



Literature Search

Bullying and Looked After Children

Dr Stephanie Smith / March 2018



1. Prevalence of bullying among looked after children (LAC) and comparisons with the general population

TABLE 1 - Summary table of prevalence evidence

AUTHORS & YEAR OF PUBLICATION	LOCATION	EVIDENCE
Long et al. (2017)	Wales	Out of the 32,479 young people who took part in the 2015/16 School Health Research Network (SHRN) questionnaire, children in foster care were around 1.8 times more likely to report being bullied at school in the last couple of months than those not in care.
McClung & Gayle (2010)	Scotland	Just under half (43%) of the LAC and care leavers who participated in qualitative interviews reported that they had been bullied (total sample n=30; 11-19 year olds).
National Centre for Social Research (2010)	England	Data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) survey (total sample n=15,500) (aged 14 at the beginning of the study) showed that there was a strong relationship between having been in care and being bullied, and this association increased with age. LAC aged 14 years were 1.56 times more likely to be bullied than those who had not been in care, 1.72 times more likely to be bullied at age 15 and 1.75 times more likely to be bullied at age 16.
OFSTED (2009) Care & Prejudice Report	England	One in six LAC in this survey had been bullied for being in care (16% of sample; total sample n=309).
Rao & Simkiss (2007)	Walsall, England	LAC were as likely as their peers to report being bullied during the last term at school (total sample n=50; 10-16 year olds). Any experience of bullying (infrequently or more often) was reported by 30% of the sample.
Social Exclusion Unit (2003)	England	60% of LAC consulted reported being bullied at school, compared with 10% of all pupils.
Vincent & Jopling (2018)	Glasgow, Scotland	17% of LAC reported to be victims of bullying in the preceding year (total sample n=130; 11-18 year olds). 7% of the sample admitted to being a perpetrator of bullying in the last year (compared to 20% of the general population).

2. Experiences of bullying among looked after children

TABLE 2 - Summary table of evidence in relation to bullying experiences in LAC

AUTHORS & YEAR OF PUBLICATION	LOCATION	EVIDENCE
Harker et al. (2003)	England	Some LAC reported having experienced bullying at school when fellow students discovered they were looked after (total sample n=56; aged 12-19 years from three local authorities in England).
Long et al. (2017)	Wales	The experience of being bullied was found to be associated with other factors, including being a regular smoker, having engaged in binge drinking, multiple substance use, and having low subjective wellbeing.
McClung & Gayle (2010)	Scotland	Of the 43% of LAC who reported being bullied in this study, 76% of them had told someone about the bullying but it had only stopped for 46% of these children.
National Centre for Social Research (2010)	England	Young people who had been in care were particularly likely to have had their money or possessions taken from them, and they were also more likely to have been continuously bullied between the ages of 14-16 years compared with those who were not in care.
OFSTED (2009) Care & Prejudice Report	England	This report stated that being bullied for being in care was the most commonly reported way of being treated worse by other children. The longer children spent in care, the more likely they were to report sometimes being treated worse. The experiences of being bullied for being in care including being called names and being physically hurt: 'people can bully you about being in care'; 'get called horrible names'.
Rao & Simkiss (2007)	Walsall, England	This paper found that LAC are subject to the same types of bullying as other children. Bullying in these vulnerable children takes the form of verbal abuse, racist name calling, spreading rumours and physical bullying. The pattern of bullying appears to be no different in this group of children than in the general population. The authors also found no difference in health complaints between those reporting bullying and those who did not.
Vincent & Jopling (2018)	Glasgow, Scotland	Of the 17% (n = 22) of LACs who reported that they had been a victim of bullying in the preceding year, the majority (82%, n=18) were bullied at school. Participants aged 11 and 12 years and those who lived at home (a younger group) were more likely to have been bullied. In terms of being perpetrators of bullying, boys were more likely to admit to having bullied someone.

