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Journal of Social Work 2009 9: 285

DOI: 10.1177/1468017309334903

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Does Social Work Make a Difference?

A Controlled Study of Former 'Looked-After-Children' and 'Excluded-From-School' Adolescents Now Men Aged 16–24 Subsequent Offences, Being Victims of Crime and Suicide

COLIN PRITCHARD AND RICHARD WILLIAMS

Bournemouth University, England

Abstract

• *Summary:* In the UK the outcomes of former 'Looked-After-Children' (LAC)¹ as young adults have generally caused concern, especially those highlighting their relatively high involvement in crime. Yet statutory right of LACs to continued support might have been expected to make a difference to their lives. Social work support should have impacted upon their social integration and this should, in turn, have led to a reduced involvement in crime. However, previous studies on former LAC used their age peers in the general population as a 'control group' whereas another socially disadvantaged group would have been a more appropriate comparison. This study took another group of 'socially disadvantaged' people, that is, former adolescent Permanently-Excluded-from-School (PEFS) young men, who had no statutory right to social work support, to compare with LAC men now aged 16–24. This enables us to ask the question, did social work make a difference between the two groups? The focus will be upon examining the young men's subsequent involvement in crime, either as offenders or victims, which are issues policy and public concern. The study compares a five-year cohort of former LAC adolescent males ($n = 438$), as Young Adults, with a control five-year cohort of former PEFS males ($n = 215$). We examine whether there were any differences between the cohorts as either offenders or victims of crime and whether there were any suicides amongst them. This was based upon an analysis of National Police data and the Home Office prediction of future crime with actual outcomes of the two groups. A Regional Suicide register was examined to determine

any suicides over the period. It should be stressed that the study was totally records based, all individual identification markers were stripped from the data before analysis and total anonymity and confidentiality was maintained. Chi square tests were used to compare outcomes of levels of offending and being victims of crime. Epidemiological rates were used to compare violent deaths.

- *Findings*: Despite the different entry referral points of the cohorts, they had similar social backgrounds. Subsequent offending rate by LAC was 44 percent, which was significantly *less* than the former PEFS (64%). The offences of PEFS were significantly more *violent*, including a murder rate more than 1670 times their peers in the general population. In regard to being victims of crime, whilst both LAC and PEFS had higher rates of being victims of crime than the general population, LAC men were significantly *more* often victims of sex and violent crimes, having a *murdered* rate 176 times their age peers. However, there were no suicides amongst LAC but the PEFS *suicide* rate was 133 times that of their peers in the general population.
- *Applications*: These results indicate that, despite starting from a more disadvantaged situation, former LAC did significantly *better* than the PEFS young men. Whilst the LAC rates of 'victimhood' shows their continuing relative vulnerability, the outcomes of the PEFS indicate another group of socially excluded people who require at least as much preventative support as former LAC. Overall, the LAC results indicate that Social Work support made a positive difference in the LAC outcomes.

Keywords criminality Excluded-from-School'
'Looked-After-Children' suicide

Introduction

'Are you part of the solution or part of the problem?' (James Baldwin, 1968)

This study evolved out of an earlier Home Office (UK) funded project which was a three-year prospective controlled study of a school-based social work service, aimed at reducing truancy, drug misuse, delinquency and school exclusions (Pritchard, 2001). The project, which was very effective in achieving many of its objectives and has been developed and continues to be relatively successful (Williams and Pritchard, 2006). At the end of the formal three-year evaluation, the Chief Officers of the agencies involved, Education, Health, Probation and Social Services asked the authors to consider the impact on those children we had not reached and at the invitation of the agencies we undertook a preliminary retrospective pilot study of 'Permanently-Excluded-From-School' (PEFS) adolescents who had been excluded over the past five years.

Five years were chosen because relatively few pupils are permanently excluded, but eventually 227 adolescents were identified, aged between 16 and

23 years old. The initial project had been Home Office led so this preliminary study was essentially about the subsequent criminality of former PEFS adolescents, either as offenders or as victims of crime. However, within the 227 PEFS men were 22 males who were also LAC. It had been expected that those who were both PEFS and LAC would have a worse criminal outcome because of the well-known range of poorer outcomes when compared with the general population (Biehel et al., 1992, 1995; Gibbons et al., 1995; Parker et al., 1991; Munro, 1998; Stein, 1998). However, despite relatively small numbers, those who had been both LAC and PEFS had a significantly *lower* subsequent crime rate than their PEFS only peers. Having acknowledged that former LAC had the right to statutory social work support, whilst former PEFS had no such provision, it was hypothesized that the reason for the better outcome of the LAC group was the social work support they had received. In effect, this preliminary study had compared a supported-group with a non-supported group and had posed the question: did social work intervention make a difference?

At the time when the LAC came into care and the PEFS were excluded, it would be assumed that the LAC adolescents would have been more disadvantaged and vulnerable than the PEFS, otherwise the PEFS would also have become LAC.

We were then invited to replicate the preliminary PEFS study to examine a matched five-year cohort of all children who had spent some time as LAC, and thereby see if the original result had happened by chance, and whether there would be any significant difference in the criminal outcomes of the two groups.

