

R030: Childhood interactions with social services and risk of poor health and social outcomes in adulthood: a population wide data linkage study – QUB

Early life influences are a known predictor of adult health outcomes with a growing body of evidence suggesting that adverse childhood experiences such as abuse/neglect have a negative impact on mental health. But few studies exist examining the long-term impact of these experiences on adult mental health outcomes.

In 2015 around 5% of young people in Northern Ireland (aged 0-18yrs) were known to social services as a child in need, with 2,875 in the care of the Health and Social Care Trusts (a "looked after" child) and 1,969 on the Child Protection Register at risk of abuse/ neglect. Half of "looked after" children report some form of mental health difficulty compared to just 10% of children not in care, but very little is known on what becomes of these children after they leave the care of social services. It is vital to understand the long-term outcomes of adverse childhood experiences so policy makers can target interventions effectively to reduce childhood mental health difficulties and thus reduce poor adult mental health outcomes.

Northern Ireland is unique as it has an integrated health and social care system, holding data centrally on all individuals known to social services since 1985. This project will utilise 30 years' worth of de-identified social services data from the Social Services Client Administration and Retrieval Environment (SOSCARE) linked to medication data, hospital records and death records to create the UK's first historical, population-wide cohort studying the long-term mental health outcomes of children known to social services.