Preschool children in care in Scotland are up to five times more likely to have a developmental issue than children not in care.

**INTRODUCTION**

All children need substantial support to meet expected developmental milestones for social, emotional, and physical health. Children in care often don’t receive this support which has consequences for their ongoing development.

The aim of this study was to compare the rate of developmental concerns identified in two year olds in care with the rate in children not in care using population-level health review data in Scotland.

**DATA**

Child Health Surveillance Programme 27-30 Month Health Review data were available for ~90% of eligible children in Scotland from 2013-2021. These universal reviews are a holistic assessment of a child’s development across a range of domains.

**SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Care</th>
<th>Non-care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>3,077</td>
<td>349,606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% male</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>48.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age</td>
<td>28.7 months</td>
<td>28.8 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESULTS**

Children in care were more likely to have a developmental issue than children not in care in every domain.

- Vision (aOR = 4.89)
- Gross Motor (aOR = 4.61)
- Fine Motor (aOR = 4.18)
- Emotional, Behavioural, and/or Attentional (aOR = 3.68)
- Personal and/or Social (aOR = 3.52)
- Speech and Language (aOR = 2.39)
- Hearing (aOR = 2.02)

**OUTCOMES**

Binary indicators of a concern in seven domains (see plot), identified by health visitors or the child’s caregiver.

**METHOD**

Adjusted odds ratios (aOR) were calculated using logistic regressions adjusted for:
- Age
- Sex
- Area deprivation

**IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE WORK**

Young children in care in Scotland are at a disadvantage across a range of developmental domains in the critical preschool period. This has lifelong consequences for education, health, and quality of life outcomes. Policy improvements including increased placement support from health professionals are required to address this inequity.

Future work will use this rich dataset to also explore physical health differences and further characterise the wider health of preschool children in care.