As noted above, research on former Looked-After-Children (LAC) has found that, compared to their peers in the general population, LAC achieve significantly poorer psycho-socio-economic outcomes (Bieheel et al., 1992, 1995; Parker et al., 1991; Stein, 1998), often being involved with the criminal justice system and needing mental and physical health services (Gibbons et al., 1995; Munro, 1998; Stein, 1998). Recent results still find higher educational difficulties, crime, homelessness and teenage pregnancy problems amongst former LAC (Berridge, 2006; Buchanan, 2007; Cheesbrough, 2002; DfES, 2006; Department of Health, 2003; Mills, 2004; Munro, 2004; Social Exclusion Unit, 2003; Stein, 2006; Williams et al., 2001). Indeed, Viner and Taylor (2005) in a British longitudinal study, found that former LAC did especially poorly and longitudinal research in other countries on children who had been in public care had similar results, with evidence of the influence of inter-generational factors in a cycle of deprivation (Ekeus et al., 2004; Farooqi et al., 2007; Hjern et al., 2004; Vinnerljung et al., 2007; Weitoft et al., 2007). Nonetheless, some former British LAC young adults who entered university reported the benefits of their being in care on their eventual educational progress (Jackson et al., 2005).

Recent legislation has responded to the need to make the educational attainment of LAC a priority (The Children Act 2004, sections 48–52), widening

local authority powers to direct LAC to the most suitable school as the new Children's Services bring together aspects of Child Protection and Education, within the 'Every Child Matters' agenda. The government continue to pursue the agenda in their 2006 White Paper 'Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care', for example, creating the Virtual Head Teacher role 'in every local area responsible for driving up the performance of schools in relation to children in care'.

While the above catalogue of outcome results of former LAC are somewhat discouraging when compared to the general population, it is argued that former LAC should be juxtaposed against other disadvantaged people, as a more appropriate control group for comparing psychosocial outcomes.

By definition, being a LAC makes it almost impossible to have equally matched psychosocial situations of other children so it is not surprisingly that we could find no exact comparative study of former LAC and other disadvantaged children in any Western literature.

However, in terms of known psycho-social-educational and criminal backgrounds, there is a degree of overlap between former LAC and PEFS (Berridge, 2006; Berridge et al., 2001). Moreover, within the Every Child Matters agenda, the importance of the child protection-educational interface is now much more appreciated (Berridge, 2006; Berridge et al., 2001; Department of Health, 1999; Jackson, 2001) as educational under-achievement is a likely route to 'social exclusion', which makes comparisons of LAC and PEFS more relevant.

Almost by definition, PEFS young people will be educational under-achievers. This is linked to subsequent unemployment, poor skills, low income, poor housing, high crime, ill health and family breakdown, all of which impact upon children and re-enforces the inter-generational dimension of social exclusion (Bebbington and Miles, 1989; Berridge, 2006; Berridge et al., 2001; Blyth and Milner, 1996; Buchanan, 2007; Feinstein et al., 2007; Hales et al., 2006; Kinder et al., 1997; Social Exclusion Unit, 1998, 2003). Hence the PEFS are as good a match for LAC as young adults as we are likely to find.

This study is the first to directly compare the outcomes of two definable, disadvantaged groups of adolescents as young adults (16–24), namely, former LAC and PEFS young men, who serve as a comparative control group for each other.

Of the LAC cohort, 54 percent (438) were males and 46 percent (374) were female, whereas 95 percent (215) of PEFS were male and only five percent (12) female. With so few females, this makes any comparison between the LAC and PEFS cohorts unfeasible. The study therefore compares only the adolescent males in the two disadvantaged groups.

It needs to be reiterated that the two cohorts started from different positions in terms of psychosocial vulnerability and distress, it being assumed that LAC would be worse, but also that the LAC cohort were a group with statutory social work support. By comparison, once the PEFS group exceeded

compulsory school leaving age, no agency had a statutory responsibility for them, and in this sense, were an unsupported group, and allows us to pose the question, did social work support make any difference to the subsequent criminal outcomes of former LAC young men?

The outcomes to be explored are their involvement in crime both as offenders and/or victims, which are issues of real concern in regard to former LAC (Biehel et al., 1992, 1995; Social Exclusion Unit, 2003; Stein, 1998; Utting, 1997).

One additional area of interest is that of suicidal behaviour, as it is known that former LAC young adults have a higher rate of suicidal behaviour than in the general population, related to their lower self-esteem and their often neglectful and abusive backgrounds (Enns et al., 2006; Evren and Evren, 2006; Favaro et al., 2007; Makhija, 2007; Pritchard, 1999, 2006; Pritchard and King, 2004) and a Regional Suicide Register was examined (Pritchard and King, 2004), to determine whether any of the former LAC or PEFS subsequently became suicide victims.

The study postulates three null hypotheses:

That there will be no statistically significant differences between former LAC and PEFS young men in regard to their subsequent:

1. levels of criminal offences,
2. rates of 'victimhood', and
3. being involved in suicide.

Methodology

This study emerged out of the evaluation of a Home Office funded three-year prospective controlled school-based social work project, which had reduced truancy, delinquency and school-exclusions (Pritchard, 2001; Williams and Pritchard, 2006). The preliminary study found a lower offending rate amongst young men who were both PEFS and LAC, compared to that of the PEFS only young men. This led to the agencies inviting us to examine, on their behalf, matched five-year cohorts of former LAC and PEFS adolescents, that is, those who had statutory right to receive social work support and the PEFS, who had no such rights. This was part of a collaborative initiative between the Education, Probation and Social Services. Those agencies requesting the data analysis, that is, Education, Probation, Social Services, as well as those granting access to the data, that is, Police and Coroners' Courts, are bound by strict data protection and governance processes, all of which were complied with by the authors.

