Evidence for change: understanding the lifelong health and wellbeing trajectories of people who have been in care

The Looked-after children grown up project

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Background

“If we can get it right for the most vulnerable, such as looked after children and care leavers, then it is more likely we will get it right for all those in need.”

(Department of Health and NHS England 2015)
LACGro’s objectives

- To determine whether children in care have different health and social experiences 10 to 40 years later compared to children in parental homes
  - YES
- To explore if children in residential care do better or worse than children in foster or kinship care, and if children in kinship care fare better than children in foster care
  - Worse / better
- To understand if any care differences vary by gender or ethnicity/migration status
  - Complicated
- To investigate if improving trends in outcomes can be seen for cohorts of children in more recent censuses
  - Not really
The ONS Longitudinal Study

- Based on the England and Wales censuses
- Started with the 1971 census and then individuals followed up in subsequent censuses
- Random selection based on 4 birthdays - a 1% sample of the population
- More people added from each census if their birthday is one of the 4 birthdates
- All census topics available
- Large sample → subgroup analyses
- Linked to births, deaths & cancer registrations
Data Sample

Definition of a dependent child
  • Aged less than 18 years
  • Never married
  • Not living alone/independently
  • Excluded visitors on the census date

ONS LS dependent children in the 1971-2001 censuses followed up until 2011 and grouped into:
  • Residential care
  • Foster carer
  • Kinship care
  • Parental care
Health and social outcomes

- Self-rated health
- Long-term illness
- Mortality – overall
- Mortality - cause
- Qualifications
- Employment
- Social Class
- Long-term non-employed
- Tenure
- Overcrowding
- Living alone
- Marital status
- No of Children
- Age at 1st birth
Number in each care situation by census year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Parental care</th>
<th>Kinship care</th>
<th>Foster care</th>
<th>Residential care</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>134,347</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>135,820</td>
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<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>124,319</td>
<td>1,094</td>
<td>684</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>126,359</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>114,008</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>115,344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>112,182</td>
<td>1,363</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>114,011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>484,856</td>
<td>3,542</td>
<td>2,224</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>491,534</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ONS Longitudinal Study
Key finding 1

There are large inequalities in adulthood for the care experienced
Probability of achieving NVQ level 3+ qualifications

Source: ONS Longitudinal Study
Predicted employment status at adult follow-ups

Source: ONS Longitudinal Study
Cause of death by any care status

Source: ONS Longitudinal Study
Risk of death by census year in care

Source: ONS Longitudinal Study
Differences in probability of being in education by census year in childhood

Source: ONS Longitudinal Study
Key finding 2

Ethnicity matters but not in the way that we thought
Probability of achieving <NVQ 3 qualifications by ethnicity

Source: ONS Longitudinal Study
Probability of being in the least advantaged social class by ethnicity

Source: ONS Longitudinal Study
Key finding 3

Children of kinship and foster parents need support too
Markers of transitions to adulthood

• Age 20-29 years follow-up
  • Less likely to have age 18+ qualifications
  • More likely to be unemployed or long-term non-employed
  • More likely to be married
  • Less likely to own their own home
  • Women were younger at the birth of their first child

• Age 40-49 years follow-up
  • No differences between carers’ children and non-carers’ children
Conclusions

• Our research clearly shows that child placement matters

• Falling rates of premature mortality in the general population have not been mirrored among care leavers

• Lifecourse trajectories are not the same for all minority children in care

• Children of kinship and foster parents pass the “big 5” transition milestones to adulthood earlier than other children
The case for change: Quotes from the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care

1) Improving children’s social care is not something that national government, local authorities or other partners can achieve on their own

2) A focus on kinship is needed to promote and support its use and ensure that more children grow up with carers who already know and love them

3) Children entering care are not getting the mental health support they need

4) Education can be transformational for children and there is more to be done to support children in care to achieve their potential

5) There is much more we can do to help children who have been in care progress to further and higher education or find a job or home, acknowledging it might sometimes take longer than their peers

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Thank you

https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/project/looked-after-children-grown-up