The Mental Health of Young People Looked After by Local Authorities in Scotland

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Introduction

The survey of the mental health of young people looked after by local authorities in Scotland was the second major national survey focusing on the development and well-being of young people to be carried out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The first survey, carried out in 1999, obtained information about the mental health of nearly 900 young people living in private households in Scotland (Meltzer, Gatward, Goodman & Ford, 2000). Both surveys were commissioned by the Scottish Executive Education Department and the Scottish Executive Health Department.

The rationale for a national survey of the mental health of young people looked after by local authorities in Scotland was exactly the same as that for the private household population. In order to plan mental health services effectively, it is necessary to know how many children looked after by local authorities have mental health problems, what their diagnoses are, and how far their needs for treatment are being met.

Therefore, it was hoped that this first national survey of the mental health of children looked after by local authorities in Scotland would be invaluable in taking forward a number of key policy initiatives:

- Strategic service planning with health agencies.
- Understanding the stresses on placements.
- Training and support requirements of carers with a view to improve placement stability.
- Work on health inequality targets.
- Improving the health outcomes of looked after children.

The results of the survey were published in May 2004 (Meltzer, Lader, Corbin, Goodman & Ford, 2004a).

The aims of the survey

The primary purpose of the survey was to produce prevalence rates of three main categories of mental disorder: conduct disorder, hyperactivity and emotional disorders (and their comorbidity), based on ICD-10 (World Health Organisation, 1993) and DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) criteria.

The second aim of the survey was to determine the IMP and BUF of children's mental health problems in terms of social impairment and adverse consequences for others. Social impairment is measured by the extent to which each particular mental problem interferes with relations with others, forming and keeping friendships, participation in leisure activities, and scholastic