The researchers examined anonymized data of the former LAC and PEFS, from which all individual identification had been stripped, and matched against Police and regional suicide records. Hence the researchers had no knowledge of who the people were and because the information was already extant, confidential, anonymous and non-intrusive, this resolved any ethical problems, as

total confidentiality has been maintained. After the data were coded and analysed, all was destroyed, thereby doubly ensuring that no individual or area can be identified.

The cohorts consisted of all consecutive adolescent males who had spent some time as LAC or who had been PEFS; these formed the comparative retrospective five-year cohorts, covering the years 1998–2002. The study was retrospective, because part of the objective was to discover what happened to problematic adolescents who could not have been involved in the original school-based social work service (Williams and Pritchard, 2006).

As the initial study was Home Office funded, the outcome focus was limited to criminal outcomes, thus nothing further is known about the cohorts' educational or Social Service backgrounds. All data were taken from examining national police records to determine whether any were known to the Police, either as offenders or as victims of crime. In regard to being a subsequent offender, this included minor counts of criminality through to murder.

Based upon their offences, it was possible use the Home Office predictor of the risk of future crime, which is calculated on the age of first conviction and the most serious of their offence/s (ORGS) (Home Office, 2000). This enables us to measure whether either group had more or fewer offences than the ORGS would predict.

In addition, based upon an earlier analysis of crime and location (Cox, 2002), we could identify whether the men were living in an area of low, moderate or high crime, as well as any who were currently homeless. However, the homeless rates might well be an underestimate, as some may have moved in and out of homelessness (DCSF, 2007; Social Exclusion Unit, 1998), a point needing consideration when discussing the results.

Finally, because of the association between suicidal behaviour and former neglected and abused adolescents (Enns et al., 2006; Evren and Evren, 2006; Favaro et al., 2007; Makhija, 2007; Pritchard, 2006; Pritchard and King, 2004), a Regional Suicide register was consulted to discover whether any had subsequently died as a result of suicide (King, 2001).

How sound was this database? With regard to Police and Suicide information and within the limits above, it is as hard a data set as can be obtained. It contained all known LAC and PEFS and, providing Police and Suicide records were reasonably comprehensive, we could be confident that this covered virtually 100 percent of both five-year cohorts. The strength of such data can be seen when comparing it with a new in-depth, comprehensive, national study of young people in care in the USA. Based upon random samples from 36 states, they had completed information for only 66 percent of their initial sample (NSCAW, 2007). Thus, despite the inevitable limits of these data, it is argued that this first ever study comparing LAC and PEFS is a very reasonable data set that merits study and analysis.

It was not possible to compare the cohorts' crime rates against that of their age peers (16–24), that is, young men in the general population (YMGP)

because few current crime statistics matched the cohorts' age (ONS, 2007), except in regard to being victims of violence-related crime, that is, 15–24 (Smith and Allen, 2004).

However, the meaning of 'crimes of violence' is far from clear as the Home Office data showed that 70 percent of confirmed 'offences-against-the person' did not lead to physical injury, and out of 1.06 million 'violent offences', only 40,300 were described as serious, that is, four percent (Smith and Allen, 2004). Moreover, a UK study of the use of guns found that the 0.4 percent of crimes in which guns were used, is reduced to 0.2 percent when airguns are removed from the equation (*BMJ*, 2007; Hales et al., 2006). This is not to ignore the risk, but to highlight the difficulty of adequately defining concepts such as violence, which the media present as so all-pervasive, when it is actually relatively rare (Hales et al., 2006; Smith and Allen, 2004). This helps to underline the practical significance of serious violence that is identified in this study.

A very small number of LAC and PEFS men were involved in sexual offences against children, but it is known that formal charges of a sexual offence against children are relatively very low (Marshall, 1997; Pritchard, 2004). To place these small numbers in context, an epidemiological rate was calculated and compared to the latest national figures we could find (Marshall, 1997). There are problems with this estimate, as there is no matching age data, but based upon Marshall's (1997) UK figures, we calculate that about 3125 men aged 20–40 were convicted of a sexual offences against children. With a population of 9.16 million 20–40-year-olds (WHO, 2005) this yields a rate of 341 per million (pm) in the general population at any one time. This rate will be contrasted against the epidemiological rate found in the cohorts.

Violent Mortality Rates and Statistical Analysis

Over the period studied, there were a number of violent deaths that included murder, being murdered and suicide. Whilst such numbers of these types of violent deaths in England and Wales are relatively and statistically rare in the general population (WHO, 2005), to make any meaningful comparison, it is necessary to calculate an epidemiological mortality rate for the various deaths, with rates presented as deaths per million (pm) of the population. This allows a comparison of murderer, murdered and suicide rates found in 'Young-Men-in-General-Population' 15–24 years (YMGP), the age band closest to our cohorts. Mortality rates are published in decades of age bands, 15–24 (WHO, 2005), and although not an exact match, they provide a very reasonable contextual estimate to compare with the cohorts age (16–24). The YMGP rates are for the latest year available, 2002 (WHO, 2005). Extrapolating from WHO data (2005), there were 2076 male deaths for 'All Causes of Death' in England and Wales for the 15–24-year-olds. Dividing this by the Anglo-Welsh YMGP population of 3.28 million yields a rate of 632 per million (pm); which is an important baseline for later comparisons.

Comparative Statistics LAC v. PEFS

To compare the LAC and PEFS outcomes, Chi square tests are used with statistical significance taken at a probability (p) level of < 0.05 level, but where the Chi square test just falls short of significance, statistical trends of < 0.09 will also be reported upon.

