

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

**(ADCS REFERENCE: RGE200212)**

### **INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPATING LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

You are receiving this information sheet as your local authority has opted into a survey of mental health and wellbeing of children in care, which is being carried out as part of a research study led by the University of Bristol.

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

The aim of this research 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 developmental context, such as their care experiences, individual and school-related factors. This information should be useful for local authorities and other service providers. This research is funded through two grants from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Further details about these grants can be found here: <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=ES%2FR006482%2F1>; <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=ES%2FV015699%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 also will 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 national administrative data with data from a longitudinal 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**

The online survey has been created for children and young people in care aged 11-17 years (up to 18 years of age) who have been in care for more than 1 year. This survey has been created by a research team at the University of Bristol with input from an expert advisory group and a care experienced group of young people.

- It will ask children in care about their developmental context, mental health and wellbeing including the impact of COVID-19. We have been very careful not to ask questions that could cause distress to children.
- The secure online survey can be completed on a mobile phone/tablet/PC. It will take about 20 minutes to complete. We would be happy to provide paper copies if that is easier for you.

- The survey will be linked to each child by their administrative identification number, which will enable their information to be linked over time and to link with national data held by the Department for Education.
- All children who complete the survey will receive a £15 gift voucher. This will be sent by the research team.

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

- The local authorities are requested to provide the local authority ID numbers for all children aged 11-17 years (up to 18 years of age), who have been in care for more than 1 year, excluding children on Section 20 agreements. The research team will then assign a unique survey link to each child.
- The research team will also request the date of birth and the gender of the child linked to each ID number from the LA, to enable checking that the correct link has been sent to the right child and to enable linkage with national data.
- The survey links will be sent out by the local authority, along with an information sheet about the research for children and young people, an information sheet for their carer/s and links to support services.
- We will ask you to send the individual survey links to children and young people via their social workers or independent reviewing officers (IROs). If the links are being sent via the local authority performance management or other teams, we request that the social workers/IROs are notified when the survey links are sent out to children and young people so that the children and young people will have a linked follow-up call/visit. 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 weekly. If there is any information indicative of any risk of significant harm, the research team will alert the local authority, by forwarding 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 decide to not participate or withdraw and ask for their data to be deleted within a month of completing the survey<sup>1</sup>, without giving a reason.
- 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].
- 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 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.

---

<sup>1</sup> This is because the research team will analyse and report on the data within a month of survey closing. The reports will be based on aggregate data and no individual child will be identifiable from the output.

## 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. The 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. Please do get in touch with any queries.

**PROJECT TEAM:** Dinithi Wijedasa, University of Bristol ([Dinithi.wijedasa@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:Dinithi.wijedasa@bristol.ac.uk))  
Florie Schmits, University of Bristol ([Florie.Schmits@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:Florie.Schmits@bristol.ac.uk))  
Yeosun Yoon, University of Bristol ([Yeosun.Yoon@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:Yeosun.Yoon@bristol.ac.uk))

***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)***