

Young person's Data Insight: Childhood contact with social services and self-harm in young adulthood

Authors: Ash, Asher, Dylan, Esla, Jack, Martha, Naomi & Rhianna

Date: May 2024

What is the study about?

This study looks at young adults in Northern Ireland (NI) and their risk of presenting to hospital with self-harm, or thoughts about self-harm and suicide (known as ideation). It asks whether risk is higher for young adults that were involved with social services during childhood.

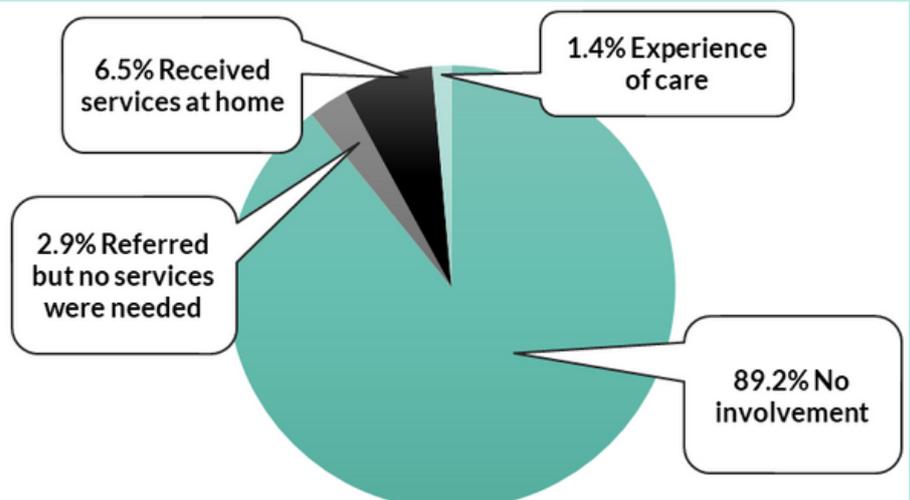
What did the study do?

It linked anonymous data from health services and social services (called administrative data) to find out how many young adults presented to hospital with self-harm or ideation in NI between 2012 and 2015. It compared young adults who were involved with social services with those never involved.

Who is in the study?

253,495

young adults in NI
aged 18-30 years
between 2012 and
2015



Over **1 in 10** had contact with social services in childhood

What did the study find?

Finding 1:



4 out of every 10 young adults that presented to hospital with self-harm or ideation was involved with social services as child

Finding 2:



Risk of self-harm or ideation goes up as level of involvement with social services goes up

Finding 3:

Care experienced adults were **10 times** more likely to present to hospital with self-harm

Key messages

Most of the young adults in this study who were known to social services in childhood **did not present** to hospital with self-harm or ideation.

But a **large proportion** of young adults that present to hospital with self-harm or ideation have a childhood history of social care contact.

The results were **not a surprise** to the authors. Young people with a care history often have complex personal histories and may need extra support during or after care.

What needs to change?

Poor outcomes are **not inevitable**.

Care experienced young adults are just like any other young adults – but they do clearly **need more support**.

With the **right support** it is possible to overcome problems and live a happy and fulfilling life.

About the authors

This Data Insight was written by experts by experience who are members of the Data Research Advisors Group. Supported by Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC), members co-produce ADRC NI data research about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people known to social services.

For further information contact Dr Sarah McKenna (s.mckenna@qub.ac.uk).