Sample

The sample consisted of a two five-year cohort of all consecutive adolescents who were either former LAC or PEFS adolescents. The LAC cohort consisted of 438 men aged 16–24 and the PEFS cohort consisted of PEFS men, aged 16–23; the age difference was due to the PEFS data being collected a year earlier than the LAC information.

Findings

It will be shown that the current social backgrounds of the cohorts were reasonably well matched, but that the PEFS men's subsequent criminality was far worse than that of the LAC men. The PEFS cohort had significantly more offences, especially violent crime, including a markedly high murder rate. The lower criminality of LAC men can be considered as a modest success, when compared against the subsequent behaviour of the former PEFS men.

Conversely, whilst both cohorts had a relatively high rate of victimhood, it was the LAC men who were more often victims of violent and sex crimes, including being murdered.

Social Characteristics

Table 1 shows there were no significant differences between the majority of social characteristics of the LAC and PEFS cohorts of 438 and 215 men respectively.

It is notable that 72 percent and 70 percent of LAC and PEFS men still lived in their original area and that 70 percent and 67 percent respectively lived in an area of high crime, that is, three times the regional rate, in other words, an area of chronic poor housing and poverty.

The only significant difference was that the LAC group were more often defined as Homeless, seven to one percent, although four percent of the PEFS men's domicile was unknown. It may be that this level of homelessness is an underestimate and that they may be more alike than these figures suggest, as they move into and out of homelessness.

Generally, within the limits of the data set, it is argued that the cohorts are a good social match and merit comparison as *special* samples of former 'socially excluded' adolescents as young men (16–24).

Table 1 **Social characteristics of five-year cohort of former LAC and PEFS adolescents**

Characteristics	LAC (<i>n</i> = 438) %	PEFS (<i>n</i> = 215) %	<i>p</i> value
<i>Age</i>			
<18	33	29	
19–21	35	41	
22+	32	30	n. sig.
<i>Current living</i>			
County area	72	70	
Region	19	14	
Metropolitan	2	11	n. sig.
No-fixed-abode	7	1*	*<0.005
<i>Local crime rate</i>			
High	67	70	
Medium	20	19	
Low	13	11	n. sig.

* 4% unknown locale. All chi square tests 1 d.f.

The Preliminary PEFS Analysis

The earlier preliminary study of the PEFS men had found lower levels of subsequent offences amongst men who had been both former LAC and PEFS, that is, 22 of the 215 PEFS, of whom 41 percent had subsequent offences, whereas the PEFS only men had a 66 percent offender rate. Thus, those former adolescents who had been both LAC and PEFS had a statistically significantly lower level of subsequent crime than those who were only PEFS but had not been in care ($p < 0.02$). This led to the conjecture that the impact of social work intervention could account for the difference, hence this study.

LAC v. PEFS Subsequent Criminality

Table 2 shows the subsequent criminality of the cohorts. It shows that out of 438 LAC, 247 (56%) had *no known offence*, compared with only 78 (36%) of the 215 PEFS; this is statistically significantly different and is a successful outcome for the LAC men.

Thus, out of 438 LAC only 191 (44%) had a subsequent conviction, compared with the 137 (64%) out of 215 PEFS who had further convictions. The following comparisons therefore refer *only* to the subsequent 191 LAC and 137 PEFS offenders.

Ages at First Offence

There was no significant difference between the groups in terms of their ages at the time of their first offence. Most were under 15 years old, that is, 45 percent

Table 2 Comparison of the criminality of former LAC v. PEFS males as young adults (16–24) and *p* values (PEFS significantly 'worse' unless marked #. Epidemiological rates per 100,000^a)

Offences	LAC (<i>n</i> = 438) Numbers – %	PEFS (<i>n</i> = 215) Numbers – %	<i>n</i> value
Total offenders	191 – 44%		
Non-offenders	247 – 56%	78 – 36%	<.00001
	LAC (<i>n</i> = 191) Offenders	PEFS (<i>n</i> = 137) Offenders	
<i>Age first offence</i>			
<15	45	44	
16–18	38	43	
19+	17	13	n. sig.
<i>Number of offences</i>			
Theft			
<5	105 – 55%	84 – 61%	
6–10	44 – 23%	15 – 10%	
11+	42 – 22%	38 – 28%	<0.02
<i>Types of offences (more than 1)</i>			
Theft	151 – 79%	122 – 89%	
Burglary	36 – 19%	36 – 26%	n. sig.
Criminal damage	40 – 21%	30 – 22%	n. sig.
Drug possession	23 – 12%	18 – 13%	n. sig.
Drug dealing	2 – 1%	5 – 4%	n. sig.
Theft of car	25 – 13%	27 – 20%	n. sig.
<i>Violent offences</i>			
Breach of peace	27 – 14%	40 – 29%	<.0001
ABH	11 – 6%	19 – 14%	<.020
GBH	2 – 1%	10 – 7%	<.003
Robbery	4 – 2%	5 – 4%	n. sig.
Wounding and offensive weapon	15 – 8%	12 – 9%	n. sig.
Number of 'violent' offenders	38 – 20%	53 – 39%	<.002
Average violence per person	2.03	4.20	
Convicted of murder ^b	1 – 0.5%	2 – 1.5%	n. sig.
Epidemiological rate	5,236pm	14,599pm	
Combined PEFS	0 – 0%	3 – 2.17%	<.05
Epidemiological rate	n/a	21,729pm	
General population (15-24) rate	42 = 13pm	42 = 13pm	<.00001
<i>Sex offences</i>			
Sex crimes v. children ^c	4 – 0.9%	4 – 1.8%	n. sig.
Epidemiological rate ^a	9,132pm	18,605pm	
General population 20–40 estimated ^d	3,125–340pm	3,125–340pm	<.0001
Sex crimes v. adults ^c	3 – 2%	4 – 3%	n. sig.
Epidemiological rate ^a	6,849pm	18,605pm	n. sig.

