

# The Mental Health Needs of Care-Experienced Young People in Wales: Early Findings

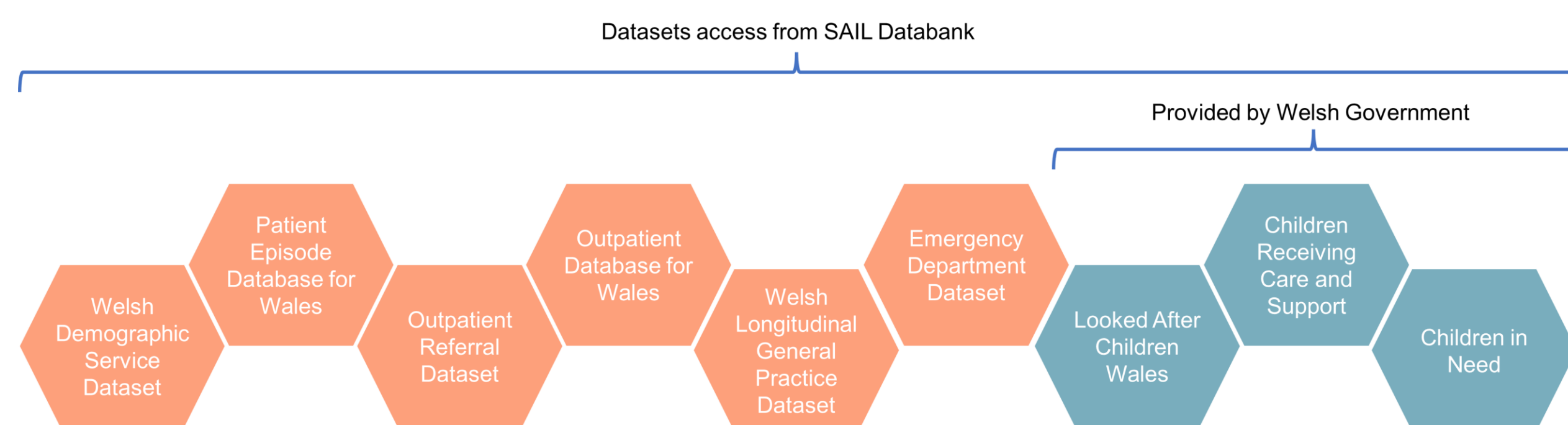
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## Background

The mental health outcomes of Looked After Children are poor when compared to the general population (Meltzer et al., 2003; Meltzer et al., 2004a; Meltzer et al., 2004b; Ford et al., 2007).

A systematic review found that estimates of the prevalence of mental health disorders in this population range from 1-82% (Cummings & Shelton, under review).

Currently in year two of a three-year funded PhD project using administrative data from the SAIL Databank.



## Research Questions

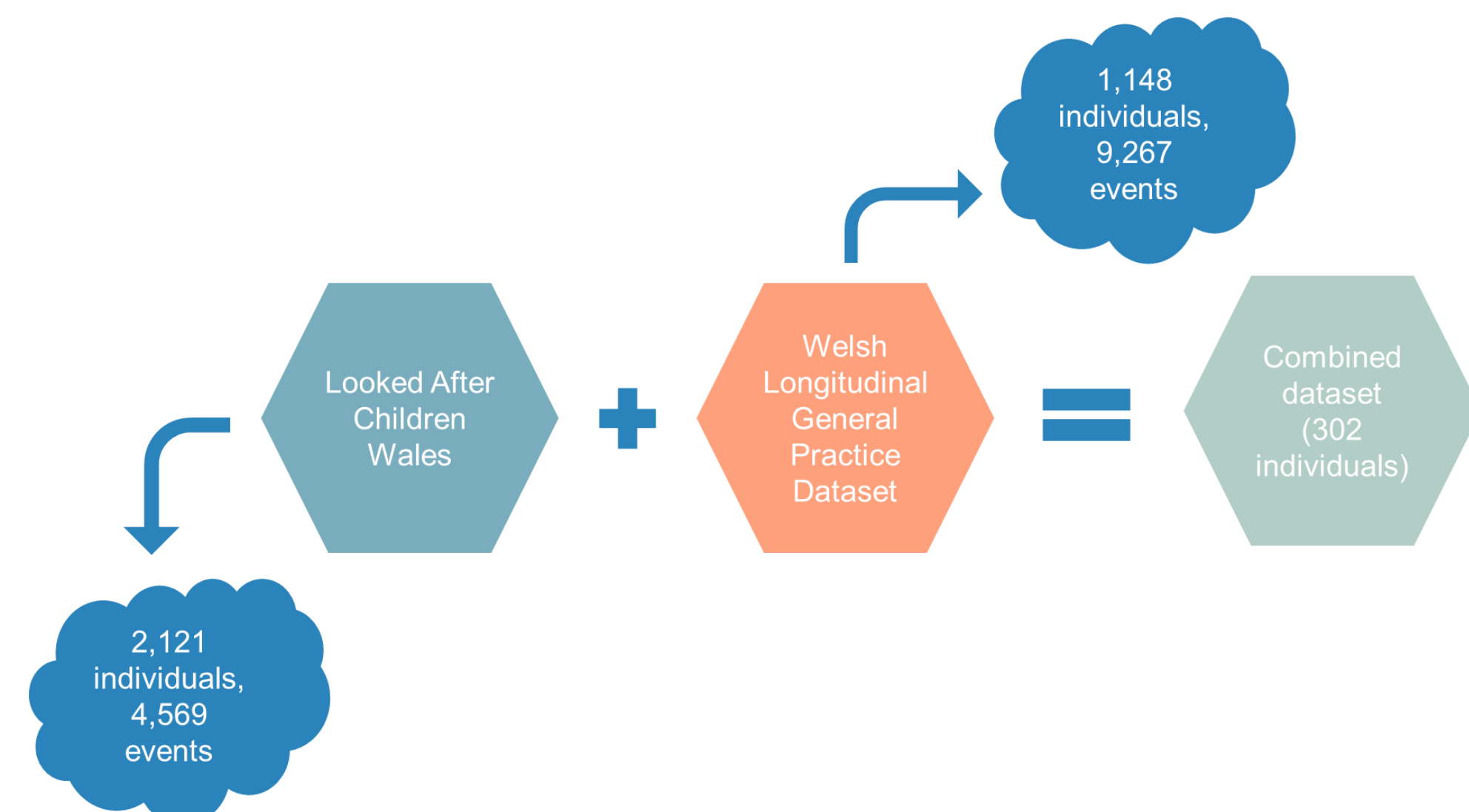
This project aims to understand the prevalence of specific mental health disorders among the population of care-experienced young people in Wales, how these needs are being supported, and how services might improve provisions for this group.