3. Evidence of particular bullying interventions for looked after children

TABLE 3 - Summary table of evidence in relation to bullying interventions for LAC

NAME OF INTERVENTION / AUTHORS, LOCATION	DESCRIPTION	EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS
'All Together Programme' / Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA), England	ABA extended their All Together programme, which focuses on reducing bullying of children with SEND, to reach other groups of vulnerable children, including looked after children and young carers. The programme includes face-to-face training for teachers, including trainees, helplines and online information for parents, and engaging young people in the development of resources for the programme.	Evaluation pending

4. Research Articles / Other Sources

Greater Manchester Safeguarding Partnership website

Weblink: http://greatermanchesterscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/g_bullying.html#lac

Summary of relevant text:

- "Looked After children and young people do not necessarily consider that being in care equates to greater levels of bullying. However, it is important to note that high numbers of Looked After children report either being victims or perpetrators of bullying;
- Looked After children say that they truant from school because of the stress of being bullied at school;
- Looked After children often transfer into school at times when other pupils are already settled. They consider that arriving in a new school in mid-term following home placement changes or exclusions increases their vulnerability to incidents of bullying;
- Some Looked After children reported that they were treated different to other pupils by teachers and schools and felt "scapegoated" because they are looked after;
- Children recognised the value of good friendships in making them feel safe. Being looked after often meant leaving their home area and friends and having to start again. Making new friends in a new school was seen as a problem;
- Children who stand out as different in some way are easy targets. Looked After children are concerned about anything that emphasised difference such as not wearing the right uniform. A change in placement particularly if it is a part-time place also serves to emphasise their difference from the majority increasing the likelihood of bullying.

The Children's Commissioner for England has expressed concern about bullying experienced by young people who are already vulnerable and in the public care system. His advice includes:

- Identifying vulnerable children and young people at those critical moments and transitions when they become vulnerable and providing additional support when needed;
- Engaging children and young people in learning about difference and social diversity."

Harker et al. (2003)

Reference: Harker, R.M., Dobel-Ober, D., Akhurst, S., Berridge, D. and Sinclair, R., 2004. Who Takes Care of Education 18 months on? A follow-up study of looked after children's perceptions of support for educational progress. *Child & family social work*, 9(3), pp.273-284.

Weblink: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2004.00316.x/full>

Abstract: This paper represents a follow-up publication to the findings of a previous paper by documenting the views of a follow-up sample of 56 young people, aged 12–19 years, looked after in three English local authorities. Young people were interviewed on two separate occasions, 18 months apart, to assess their perceptions of educational progress and identify factors that might support or hinder their education. The interviews took place as part of an ongoing evaluation of the Taking Care of Education project, a development programme designed to facilitate improvements in the education of looked after children. Most young people were aware of

individual project-related activities and a number of these were seen to contribute towards educational progress. Perceptions of educational progress were significantly higher at follow-up interview and an increased proportion of young people reported that being looked after had had a positive impact upon their education. Carers and teachers continued to be the most frequently mentioned providers of educational support, but the proportion of comments relating to educational support from social workers increased at follow-up. The most consistent explanation given for improved educational progress was the availability of support and encouragement for educational progress and acknowledgement of young people's achievements.

Long et al. (2017)

Reference: Long, S.J., Evans, R.E., Fletcher, A., Hewitt, G., Murphy, S., Young, H. and Moore, G.F., 2017. Comparison of substance use, subjective well-being and interpersonal relationships among young people in foster care and private households: a cross sectional analysis of the School Health Research Network survey in Wales. *BMJ open*, 7(2), p.e014198.

Weblink: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5337680/pdf/bmjopen-2016-014198.pdf>

Abstract: Objective: To investigate the association of living in foster care (FC) with substance use and subjective well-being in a sample of secondary school students (11–16 years) in Wales in 2015/16, and to examine whether these associations are attenuated by the perceived quality of interpersonal relationships. Design: Cross-sectional, population-based health behaviour and lifestyle questionnaire. Setting and participants: Wales, UK; young people who took part in the 2015/16 School Health Research Network (SHRN) questionnaire (n=32 479). Primary outcome: Health behaviours among young people in FC were compared with those from private households. Results: The prevalence of all adverse outcomes was higher among young people in FC. Those in FC were significantly more likely to report mephedrone use (OR=9.24, 95% CI 5.60 to 15.34), multiple substance misuse behaviours (OR=3.72, 95% CI 2.30 to 6.00), poorer relationships with peers (RR=1.88, 95% CI 1.23 to 2.88) and teachers (RR=1.83, 95% CI 1.31 to 2.56), having experienced bullying (OR=1.80, 95% CI 1.38 to 2.35), dating violence (OR=1.66, 95% CI 1.13 to 2.43) and poor well-being (RR=1.72, 95% CI 1.20 to 2.46). The association between FC and substance use remained significant, though was attenuated after accounting for relationship variables. The association between FC and subjective well-being became non-significant after adjustment for relationship variables. Conclusions: Young people living in FC experience significantly worse outcomes than young people not in care, likely due to a range of care and pre-care factors, which impact adversely on subsequent social relationships. The analyses are consistent with the hypothesis that the associations of FC with substance use and life satisfaction are partially explained by poorer quality social relationships. Large scale, longitudinal studies are required to investigate the relationship between being in care and health, educational and social outcomes. Mental health interventions and interventions to reduce substance use and improve well-being in FC should include a focus on supporting healthy social relationships.