^aEpidemiological rates per million of population.

^bIndicates that one LAC had also been PEFS who went on to murder, therefore rates given for LAC, PEFS separately and for combined PEFS.

^cIndicates the same men offending against both children and adults.

^dEstimated child sex offenders in general population (20–40 years) – (Marshall, 1997).

of LAC and 44 percent of PEFS. More than 80 percent of both groups had a conviction before their 18th birthday.

Numbers of Offences

There was a significant difference ($p < 0.02$) in the number of offences committed, with 22 percent of LAC and 28 percent of PEFS committing 11 or more offences each.

Types of Crime

There was little difference between the cohorts in their rate of property crime, which was predominately theft, 79 percent and 89 percent, but 19 percent of LAC and 26 percent of PEFS had at least one conviction for the more serious crime of burglary.

Violent Offences

The key difference between the two groups in terms of crimes was related to violence, that is, Actual Bodily Harm (ABH) and Grievous Bodily Harm (GBH). There were significantly fewer amongst LAC offenders than PEFS offenders: six percent to 14 percent for ABH and one percent to seven percent respectively for GBH.

Overall, 38 (20%) of LAC Offenders to 53 (39%) PEFS offenders had at least one conviction for violence-against the-person, with the PEFS having significantly more violent offences.

Extreme Violence: Murder The most marked variation in violent offences was in respect to Murder. Two PEFS men and one LAC man, who had also been excluded from school *before* he entered care, were subsequently convicted of murder, three out of the 216 PEFS if we *combine* the subsequent PEFS men who went on to murder.

If these men are treated separately, this represents one LAC man in 438 young men, who subsequently murdered, expressed as an epidemiological rate of 2283 per million (pm). Calculating the two PEFS subsequent murderers separately equates to one in 108 PEFS to find a murderer, 9302 pm of all the PEFS but equivalent to a rate of 14,599 pm amongst PEFS subsequent offenders.

However, as the LAC assailant was also PEFS prior to becoming a LAC, categorizing all three murderers as PEFS offenders equates to a homicide rate of 21,739 pm.

This is dramatically different from the national annual murder rate for 'young-men-in-the-general-population' (YMGP) aged 15–24. Assuming all 15–24 male homicide victims were murdered by another same aged male, this would mean that of the 42 such murders in a population of 3.284 million men in England and Wales aged 15–24 (WHO, 2005) equates to a rate of 13 pm, that is, one in 78,190 men. This means that the three PEFS offenders murdered at 1672 times the rate of their YMGP age peers. This may even be an

underestimate, as some of the assailants in the general population would be either women or be older than 15–24 years old.

Nonetheless, out of all the cohort of 653 socially excluded young men, only three were involved in the extremes of violence, 0.46 percent, whilst 87 percent of LAC and 75 percent of PEFS young men had no subsequent conviction for *violence*.

Sex Offences There were a few with sex offences: four LAC and four PEFS men offending against children and three and four offended against an adult. It should be noted that three LAC men offended against adults and all four PEFS sex offenders committed sex crimes against both children and adults. Because sex offences are often under-reported (Pritchard, 2004), we calculate these rates of offending against children on the whole sample as 0.9 percent of LAC and 1.9 percent of PEFS.

These numbers of course are very small and there were no statistically significant differences between the groups. However, if the numbers of offenders were expressed as an epidemiological rate, then this might be considered high when compared against estimates of sex offenders in the general male population aged 20–40, that is, approximately 341 pm (Marshall, 1997). The LAC men's child sex offences were 9132 pm and for PEFS offenders 18,605 pm. Both of these figures are markedly different from those for the general population where the rate of sex offending is one in 2931; whereas LAC offenders were one in 110 and PEFS offenders were one in 54, considerably more than that estimated in the general population rate.

It should be noted we are speaking of known conviction rates and as our two cohorts would be more often known to the authorities, this may have made it more likely that they would be convicted rather than men in the general population who were more likely *not* to have had a previous criminal record. Hence it would be easy to overstate this finding and such comparative rates should be viewed with *greatest caution* as 99 percent of LAC and 98 percent of PEFS had *no* known sex offence against anyone. Nonetheless, the offenders within the cohorts had a statistically significant higher rate of violent and sexual crimes than did their male age peers in the general population although it is reiterated that 56 percent of LAC and 36 percent offended against no one.

Involvement in Criminal Justice System (CJS)

Table 3 compares the offenders in each cohort, that is, 191 LAC men and 137 PEFS men, in recent contact with the Criminal Justice System.

In regard to the numbers of court appearances, 120 (63%) of the 191 LAC men had five or fewer court appearances but 14 (7%) had more than 11. Conversely, the PEFS had significantly worse outcome as 59 (43%) PEFS men had more than 11 court appearances. Bearing in mind the fiscal cost of an appearance at Court (Audit Commission, 1998), the PEFS cost far more than the former LAC men.

