

## **LONG-TERM MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN IN CARE IN ENGLAND**

**(ADCS REFERENCE: RGE200212)**

### **INFORMATION FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

#### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH?**

The aim of this research, which is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), is to contribute to our understanding of how mental health of children in care varies over time. It also aims to explore how these patterns of mental health are influenced by children's care experiences, individual and school-related factors. This information should be useful for local authorities and other service providers. Further details about the study can be found here: <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=ES%2FR006482%2F1>

#### **ETHICS**

We have gained ethical approval for this research from the ethics committees at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law at the University of Bristol, and approval from the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) research committee. We will also comply with Research Governance requirements of specific local authorities taking part in this research.

#### **HOW IS THIS RESEARCH BEING CARRIED OUT?**

This research has two parts. In the first part, we aim to access national data held by the Department for Education on children in care to analyse data routinely submitted by each local authority to establish long-term mental health trajectories of children in care. However, it is difficult to use administrative data alone to explore the factors that influence children's mental health. Therefore, in the second part of the study, we are supplementing the administrative data with data from an online survey of children in care in local authorities. We are contacting you to ask for your help with carrying out this online survey.

#### **MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE SURVEY**

- We have created an online survey for 11-17-year-old children in care. We will ask those who have been in care for at least one year to complete the survey.
- It will ask children in care about their mental health and wellbeing including the impact of COVID-19.
- The survey will be linked to each child by their administrative identification number, which will enable their information to be linked with national data held by the Department for Education.
- The secure survey is online and can be completed on a mobile phone/tablet/PC. We would be happy to provide paper copies if that is easier for you. It will take about 20 minutes to complete.
- All children who complete the survey will receive a £15 gift voucher.

#### **WHAT ARE WE ASKING YOUR LOCAL AUTHORITY TO DO?**

We will ask you to provide individual survey links to children aged 11-17 years in care in your local authority via their social workers at the next social worker contact. We are happy to discuss if you think the survey could be administered differently in your local authority.

## WHAT IF SAFEGUARDING ISSUES ARE RAISED IN THE SURVEYS?

The research team will review all survey responses. If there is any information indicative of a child being at risk of serious significant harm, the research team will alert the children's social worker, by informing the social worker of the child/young person's ID number.

## DATA PROTECTION: HOW WILL THE RESEARCH TEAM PROCESS THE INFORMATION FROM THE SURVEYS?

We would like to assure you that:

- The research will comply with the principles of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).
- The participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Children are free to withdraw and ask for their data to be deleted at any time, without giving a reason.
- All survey data will be held and analysed on a secure University of Bristol server, or the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Secure Research Servers only accessible to the research team. Any paper copies, after downloading to the secure server, will be shredded through confidential waste facilities. The research lead, Dinithi Wijedasa is an ONS approved researcher.
- All information will only be seen by the research team and will be treated with the strictest confidence [with the exception of any serious safeguarding concerns].
- The surveys will be linked to each young person via an ID number. Any personal details that could be used to identify young people will be removed from the surveys. No identifiable information will be used when we report our findings in future publications, reports or presentations.
- Anonymised survey data will be deposited at the University of Bristol Research Data Storage Facility and the UK Data Service.

## WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?

By helping us with this research you will be contributing to a study which aims to explore the impact of COVID-19 on children in care and establish how the mental health of children in care changes over time. Department for Education has confirmed that information from our study would be of use for policy and practice.

You will also receive:

- An individualised report on the mental health and wellbeing of children in care in your local authority.
- An opportunity to attend a peer learning seminar, which will bring together participating local authorities to discuss practice and policy implications of our findings.

We will do our utmost to ensure that the demands on local authority staff time are minimised. Thank you for taking the time to read this, and we hope to welcome you to our study soon. Please do get in touch with any queries.

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***For any questions about the project or further information please email any of the team, or [mh-cat@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:mh-cat@bristol.ac.uk) (our project mailbox)***

***If you wish to complain about any aspect of this research, please email [dinithi.wijedasa@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:dinithi.wijedasa@bristol.ac.uk)***