

# The mental health of all children in contact with social services

## Young person's version of a research paper

Author: Rhianna Brown

Administrative Data Research Centre Northern Ireland (ADRC NI)  
Research & Communications Intern

### What is the study about?

This study looks at the mental health of all children (aged 17 years or less) in Northern Ireland (NI) and their contact with social services.

Contact with social services was grouped into:

- No contact
- Referred but decided no services were needed
- Received services at home
- Placed in care.

### What did the study do?

This study used anonymous data from health services and social services (called administrative data) to find out how many children in NI experience mental ill-health.

It compared the mental health of children in contact with social services with those never in contact.

It looked at prescribed medication to treat mental ill-health, hospitalisation for a mental health reason, and hospital presenting self-harm or thoughts of self-harm.

# What did the study find?

**1 in 6**



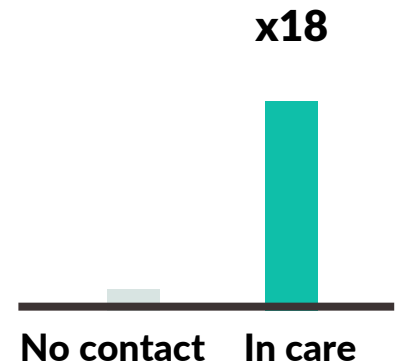
children in NI have contact with social services



**1  
—  
2**

of all children (49.5%) with mental ill-health in NI were previously or currently known to social services

Children in care were **52 times** more likely to present to hospital with self-harm or thoughts of self-harm



Antidepressant prescribing levels were **18 times** higher among children in care

## Key messages

As level of contact with social services increases, the level of mental ill-health increases as well.

Being more likely to experience mental ill-health does not mean that you are guaranteed to go down that road.

Mental ill-health is highest in care experienced children compared to other children.

This study cannot claim that being in care causes mental ill-health.

Mental ill-health is also higher in children in contact with social services that never entered care compared to children with no contact.

With the right support at the right time, care experienced children can reach their full potential.



## What needs to happen?



Prevention is better than cure. Families and children need help with disadvantages that can impact mental health.

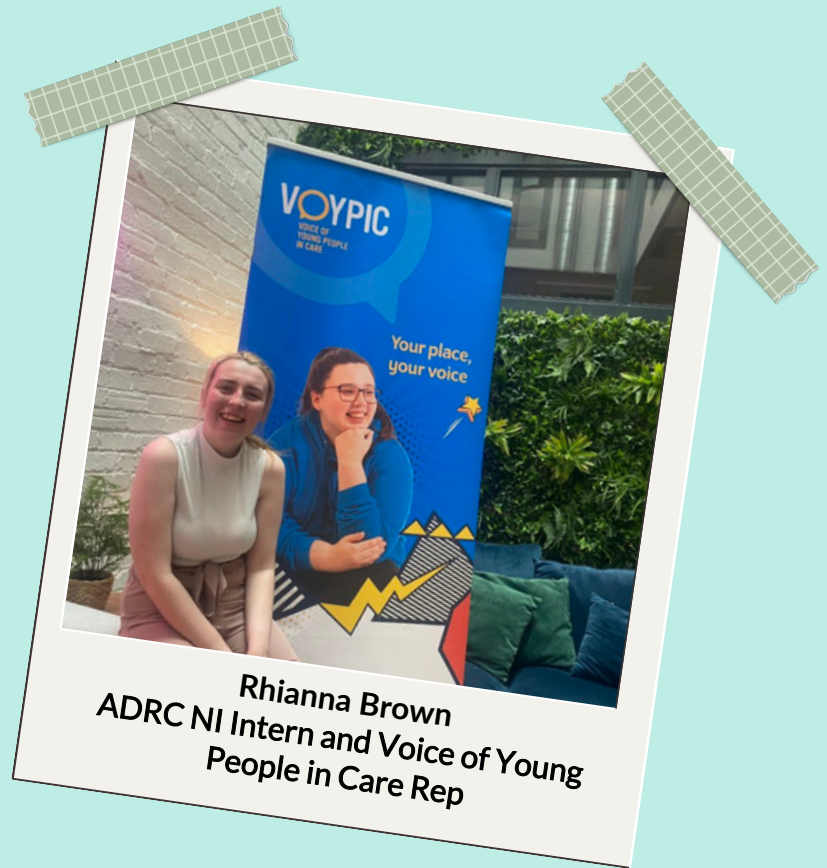


Children in contact with social services could benefit from support with their mental health.



This support needs to be at the right time and at the right pace for the young person.

# We couldn't have done it without your support!



## Thank you!

Many thanks to Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) and the group of care experienced young people advising the researchers in ADRC NI.

Thank you as well to the Honest Broker Service for providing access to the anonymous data in this study in a secure setting, where it is stored safely.

## Sources of help

If you need to talk to someone, help is available:

Samaritans: Call 116 123

Childline: Call 0800 1111

Lifeline: Call 0808 808 8000

Read the full paper