Table 3 Criminal Justice System involvements of offenders

Type of involvement	LAC (n = 191) Numbers – %	PEFS (n = 137) Numbers – %	p value
Court appearances			
<5	120 – 63%	56 – 41%	
6–10	57 – 30%	53 – 39%	
11+	14 – 7%	28 – 20%	<.0001
Current ORGS scores			
Low	81 – 42%	39 – 30%	
Medium	74 – 39%	39 – 28%	
High	36 – 19%	59 – 43%	<.00001
Crimes in last year – 1	51 – 27%	70 – 51%	
Previous 2–3	27 – 14%	32 – 23%	
Previous >4	113 – 59%	35 – 26%	<.00001
Currently in CJS	52 – 27%	47 – 34%	<.03
Had custodial sentence	55 – 29%	53 – 39%	<.06
Average months per prisoner	14.2	18.5	

Crimes in Past Years The LAC offender group had significantly lower Home Office prediction of re-offending scores (ORGS) and as many as 59 percent of the LAC to 26 percent of PEFS men had not committed a crime for more than four years. As the Home Office considers two years without a subsequent offence as success, this is another indication of the LAC group supported by statutory social work having a significantly better outcome.

Currently in the Criminal Justice System A substantial minority of both groups of subsequent offenders were currently in the CJS at the time of the study, 27 percent LAC and 34 percent PEFS. Conversely, 27 percent of LAC and 51 percent of PEFS were convicted of an offence within the last year, which the Home Office considers failure.

Prediction of Future Crime and Custodial Sentences The seriousness of the types of offence, especially violence, is indicated in both the Home Office ORGS results: 19 percent of LAC and 42 percent of PEFS offenders had a High ORGS score, that is, likely to repeat their last serious offence within the next two years. The rates of custodial sentence, 29 percent of LAC and 39 percent of PEFS offenders, again shows that LAC men had a better outcome than the PEFS.

Victims of Crime and Suicide

Victims of Crime Table 4 lists the cohorts' experience of being offended against. Of the victims, nine percent of LAC and six percent of PEFS men were only

Table 4 **Being victim of crime LAC v. PEFS males (PEFS worse unless = #)**

Type of victim of crimes	LAC Numbers – %	PEFS Numbers – %	<i>p</i> value
Not known victim of crime	333 – 76%	168 – 78%	
Victim only	39 – 9%	13 – 6%	
Victim and offender	66 – 15%	34 – 16%	n. sig.
Total victimhood	105 – 24%	47 – 22%	
<i>Victims of property crime</i>			
Burglary	92 – 21%	36 – 17%	n. sig.
Criminal damage	13 – 3%	13 – 6%	<.06#
Car theft	4 – 1%	4 – 2%	n. sig.
<i>Victims of violent crimes</i>			
Domestic violence	18 – 4%	2 – 1%	<.03
ABH	44 – 10%	4 – 2%	<.0002
Robbery	9 – 2%	2 – 1%	n. sig.
GBH	22 – 5%	2 – 1%	<.01
Assailant a relative	53 – 12%	2 – 1%	<.00001
<i>Victims of sex crimes</i>			
Indecent and gross indecency	39 – 9%	2 – 1%	<.0001
Rape	4 – 1%	0 – 0%	n. sig.
Assailant a relative	18 – 4%	0 – 0%	<.003
Missing person	4 – 1%	0 – 0%	n. sig.
Number victims of violent crime	52	9	<.002
Number Victims of sex crime	43	2	<.00001
Victim of murder	1 – 0.23%	0 – 0%	n. sig.
Epidemiological rate	2,283	n/a	
General population rate	42 – 13pm	0 – 0%	<.0001

offended against and had *not* been offenders, whereas 15 percent and 16 percent respectively of the victims had also committed offences against others.

There was little significant difference between the groups, other than in the types of offence. The majority in both cohorts, 76 percent and 78 percent, had no known crime committed against them, which might be seen as a modicum of success, especially bearing in mind the areas of 'high crime' in which they lived, and there was little difference between the cohorts in regard to being victims of property crime.

Victims of Violent and Sexual Crime The key differences, however, were found in regard to being victims of violent and/or sex crimes, with the LAC having significantly higher levels of victimhood than the PEFS men.

Unlike general population statistics on 'violent crime', which includes the whole range from common assault to murder, we can report on actual types of violent crime, namely Actual Bodily Harm (ABH), Grievous Bodily Harm (GBH) and being victims of Robbery.

Victims of domestic violence included four percent of all LAC ($n = 438$) and one percent of all PEFS (215) men, whilst the LAC men had significantly higher ABH and GBH crimes committed against them than the PEFS.

Sadly, the LAC men were significantly more often assaulted by a relative compared to the PEFS men: 12 percent to one percent. However, it is when we contrast their victimhood to violent deaths that other stark differences emerge.

Taking being the victims of a violent and/or a sexual crime, overall there were 52 (18%) LAC victims compared with nine (4%) PEFS. The LAC men's situations were comparatively worse in that 43 (10%) of LAC were victims of a sex crime, mainly by members of their family, but only two (1%) for the PEFS men.

It raises the continuing problem of former LAC probably having to live with, or close by, their previous within-family abusers, but of course we do not know without further research.

Murder Victims Whilst no PEFS man was a murder victim, one LAC man was murdered; which was equivalent to a murdered rate of 2283 pm, which compared to the YMGP rate of 13 pm was equivalent to more than 176 times that of their age peers.