McClung & Gayle (2010)

Reference: McClung, M. and Gayle, V., 2010. Exploring the care effects of multiple factors on the educational achievement of children looked after at home and away from home: an investigation of two Scottish local authorities. *Child & family social work*, 15(4), pp.409-431.

Weblink: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2010.00688.x/full>

Abstract: This paper reports the findings of a research project which explored the care factors that influence the educational achievement of looked-after children. The project was innovative

because it focused on children looked after at home and away from home. A mixed-methods strategy was adopted to analyse data from two large Scottish local authorities. The project developed, what is to date, the largest dataset which includes variables for one-fifth of children discharged from care in Scotland over a 5-year period. The qualitative element of the project collected in-depth data on the care and education experiences of looked-after children and care leavers. The overall finding was that looked-after children perform less well academically than their counterparts in the general school population. The empirical data indicated that factors such as placement type, reason for becoming looked after and age on becoming looked after were significant in determining educational achievement. Empirical results further indicated that looked-after children suffered from discrimination and social exclusion in many areas of their lives, including school and where they lived.

National Centre for Social Research (2010)

Title: Characteristics of bullying victims in schools

Weblink: <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/121/1/DFE-RR001.pdf>

OFSTED (2009) Care and Prejudice Report

Title: Care and prejudice: a report of children's experience by the Children's Rights Director for England

Weblink: http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/179/7/Care%20and%20prejudice_Redacted.pdf

Rao & Simkiss (2007)

Reference: Rao, V. and Simkiss, D., 2007. *Bullying in schools: A survey of the experience of looked after children*. *Adoption & Fostering*, 31 (3), pp.49-57.

Weblink: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/030857590703100307>

Abstract: Bullying is an important issue in schools and one to which looked after children may be particularly susceptible. In a cross-sectional survey, a sample of 50 ten to 16-year-old children in the care of one local authority were asked about their experience of bullying using a modified Olweus questionnaire. The results, reviewed by Vidya Rao and Doug Simkiss, suggest that these looked after children were at least as likely as their peers to be bullied and were subject to the same types of bullying as other children. The characteristics of both bullies and victims are discussed and recent work to improve the recognition of bullying and identify effective strategies to prevent it is highlighted. Health assessments are an opportunity to consider bullying as a possible underlying cause of stress and behavioural problems.

Social Exclusion Unit (2003)

Title: A Better Education for Children in Care

Weblink:

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/social_exclusion_task_force/assets/publications_1997_to_2006/abefcic_summary_2.pdf

Vincent & Jopling (2018)

Reference: Vincent, S. and Jopling, M., 2018. The health and well-being of children and young people who are looked after: Findings from a face-to-face survey in Glasgow. *Health & social care in the community*, 26(2), pp.182-190.

Weblink: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hsc.12500/full>

Abstract: Evidence suggests children and young people who are looked after (LACYP) may have poorer health outcomes than children and young people in the general population, particularly in relation to mental health. This paper discusses findings from a survey of the health and well-being of LACYP in Glasgow. A structured questionnaire used in the 2010 Glasgow Schools Survey (GSS) was adapted and administered in face-to-face interviews with 130 young people aged 11–18 in 2014–2015 to investigate various aspects of health and well-being including physical activity, diet and sleep, smoking, alcohol and drugs, health feelings and worries, behaviours, attitudes and expectations. LACYP were more likely to report that they had tried drugs, slightly more likely to have scores indicating a high level of difficulties on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and less likely to report that they ate fruit and vegetables, used active transport methods to get to school and expected to go on to further or higher education; however, reported rates of physical activity, smoking and drinking were similar. LACYP were less likely to report that they had engaged in antisocial behaviour, truancy or bullying or been exposed to environmental tobacco smoke, less likely to worry or have low self-esteem, and more likely to rate their health positively. There were some variations according to placement type. The findings of this study present a more positive picture of the health and well-being of LACYP in Glasgow than might have been expected but should be treated with caution due to small sample size. Further research is needed to identify differences in relation to placement type and to determine whether being looked after might be associated with improved health and well-being outcomes for some children and young people.