admission	Short-stay % (N=149)	Long-stay % (N=149)
Under 1	10	3
1-4	34	16
5-9	19	15
10-15	33	61
16-16+	4	4
Admitted w sib	56	42
Sib in care	8	10
In care before	26	27

Table 11: Reasons for entry to care for the short-stay children

Reasons for entry to care	<i>Number</i>	Criminal convictions after leaving care	Recidivist
Voluntary agreement	<i>120</i>	18%	8%
Neglect	<i>25</i>	16%	4%
Moral danger	<i>0</i>	0%	0%
Beyond control	<i>0</i>	0%	0%
Truancy	<i>3</i>	0%	0%
Delinquency	<i>1</i>	100%	0%
Matrimonial reasons	<i>0</i>	0%	0%
Long term family placement	<i>0</i>	0%	0%

Table 12: Criminal convictions for children entering care for a short-stay and for different reasons

Short-stay group	<i>Number</i>	Criminal conviction(s) after leaving care
Abuse/neglect	<i>19</i>	11%
Difficult behaviour	<i>17</i>	29%
Family breakdown	<i>113</i>	18%

Table 13: Conviction rates for boys and girls entering care for a short-stay and for different reasons

Short-stay group	<i>Number Boys</i>	Criminal conviction(s) after leaving care Boys	<i>Number Girls</i>	Criminal conviction(s) after leaving care Girls
Abuse/neglect	<i>10</i>	<i>10%</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>11%</i>
Difficult behaviour	<i>9</i>	<i>67%</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>13%</i>
Family breakdown	<i>59</i>	<i>24%</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>7%</i>

Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn from this follow up study of the offending behaviour and mortality of children in care:

- is not possible to evaluate outcomes for children in care without knowing their characteristics and the risks these pose. This questions global generalisations and international comparisons that do not take this into account. Care populations that contain young offenders or a disproportionate number of males will inevitably show higher rates of adult criminality
- All children in care are at increased risk of poor outcomes compared with the general population.
- The rates for the subsequent offending of children presenting delinquency and other difficult behaviour, especially truancy, and who stay long in care is 2.7 times higher than for those coming into care because of neglect and abuse and 1.6 times higher than for family breakdown. Nevertheless, all children show a significant risk due to their deprived backgrounds
- Offending behaviour is not constant and the risks associated with it vary over time. Offending does not present a single risk; it can mark a passing stage in a child's development, it can be a continuous feature of an individual's life or develop later in life from minor beginnings into something more serious.

Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn from this follow up study of the offending behaviour and mortality of children in care:

- The fact that rates for offending and mortality were higher for the long-stay children does not necessarily indicate ineffective interventions but confirms the increased vulnerability of these young people over and above other deprived children and the demands this makes on services
- There is no evidence from this study to suggest that being in care *per se* reduces or increases the risk of offending. Much depends on other factors, such as the child's predisposition and the quality of interventions received.
- While it is difficult to draw authoritative conclusions from the small sample, the findings on life expectancy and causes of death support those from other larger studies of the risks posed by early illness and disability, abuse and neglect and anti-social life styles.
- Further research is needed to clarify the relationship between the care system and juvenile justice services and the reasons why no girls were identified in the exploration of mortality.