Suicides There were no known suicides amongst the LAC, but two PEFS young men subsequently died by suicide; a rate of 9302 pm, or one in 108. Compared to the current YMGP suicide rate of 70 pm (229 suicides in 3.28million, WHO, 2005) or one in 14,341, the subsequent vulnerability of the PEFS men is seen by having a suicide rate 133 times that of the general population.

Taking the violent deaths of these two cohorts of 'Socially Excluded' young men together, they had a *violent death* rate of 4594 pm, highlighting a degree of continuing vulnerability. This is especially seen when compared with an *All-Causes-of-Death* rate of their age peers 632 pm.

In summary, the social work supported majority of LAC men, although starting from a more disadvantaged background, had not been convicted of a crime, and compared to the rates of PEFS suicide, crime and especially violent crime, LAC had done far better than former excluded-from-school adolescents. Although LAC men had worse outcomes as victims of crime than the PEFS, overall outcomes they showed greater engagement with society than PEFS. The practice and policy implication for future PEFS suggests that they too require further psychosocial support.

Discussion

It is good practice to acknowledge the limitations of a study and the authors recognize the methodological limits in this work, appreciating that the more complex the question, the greater the difficulty of accounting for all variables. In the field of human behaviour, there are few if any studies that can match the precision say of a biological analysis (Goppen and Hamalainen, 2007; Weitoft et al., 2007). The main limitation of the study is that it was necessarily retrospective. Ideally, there should be an integrated prospective approach combining education, social service and police data for at least three years, preferably five, to determine the reliability of these retrospective results.

Another weakness is that being Home Office focused nothing more is known about the cohorts, that is, type of Care Order or the reason for coming into care of the LAC group, or specifics about why the PEFS were originally excluded or whether the PEFS received social work support.

Also, whilst it may be argued that the former LAC were more vulnerable than the former PEFS, in the sense of having started (probably) from a worse situation as adolescents, the latter are not a perfectly matched control group for the LAC as young men. They are, however, a far, far better logical match than their age peers in the general population because of the known association with a range of psycho-socio-economic problems amongst those PEFS (Berridge, 2006; Berridge et al., 2001).

There are a number of other limitations to this study, notably the sources of the data analysed, that is, Police and Coroners' records, though such data offer a reliable confirmation of subsequent crime and being victims of crime, they do not provide anything else.

How sound was this database? The strength of the Police and suicide data is its being based upon magistrates, crown or coroner's court verdicts. Consequently, within the parameters of measuring suicide and subsequent criminality both as offenders and victims, this is as hard and reliable a data set as is feasible in studying these two socially disadvantaged groups. With regard to Police and Suicide information and within the limits above, it is as hard a data set as can be obtained. It contained all known LAC and PEFS and, providing Police and Suicide records were reasonably comprehensive, we could be confident that this covered the majority of both five-year cohorts of former LAC and PEFS as young men. The strength of such data can be seen when comparing it with a new in-depth, comprehensive, national study of young people in care in the USA. Based upon random samples from 36 states, they had completed information for only 66 percent of their initial sample (NSCAW, 2007).

Crucially however, we know nothing about the specific Social Work intervention and can only assess it on the global outcome measures of offences. Nevertheless, crime is a major concern for most agencies and certainly for society, and on this criterion alone, the LAC results would be judged as a reasonable success. Furthermore, for the non-criminal majority of LAC men,

the absence of recent or current crime is a reasonable indicator of their greater social engagement than their PEFS peers.

One feature was the number of violent deaths associated with the two cohorts: three murderers, two suicides and one murdered out of a total of 653 men. However, the implications of the magnitude of this result is seen when recalling that to randomly find one male murderer aged 15–25 in the general population would require more than 78,000 men, whereas the PEFS had one in 72; whilst the one suicide in 108 PEFS men contrasts with the 14,341 needed to randomly find one suicide amongst their age peers. This highlights something of the vulnerable nature of these young men.

On the other hand, the disproportionately high level of LAC men as victims of violent and sexual crime, including a murder, which was 176 times that of their peers, does not appear to be a statistical artefact but rather a clear indicator of the need for the on-going support. Of particular importance appears to be the need for preventative action, especially in the area of accommodation, as the LAC men appear to often return to their previously abusing families.

Thus, despite the inevitable limits of this data, it is argued that this first ever study comparing LAC and PEFS is a very reasonable data set that merits serious consideration.

The Hypotheses

All three working null-hypotheses, that there would be *no* significant differences between LAC and PEFS men in regard to subsequent crime, suicide and victimhood, can be rejected.

LAC had statistically significantly better criminal and suicide outcomes than PEFS, although PEFS were significantly less often victims of violent and sex crimes than the LAC counterparts.

On reflection, the lesser offending rates of LAC might have been expected because former LAC people have a statutory right to support but none for the PEFS, hence the *de facto* Social Work versus No-Social ‘treatment’ model, whose results showed that despite starting from a more disadvantaged base, the Social Work supported group did better than the non-supported men.

There are five key results warranting further discussion and research. First is the *relative success* story of former LAC males as young adults, as more than half had no subsequent criminality, compared to only a third of the PEFS men.

Second was the strikingly different rate of violent offences between the LAC and PEFS men. The extraordinarily high murder rate of the PEFS was a startling finding. This has some support from a recent Home Office study of 80 young men charged with illegal firearms offences, more than half had been excluded from school (Hales et al., 2006).

