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Children and young people in need of care and support

Contents

Evidence summary 2
Overview 2
Key issues by population 2
Children and young people who have experienced being in care 2
Children and young people with long-term health conditions 4
Disabled children and young people 5
Children and young people with emotional and mental health needs 9
Young people who are pregnant or parents 9
Young people with experience of the youth justice system 11
Search strategies 13
References 16

Disclaimer: This evidence summary includes relevant literature identified from searches on the above topic, it is not an exhaustive list, it presents key finding and not recommendations for practice.

Evidence summary

Overview

This report looks at the issues that are faced by children and young people in need of care and support. Children in need of care and support covers a wide range of different populations, populations included in this report are:

- Children and young people who have experienced being in care
- Children and young people with long-term health conditions
- Disabled children and young people
- Children and young people with emotional and mental health needs
- Young people who are pregnant or parents
- Children and young people with experience of the youth justice system

Key issues by population

Children and young people who have experienced being in care

Children and young people can do well in care. A study based in Wales found many children & young people who are care experienced had positive educational, social, physical and sexual health outcomes thanks to the support they received.[1] However, children in care can face many challenges. These may include:

- Experiencing adverse childhood experiences / trauma [1–3]
- Disturbances affecting early attachment [1]
- Mental health and emotional well-being difficulties [1–8]
- Difficulties finding a good quality long-term / permanent home [1–3,6]
- Finding carers able to support their complex needs [1,2,6]
- Being unhappy with their placements [1]
- Lower educational achievements / outcomes, particularly those entering care just before starting school [4,6,9]
- Being more likely to receive temporary and permanent school exclusions [7,9]
- Being at risk of going missing [2,4,6]
- Having to leave home when they turn 18 years old [4]
- Difficulties transitioning to adulthood [6]
- Being at risk of homelessness after leaving care [4]
- Their own children ending up in care [4]

- Experiencing stigma / prejudice / prejudgment [3,4]
- Greater health, well-being and housing needs as adults [5]
- Substance misuse [5,6]
- Poor health behaviours; smoking, alcohol, and sexual health [3]
- Contact with the criminal justice system [5]
- Separation and estrangement from siblings [2]
- Disruption to friendships and other support networks [2]
- Disrupted education; moving schools, missing school [2,9]
- Being far from home [2]
- Difficulties forming secure relationships with peers, carers, etc [2,8]
- Greater risk of physical abuse, grooming and sexual exploitation [2,6]
- Being more likely to experience bullying / abuse by peers [6]
- Developmental delay, special education needs and / or disabilities [5–7]
- Having behavioural issues [3,5,7,8]
- Having a lack of access to outdoor spaces [7]
- Withdrawal, difficulty being soothed, or excessive clinging [8]

Children in care may appear to have worse outcomes compared to the general population, but this is not necessarily the case when compared with other groups of children who have had similar experiences.[2] However, it is still important to recognise the difficulties children who have experienced care may have.

Some children may experience better outcomes, for example if they are placed into kinship care (grandparents, older siblings) rather than non-relative foster care.[7] Whereas frequent placement changes, spending longer in care, and failed reunification attempts can further impact the child or young person.[7]

Children exposed to substance misuse

Children who have been exposed to substances prior to their birth are likely to be known to social services and / or be under their care, for example in foster placements.[10,11] These children are also more likely to have experienced maltreatment.[11] Children exposed to substances may need additional support with:

- Promoting parent contact [12]
- Developmental issues [12]
- Mental health [12]
- Co-occurring social adversities [10]
- Side-effects from substances, such as withdrawal [10]

Young people adopted following time in care

Adopted young people may experience feelings of contentment with good relationships with both birth and foster / adopted parents.[13] However, many children who are adopted after being in care may experience issues. These may include:

- Mixed feelings such as anger, affection, loss, guilt, or worry [13]
- Feeling rejected / abandoned [13]
- Curiosity if they do not know or have had no contact with their birth parents [13]
- Indifference and lack of interest if they do not know or have had no contact with their birth parents [13]

Children and young people with long-term health conditions

Children and young people living with long-term health conditions can demonstrate great use of coping mechanisms, self-efficacy, adaptability, and resilience.[14] Some felt living with a health condition had strengthened their family relationships and made them more mature.[15] However, many children / young people experience issues due to living with a health condition. These may include:

- Multiple difficulties that may exacerbate other symptoms [16]
- Struggling to participate in everyday life / restricted activities [14–16]
- Living with pain [15]
- Isolation from peers / friends [15]
- Feeling dependent on family / carers [15]
- Stigma / prejudice / discrimination / hostility [15,16]
- Difficulty transitioning from child to adult services [15,16]
- Not feeling listened to [16]
- Stress or even trauma from treatment / hospitalisation / pain [14,15]
- Low self-esteem [14]
- Lack of social support [14]
- Psychological well-being (anxiety, depression) [14,15,17]
- Reduced quality of life impacted by duration of illness, symptoms, and pain [14]
- Impact on development [17]
- Impact on education [15,17]
- Issues with school; disbelief of pain, restrictive policies, lack of adaptation [15]
- Feelings; sadness, frustration, anger, depression, worry, loneliness, disappointment, feelings of loss, and fear [18]
- Worrying about parents / family [18]

The families of children and young people with long-term health conditions may also experience difficulties, for example:

- Social isolation / restricting social life [15,16]
- Mental and physical health issues [15,16,19]
- Sibling's needs may be overlooked / lack of attention [15,16]
- Fragmented care with poor communication between services [16]
- Navigating the system [16]
- Uncertainty about the future [20]
- Feelings including; fear, distress, anxiety, helpless, frustrated, guilt [15,20]
- Impact on work / finances [15,19]
- Fear of judgement / lack of sympathy / being disbelieved [15]

Disabled children and young people

Although children and young people with disabilities encounter many issues, they do also have positive experiences. For example children who had positive and supportive environments in childcare or school found these environments were sometimes life changing for them.[21]

Disabled children and young people can experience issues. These may include:

- Accessing and enjoying groups / clubs [22]
- Worrying about school [22]
- Accessing suitable learning environments [21–23]
- Schools not making reasonable adjustments for them [21]
- Missing out on aspects of their education because of their disability [21,24]
- More likely to be absent, have reduced timetable, or be excluded [21,25]
- Reduced educational outcomes / attainment [21,22]
- Barriers and lack of opportunities for progression into work [22]
- Worrying about the way they look [22]
- Basic needs, worrying about money, food, and having a place to live [22]
- Bullying / discrimination [21,22,24,25]
- Making and maintaining friendships [22,24]
- Loneliness [25,26]
- At greater risk of abuse [26]
- Feeling unsafe [22,25,27]
- Difficulties accessing support, including delays accessing services [22,25]

- Mental health and well-being [21,22]
- Accessibility and availability of public transport [22]
- Their views not being listened to [21,24,25]
- May be harder for them to share concerns / communicate [26]

The families of disabled children may also face challenges. These include:

- Difficulties finding appropriate housing [22]
- Difficulties accessing support [21–23,25]
- Difficulties finding appropriate schools and childcare [21,25]
- Limited access to Welsh provisions [21]
- Having to fight for child's needs [21,24]
- Financial difficulties / cost of living crisis (debts, skipping meals) [21,23,28,29]
- Ability to remain in employment [21]
- Health challenges (fatigue, musculoskeletal pain, sleep issues) [29]
- Mental health (depression, anxiety, feelings of hopelessness, stress) [21,29]
- Social isolation, difficulties maintaining relationships [29]
- Stigma and discrimination [29]
- Parental blame [21,24]
- Family breakdowns [21]
- Impact on siblings (missing out, disturbed sleep) [21]
- Not being listened to / taken seriously [21,25]

It is important to note that having access to the correct and sufficient support could help to reduce the number and severity of the issues these children / young people and their families face.[21]

Blind / partially sighted

Children and young people who are blind or partially sighted can face issues. These may include:

- Being high need but not having their needs understood [21]
- Disparity in access to specialist support [21]

Deaf / hearing loss

Children who are deaf may face some unique challenges. These can include:

- Lack of deaf friendly provisions [21,30]
- Acoustically problematic environments [30]

- The family needing support to help the child as deafness is unfamiliar to them [21,30–32]
- Speech and language delays [33]
- Education outcomes [32,33]
- Social and emotional development and lack of support to develop [32,33]
- Limited access to support (speech and language, sign language) [30,31,33]
- Lack of deaf peers, impacting their deaf identity [30,31]
- Rural locations exacerbated issues with support and peers [31]
- Mental health and lack of deaf support in mental health services [32]
- Increased risk of sexual abuse [32]