1. What is the prevalence of specific mental health disorders among 11–18-year-olds who are care experienced?
  - a. How does this compare to the population of children receiving care and support in Wales?
  - b. How does this compare to the general population of Wales?
2. If an onwards referral is made, what are the levels of engagement across different mental health services?

This thesis also aims to address the feasibility of investigating questions pertaining to the use of health records to understand the mental health of care-experienced young people.

## Early Results: 2013/14 cohort

Findings focus on young people who were Looked After from 01 April 2013 – 31 March 2014, while the data from the GP dataset includes events from one year prior to this (01 April 2012 – 31 March 2014).



Of the sample, 66.2% were female, the majority were aged between 15-18 (65.3%), and 85.4% were White. Most were living with a foster carer either inside (30.1%) or outside (23.2%) the local authority boundary. 34.8% had one placement move that year, while 35.7% had two or more.

For mental health, symptoms and diagnoses of mental health conditions, as well as potential indicators of poor mental health were investigated.

Symptoms / Diagnoses	Indicators
Depression	Drug Use
Anxiety	Alcohol Use
Conduct Disorder	Self-harm
Serious Mental Illness	
Eating Disorder	

52.3% (n=158) of the sample had visited the GP for an event relating to either symptoms or a diagnosis that related to a mental health condition, while 66.9% (202%) had visited due to an indicator of mental health.

The most common mental health condition reported was depression (31.8%), followed by anxiety (13.6%), conduct disorders (8.3%), and eating disorders (2.6%)

Numbers for Serious Mental Illnesses were too low to report.

Self-harm was especially prevalent (52.4%), compared to drug use (19.6%) and alcohol use (11.2%).

## Population of Interest

In Wales, looked after children are those that are either:  
Under the care of a local authority,  
or  
Are provided with accommodation, for a continuous period of more than 24 hours, by the authority in the exercise of any functions which are social services functions. (The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act, 2014, part 6).

## Challenges of Using Administrative Data

The process involved to access the data, as well as initial exploration to understand the nine datasets (and sub-sets) was time consuming. As well as this, substantial part of the time used to analyse the data has been dedicated to the structuring, recoding and linkage of the datasets.

Knowledge and extraction of READ codes (the hierarchical recording system used to record clinical summary information) involved a steep learning curve.

## Next Steps

Conduct the same analysis using the 2016/17 and 2019/20 Looked After Children cohort to look at differences over time.

Use the Emergency Department Dataset to explore different aspects of mental health need for this group.

Link the GP dataset to the Children Receiving Care and Support and Children in Need datasets to explore the differences in mental health needs across the same categories. Identify a group from the general population to use as a comparator and investigate mental health prevalence in this group.

Explore rates of referrals for Looked After Children. Understand young people's networks and who they have contact with.

Write up thesis...eventually.