

Presentation title:

Multisystemic predictors of contact with criminal justice services for children involved with social welfare services

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Children who have care experiences in childhood are more likely than their peers to have contact with criminal justice services. There are many risk and protective factors that can influence outcomes for these vulnerable children, including factors within the child, family, school, and community. Through the use of a whole population administrative dataset and multi-level models the present study explores how multisystemic factors impact on individual outcomes, and how the formal response from child protection services may improve outcomes for vulnerable children.

Methods: The present study makes use of linked Government Ministry of Justice and Department for Education administrative datasets of England. The population used in the present study is for 1.7 million children in England born from September 1994 to August 1997. The dataset is analysed using multilevel regression models to identify the role of social care involvement in childhood on education outcomes and later contact with criminal justice services, when other multisystemic predictors (e.g., ethnicity, poverty) are accounted for.

Results: The results found that compared to those without any social care contact, there was a stepped increase of risk of offending and increased risk of custodial sentences at each level of involvement from social care services, from those who were only assessed, to children in need, those with a child protection plan and those who were looked after children. There were several other multisystemic determinants for offending and sentencing, many of which may act as early indicators of at-risk children.

Conclusions: The findings uphold the importance of recognition of vulnerable children as a heterogeneous group whose outcomes are strongly influenced by multisystemic factors. The presentation highlights the potential contribution and limits of linked administrative datasets.