Wheelchair users

Children who use a wheelchair may have specific issues. These can include:

- Environments being wheelchair accessible [21]
- Access to an appropriate wheelchair [34]
- Access to appropriate equipment (desk at correct height, etc) [34]
- Lifts out of order [34]
- Not being able to use same routes as other children to enter and navigate school (having to go outside in all weathers) [34]
- Difficulties with school activities (trips, playtimes, school meals, swimming) [34]

Learning Disabilities

Children and young people may experience specific issues. These include:

- Services not meeting the needs of the child / young person [35]
- Parents having a lot of responsibility to organise and chase care [35]
- Parents feeling not listened too and hopeless [35]
- Mental health harder to identify, so often overlooked or undiagnosed [36]

Autism

Children with autism can have specific needs. These may include:

- Having higher supports needs [21]
- Higher childcare costs [21]
- Managing behavioural issues [21]
- Waiting times for diagnosis [21,25,37,38]
- Lack of support [38]
- Accessing Welsh language services / assessment [37]
- Unhappiness in school / school not meeting needs [38]
- More likely to miss school (absent, exclusions) [38]
- Having to fight for what they need (SEND tribunals, diagnosis) [38]
- Mental health issues and accessing support [38]
- Health inequalities – reduced life expectancy [38]

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Children with ADHD can have specific needs. These may include:

- Waiting times for diagnosis [37]
- Accessing Welsh language services / assessment [37]
- Noticing they are different from other children [39]
- Behavioural issues / being labelled as naughty [39]
- Parental blame [39]
- Exclusions from school [39]

Diabetes

Children with diabetes can face specific issues. These include:

- Lack of information regarding school meals [21,40]
- Lack of understanding of the condition [21,40]
- Missed education and reduced attainment [40]
- Exclusion from after school clubs, school trips and activities [40]

Children and young people with emotional and mental health needs

Children and young people with mental health difficulties can be affected by many different issues. Some of these may include:

- Not receiving the right support at the right time [41–43]
- A lack of early prevention and intervention programmes [44]
- Long waiting times to access support [41,42,44–46]
- Worsening mental health whilst waiting for support [45]
- Referrals to mental health services being rejected [44,46]
- Impact on their social life [43,45]
- Impact on their education [42,43,47]
- Impact on future employment [47]
- Impact on their physical health [45,47]
- Not feeling happy or safe in school [42,43]
- Rurality and access to services [48]
- Stigma or discrimination [41,44,45]
- Inequitable access to support – for some groups or in certain areas [45]
- Having high thresholds for support, or having to reach crisis point first [42]
- Not taken seriously / lack of parity between physical and mental health [42]
- Issues with the transition from child to adult services [44,46]
- Mental health issues continuing or returning into adulthood [47]

The topic of children's mental health is explored in further detail in the children's mental health – evidence summary published on the Research and statistics section of the North Wales Regional Partnership Board website.

Young people who are pregnant or parents

For some young people becoming a parent can be a transformative experience which improves the young person's life, motivating them to make positive changes and growing in maturity. Young people have the potential to be loving and committed parents.[49]

> "I get to bring [my son] up in an environment where I grow as much as he grows, and we learn together new experiences".
>
> (Keeley, 18, mother to one child, became a mother at 18).[49]

Becoming a parent can be a positive experience for some but for others it can be challenging. Whilst it is important to consider the risks and challenges faced by young parents, we cannot assume that all risks are due to being a young parent but actually may be due to pre-existing social deprivation.[50–52]

Young people who are pregnant can face a number of issues and can experience worse outcomes when compared to adult pregnant women. Some of the issues faced by these young people can include:

- Increased risk of perinatal death [53]
- Increased risk of low birth weights [52–54]
- Increased risk of preterm delivery [52–54]
- Increased risk of neonatal death [52–55]
- Young fathers often feel 'left out' at appointments [51,52]
- Experience stigma / stereotypes [49,50]
- May experience feelings of shame, anxiety or fear of judgement [49]
- Pregnancy being viewed as undesirable by others [50]
- May experience disappointment from family [49]
- More likely to have nutrition deficiencies / iron deficiency [52]
- More likely to smoke [52]

