

# TECHNICAL NOTES

## Combining data from two sources

With the exception of Table 16 for 1998/9 where Performance Assessment Framework data has used (see Introduction), the statistics presented in this publication are based on two returns made by local authorities:

- form CLA100, on which authorities provide some aggregate figures; (introduced for 1997/8);
- form SSDA903, on which they provided detailed data on a 'one-third' sample of their looked after children, covering children born on a day of the month divisible by 3. This sampling approach was introduced from 1 April 1997.

Figures from the CLA100 collection were summarised in a Department of Health Statistical Bulletin in October 1999. Since then additional information has been received and as a result some figures have been revised in this publication.

Figures presented here for years before 1997/98 are based entirely on the detailed SSDA903, which for those years covered all looked after children. For 1997/98 onwards data from the two collections have been combined to provide the best estimates available of the figures at a national level and at a local authority level. The methodology in the main has been to use a range of multiplying factors (such as those set out in Table A2 of Appendix A), which are calculated by comparing CLA 100 totals with counts of valid SSDA 903 records.

The 1997/98 and 1998/99 figures in some tables are based entirely on the aggregate data from the CLA100 return. These include Tables A - D, F, 3 - 5, 11 and 13 - 14.

All other tables present breakdowns derived from the SSDA903 return grossed up using figures for the whole population from CLA100. In tables such as L - M, R and 15, the figures for 'all children' are CLA100 figures whereas the detailed breakdowns are obtained from the SSDA903 sample. The act of sampling reduces the reliability some of the breakdowns presented. This should be borne mind when interpreting figures for individual authorities that are derived from the SSDA903, particularly where the figures for individual categories are relatively small.

Figures from the two sources are presented on a consistent basis wherever possible, so that the sum of figures from the sample equals the total figure from the CLA100. However in some cases this has not been possible - for example Tables K, L, O and R, where footnotes explain any inconsistency.

## Missing data for 1998/99

### CLA100 return

All LA's provided a complete CLA 100 return in time for the preparation of this publication.

### SSDA903 'one-third' sample

Two authorities failed to provide a return: Milton Keynes and Tower Hamlets, with

the result that data has been shown as being “not available” for these two authorities on all tables for which SSDA 903 input is required.

All figures for England include estimates for missing data.

## Data Quality

The Department goes to great lengths to ensure that the quality of its data relating to looked after children is as accurate as can be achieved within a reasonable time scale with the resources available. Both the SSDA 903 and the CLA 100 are subjected to validation checks, as well as being compared one with the other. All major discrepancies are referred back to local authorities for checking and correction.

Of the three sources of data used in this publication (see above), it is generally felt that the SSDA 903 is the more accurate. There are three reasons for this:

- it is a subjective survey of all episodes of care and there is no bias in the collection towards any particular child or data item
- all SSDA 903 records are subjected to a rigorous validation to ensure that all reported episodes are fully consistent one with another. Failure to pass any validation test renders the entire care-history of the child invalid, and these records are excluded from all analyses.
- efforts are made to ensure that for every child who is looked after at 31 March, a further episode for that child is submitted in the following year. No child can simply go “missing” from the database without this being reported back to the appropriate authority.

The principal disadvantage of the SSDA 903, being a one-third sample survey, is that it is unable to produce reliable estimates when sample numbers are small.

Table A2 at Appendix A gives a comparison of the CLA 100 and SSDA 903 databases as at the time they were frozen in order to prepare this publication. In this table ratios are given for each local authority

in respect of the three principal child groups – children looked after at 31 March 1999, those who started to be looked after during the year, and those who ceased. (see previous section on Four Ways of Presenting Data). Taking into account leap years, the expected value of all ratios is 3.07, although exactly this figure is unlikely to be achieved very often because of the chance effects of sampling. Ratios which indicate a significant difference between the CLA 100 and the SSDA 903 submission have been underscored, and any estimate in this publication that depends on an underscored ratio should be treated with caution.

Of the 148 local authorities, which submitted a SSDA 903 return for 1998/99, 70 had at least one of their ratios significantly different so as to indicate an inconsistency between the two returns. Five authorities – Redcar & Cleveland, Telford, Birmingham, Hackney and Kent – showed inconsistencies for all three child groups; whereas at the other extreme, data from several authorities, notably Blackpool, Manchester, Leicestershire, Sandwell, Rutland and Hampshire, produced all three ratios that were at or near the expected.

Table A2 also shows that generally speaking, the ratios for children looked after at 31 March 1999 are closer to the expected than those for either children ceasing or starting to be looked after during the year. It is noticeable that it is chiefly

amongst these latter two categories that the really wayward ratios appear. For the reasons stated above, it is felt that these outlying ratios are more likely to be due to errors in the CLA 100 return rather than in the SSDA 903 one third submission.

### **Section 53 children**

For reasons of simplicity, local authorities were asked to include in their CLA100 figures children under Section 53 of the 1933 Children and Young Persons Act, even though these are generally not looked after. This will inflate the England estimate for 31 March 1998 by about 90 children, and the 31 March 1999 figure by about 130 children, compared with figures for previous years.

### **Local Government Reorganisation**

Local authorities affected by reorganisation at the end of March 1998 supplied the Department with information indicating which successor authority took over responsibility for which looked after child. This information covered all children looked after by these authorities since the implementation of the Children Act. It has therefore enabled us to present estimated data in this publication for the new authorities for years before they came into existence.

### **Rounding**

National estimates for 1992 onwards presented in this publication have been rounded. As a result detailed figures may not sum to the totals presented. All figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred if they exceed 1,000 and to the nearest ten otherwise. Figures for earlier years were originally published unrounded and are therefore presented here unrounded.

### **Rates and percentages**

Rates per 10,000 population have been calculated using the appropriate mid-year estimates of the number of children in England aged under 18, supplied by the Office for National Statistics. A small number of children aged 18 and over are included in the figures, but this is not thought to seriously distort the rate. The mid-year population estimates for 1996 to 1998 are presented in Appendix A. These have been used to derive estimates of rates for the years 1996/7 to 1998/9 respectively.

Percentages are presented in the tables in italics. They are shown as whole numbers, and as a result may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

### **Figures on the Internet**

The Department of Health's web site contains a copy of this publication, with all the tables in a suitable format for downloading into Microsoft Excel. It can be found under the heading Social Care at:

**<http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/stats3.htm>**

### **Symbols used in the tables**

The following conventions have been used in the tables:

- .. not available
- zero
- \* estimate less than 5 (for numbers), or less than 0.5 (for rates and percentages)
- . not applicable