Third was the fact that two PEFS men committed suicide, more than 133 times that of their age peers. This result was completely unexpected, as earlier research of former LAC people often found a range of mental health problems

in adulthood, including suicide (Favaro et al., 2007; Makhija, 2007; Pritchard, 1999, 2004, 2006), whereas it was the unsupported, de facto isolated PEFS men who died.

Fourth was a negative finding, that both cohorts had higher rates of criminal victimization than the general population (Walker et al., 2006), and especially worse amongst the LAC men. In view of the raised level of homelessness of the LAC, they appear to be continuing 'within-family' victims, suggesting that housing and accommodation is a particular problem for LAC as adults. Consequently, front-line practitioners need to be aware of this potential difficulty and to ensure continued support and scrutiny to avoid further victimization. Moreover, as the state of homelessness is often transient (Black et al., 2007; Saitz et al., 2007), we may well have underestimated the level of homelessness for both groups.

Fifth, probably against expectations, the majority of former LAC men had no subsequent criminality. Furthermore, three-quarters were not known to be victims of crime, which in view of their previous difficult family backgrounds, might reasonably be claimed as a further *modest success* and reflects well upon the support given to these young men.

The implications of the results are potentially far-reaching. By contrasting longitudinal outcomes of LAC with a coterminous cohort of PEFS, albeit only upon criminality, we have highlighted some positives for LAC as adults. Despite the poor media image of children's services (Parton, 1994), this adds further evidence that there are improving outcomes (Jackson, 2001), mirrored in the macro-results of the reducing and now lowest ever rates of violent deaths of children in England and Wales (Pritchard, 2002; Pritchard and Sharples, 2008). Equally, these results emphasize the importance of engaging young people in the education process in the drive for the comprehensive care of children reflected in the Every Child Matters agenda.

Children's services are relocating themselves in the communities they serve and thereby becoming more accessible to children and families; indeed, many of these Locality Teams are being sited in schools, that is, the normative base for families. As these Teams prioritize their allocation of resources, then it becomes possible to develop policies that more effectively meet the needs of actual or potential PEFS young people; policies that more readily mirror those that apply to LAC.

One question however is how relevant nationally are these results, as a study of LAC in 24 local authorities in 2000–01 found marked variations between authorities (Dickens et al., 2007)? To us a key finding in this earlier UEA study, was that one reason for young people being able to leave care was the 'availability of other services to support children going back to home' (Dickens et al., 2007), which demonstrates the inter-disciplinary nature of child protection which is at the core of Every Child Matters.

The reality for young people excluded from school is disruption to their education, impaired social integration and associated delinquency (Berridge,

2006; Berridge et al., 2001), dramatically highlighted by this study. The consequent impact upon their likely employability is self-evident and social exclusion is a high probability.

One less recognized problem is that most teenage delinquency is undertaken in groups, yet as practitioners we tend to focus upon the individual child and their family. We have long known that disruptive pupils come together, reinforcing each other in their social exclusion and creating a self-defeating identity (Pritchard and Cox, 2007; West and Farrington, 1973). Whilst Every Child Matters has brought together education and child protection, we have seen that sometimes front-line staff undervalue the importance of the school (Pritchard, 2006). This paradox is reflected in the high profile given to the association between crime and drug misuse, ignoring the fact that drug misuse is first associated with earlier adolescent educational alienation (Pritchard, 2006; Pritchard and Cox, 2007), whilst 85 percent of prison inmates have a reading age less than 12 years (Home Office, 2004) – educational underachievement indeed!

There is evidence from a school-based social work service, that even in the most socio-economically disadvantaged schools, truancy and therefore delinquency can be reduced and over three years was shown to be cost-effective (Pritchard, 2001; Williams and Pritchard, 2006). Such a preventative approach contributed to a significant reduction in the need for school exclusions and children needing to be placed on the Child Protection Register and is a model for reducing actual or covert school exclusion.

The advent of the new more integrated education and child protection services is to be welcomed and with adequate integrated services, they could not only improve the life chances of Looked-After-Children but could reach the oft neglected and almost invisible group of young people Permanently Excluded from School. Indeed, whilst this study demonstrates that social work can and did, make a difference, there are practice and policy imperatives to consider that excluded-from-school young people are as potentially vulnerable as Looked-After-Children. Until this is more adequately recognized lives and resources will continue to be wasted.

Note

1. 'Looked After Children' is the current stand orthodox euphemism to refer to children in the care of the state, where care may imply legal status or residency in substitute care.

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COLIN PRITCHARD, previously at Southampton, became Research Professor at Bournemouth University in 2003. His recent studies of psychosocial outcomes of neuro-surgical patients and their carers led to his appointment on the Specialist Re-certification Board (Royal College of Surgeons, England). Recent books include *Child Abuse: Research & Controversy* (2004) and *Mental Health Social Work: Evidenced-based Practice* (2006). Address: School of Health and Social Care, Social Work Department, Bournemouth University, 4th Floor, Royal London House, Christchurch Road, Bournemouth BH1 3LT, UK. [email: cpritchard@bournemouth.ac.uk]

RICHARD WILLIAMS has been in continuous practice for more than 30 years, especially in the Educational Social Work field and his last five years was as co-ordinator of a Social Inclusion Unit in a comprehensive school. He joined Bournemouth University as a Senior Lecturer in the School of Health & Social Care., with a continuing interest in developing the Every Child Matters agenda. Address: School of Health and Social Care, Social Work Department, Bournemouth University, 4th Floor, Royal London House, Christchurch Road, Bournemouth BH1 3LT, UK. [email: rwilliams@bournemouth.ac.uk]