Young parents can face many issues or may require more support than older parents. These may include:

- Higher risk of mental health issues (post-natal depression, depression, low self-esteem) [51,52,56]
- A greater need for parenting support / advice [56]
- Needing someone to talk to / peer support [52,56]
- Needing support with additional life skills, such as managing finances [56]
- Needing support with relationships / managing conflicts [56]
- Being more likely to live in poverty / have financial difficulties [50,52]
- Being more likely to be unemployed or have lower salaries [50,52]
- Difficulties in accessing benefits [57]
- Leaving education / reduced educational achievements [50–52]
- Risk of further pregnancies [51]
- Experiencing stigma / stereotypes / judgement [49,58]
- Being more likely to be socially isolated [50]

- Being more likely to experience housing issues and / or poor quality housing [49,50,57]
- Being more likely to be lone parents [50]
- Feeling overwhelmed, exhausted or unprepared [58]
- Being more likely to have safeguarding concerns raised [51]
- Fear of social work intervention [49]

The child of young parents may also face difficulties or issues themselves, these can include the child being:

- At increased risk of an unplanned hospital admission [54,55,59]
- At increased risk of becoming a teenage parent [50]
- More likely to experience difficulties at school [51]

COVID-19 and young parents

The pandemic was found to have impacted on young parents, including contributing to anxieties around COVID, affecting mental well-being, and limiting the perinatal support they were able to access.[60]

Young people with experience of the youth justice system

Young people with experience of the youth justice system may have a range of needs. These might include:

- Increased likelihood of future crimes [61]
- Experience of considerable disadvantage / poverty [61–66]
- Being likely to have experienced adverse childhood experiences and trauma [61,64,65]
- Previous sexual and criminal exploitation [61,63]
- Stigma, discrimination and differential treatment [61]
- Disruption to education (absences, exclusions) [61–65,67]
- Lower educational attainment [63,64]
- Having additional learning needs (neurodiversity, learning disability) [62,64–66]
- Speech, language and communication issues [68]
- Low self-esteem [64]
- Behavioural or emotional difficulties (violence, anger) [64]
- Mental health problems (self-harm, suicidal ideation) [64,65]
- Poor social skills [64]

- Dysfunctional families / parenting (parenting styles, supervision, attitudes to crime / police / education, family history, alcohol / substance misuse, domestic violence, bereavement, family history criminal justice system) [64,65]
- Loss of positive relationships [61]
- Substance misuse [61,64,65]
- Exposure to offending communities [61,64]
- High risk of victimisation and abuse [61]
- Requiring support with communication and cognition in court [69]
- Ethnic minorities disproportionately represented among youth offenders [63,67]
- Younger children may find it harder to cope in custody (fights, assaults, self-harm) [61]

Some research indicates having more than one challenge can increase the risk of criminalisation, for example living in poverty and living with neurodiversity. However, it is important to note that with support and poverty reduction this can be prevented.[66]

Relationships with professionals can make a difference to young people's lives. When they feel valued and understood it can enable their development. This can be the only positive relationship in the young person's life.[70]

Although these children may be at higher risk of offending or re-offending, these chances of offending can be reduced with the correct support in place.[66,70–72]

Search strategies

Basic Google searches were conducted to identify reports for Wales and the United Kingdom for each of the population groups where relevant, and then advanced searches of Scopus were used for each population, see the search terms used for Scopus below.

Children and young people who have experienced being in care

Infant OR infants OR newborn *OR new-born* OR baby OR babies OR toddler* OR boy OR boys OR boyhood OR girl* OR kid OR kids OR child OR children* OR schoolchildren OR schoolchild OR "school child" OR "school children" OR adolescen* OR juvenil* OR youth* OR preteen* OR teen* OR young (abstract)
AND
"foster care*" OR "child in need" OR "children in need" OR "child protection" OR "social services" OR "social work" OR "care of the local authority" OR "edge of care" OR "looked after child*" OR "child in care" OR "children in care" OR "residential care" OR care-experienced (abstract)

Children and young people with long-term health conditions

Infant OR infants OR newborn *OR new-born* OR baby OR babies OR toddler* OR boy OR boys OR boyhood OR girl* OR kid OR kids OR child OR children* OR schoolchildren OR schoolchild OR "school child" OR "school children" OR adolescen* OR juvenil* OR youth* OR preteen* OR teen* OR young (abstract)
AND
“long-term health” OR “long-term illness” OR “long-term condition” OR life-limiting OR terminal OR “chronic illness” OR “chronic health” OR “chronic condition*” OR “chronically ill” OR “chronic disease*” OR “chronic disorder*” OR “chronic medical condition*” OR “long-term disease” OR “ongoing health” OR “Lifelong health condition*” OR degenerative (abstract)
AND
needs OR support OR help OR issues OR problems OR difficult* OR concern OR outcome* (abstract)
AND
england OR scotland OR wales OR ireland OR "united kingdom" OR UK OR Britain (affiliation country)

Disabled children and young people

Infant OR infants OR newborn *OR new-born* OR baby OR babies OR toddler* OR boy OR boys OR boyhood OR girl* OR kid OR kids OR child OR children* OR schoolchildren OR schoolchild OR "school child" OR "school children" OR adolescen* OR juvenil* OR youth* OR preteen* OR teen* OR young (abstract)
AND
"autism" OR "autistic" OR "learning disabilit*" or "learning difficult*" or "learning disorder*" or "intellectual disabilit*" or "learning difficult*" or "learning disorder*" OR "asperger*" OR "behavior disorder*" OR "behaviour disorder*" OR "cerebral palsy" OR "Down syndrome" OR "spina bifida" OR "Fragile X Syndrome" OR "Pervasive developmental disorder*" OR "mental retardation" OR "mentally retarded" OR "prader willi" OR "ADHD" OR "ADD" OR "Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder" OR "Attention Deficit Disorder" OR "Kleefstra syndrome" OR “physical diabilit*” OR “wheelchair user*” OR “spinal cord injur*” OR “spinal injur*” OR “cerebral palsy” OR “muscular dystroph*” OR “multiple sclerosis” OR mobility OR “physically disabled” OR disabilit* OR "cerebral palsy" OR "muscular dystrophies" OR "muscular dystrophy" OR "multiple sclerosis" OR disabled OR “sensory impair*” OR “hearing impair*” OR deaf OR deafness OR “hearing loss” OR “hard of hearing” OR “low vision” OR blind OR blindness OR “visual* impair*” OR “vision impair*” OR “sight impair*” OR “sensory disability*” OR deafblind OR “sensory loss” OR deafblind* OR “dual-sensory” OR disability OR disabled OR disabilities (abstract)
AND
needs OR support OR help OR issues OR problems OR difficult* OR concern OR outcome* (abstract)
AND
england OR scotland OR wales OR ireland OR "united kingdom" OR UK OR Britain (affiliation country)

Children and young people with emotional and mental health needs

boy OR boys OR boyhood OR girl* OR kid OR kids OR child OR children* OR schoolchildren OR schoolchild OR "school child" OR "school children" OR adolescen* OR juvenil* OR youth* OR preteen* OR teen* OR young (abstract)
AND
“mental health” OR “mental illness*” OR “mental disorder*” OR “emotional instability*” OR “anxiety disorder*” OR “mentally ill” OR “mental ill health” OR

depression OR “depressive disorder*” OR “psychiatric disorder*” OR “trauma-related disorder*” OR “post-traumatic” OR “psychotic”

Young people who are pregnant or parents

"underage pregnanc*" OR "young mum*" OR "young dad*" OR "young parent*" OR "teen* mum*" OR "teen* dad*" OR "teen* parent*" OR "teen* mother*" OR "teen* father*" OR “teen* pregnanc*” OR “pregnant teen*” OR “adolescent pregnan*” OR “pregnant adolescen*” (abstract)
AND
needs OR support OR help OR issues OR problems OR difficult* OR concern OR outcome* (abstract)
AND
england OR scotland OR wales OR ireland OR "united kingdom" OR UK OR Britain (affiliation country)

Young people with experience of the youth justice system

boy OR boys OR boyhood OR girl* OR kid OR kids OR child OR children* OR schoolchildren OR schoolchild OR "school child" OR "school children" OR adolescen* OR juvenil* OR youth* OR preteen* OR teen* OR young (abstract)
AND
“youth justice” OR “juvenile justice” OR “criminal justice” OR “youth offender*” OR “youth court” (abstract)
AND
england OR scotland OR wales OR ireland OR "united kingdom" OR UK OR Britain (affiliation country)

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