

INTRODUCTION

Why does the Department collect statistics on children's services?

The statistics presented in this publication are, in the main, derived from four statistical returns submitted by local councils in England. The SSDA 903, which is the principal return, provides anonymous profiles of the care history of children who have been looked after since the implementation of the Children Act. This information is then supplemented by two additional returns that provide more detailed information on key stages in the care history of some children. These are the AD1 form (which is completed for children adopted from care) and the OC1 form (which is completed for children leaving care aged 16 or over). Finally, local councils provide additional aggregate data on children's services via the CLA100 collection. All of this data represents a substantial information resource that is used for:

- the evaluation of the outcome of policy initiatives and the monitoring of trends by the Department of Health and the Social Services Inspectorate;
- the evaluation of the quality of data provided by authorities for the Performance Assessment Framework and for the Quality Protects Management Action Plans;
- the provision of statistics and analyses to inform discussions on government expenditure;
- the provision of information to Ministers and Parliamentary Committees;
- the provision of statistical information in response to parliamentary questions;
- the provision of information for research;
- the publication of information about children looked after in England, including figures for individual local authorities, which can be used by those authorities and by others to assist with the monitoring of trends and the planning of services.

What is a 'looked after' child?

Social services for children are provided under the Children Act 1989, which was implemented on 14 October 1991. Under this Act a child is 'looked after' by a local authority if he or she is placed in their care by a court (under a care order) or provided with accommodation by the authority's Social Services Department for more than 24 hours. The

Children Act is considered in further detail in the box on page 11.

Scope of the "Looked After" statistical collection

It should be borne in mind that the statistics presented in this publication only refer to the 'looked after' population, as defined above. There will be many other children and young people who receive a service from a local authority, for example under Section 17 of the Children Act (which provides that it is the duty of every local authority to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area who are in need.) Such children do not appear in these statistics, unless at some stage they become looked after. Similarly, on reaching their 18th birthday, the vast majority of children who are still looked after at that age cease to fall within the definition of a looked after child as given in the Children Act. As such, they are recorded as ceasing to be looked after in these statistics (see table G), even though many of these young people will continue to receive support from a local authority beyond their 18th birthday under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

Although these statistics are confined to England, a similar collection based on the SSDA 903 form is made in Wales. Figures for Wales can be obtained from the National Assembly for Wales, whose address is given at the end of this section.

The 'Children in Need' statistical collection

The Department has recently initiated a wider data collection to cover all children in contact with the Children's and Family Services of local authorities, including those who are looked after. This survey, conducted during a sample week, is designed to give a more comprehensive picture of the work of Social Services Departments with children in their area. The first survey was conducted in February 2000, and the second during September/October 2001. The results of the first survey are available on the internet at www.doh.gov.uk/cin/cin.htm and results of the second survey will be published in summer 2002.

The SSDA 903 collection

The SSDA 903 is a statistical return submitted by local councils covering individual children in their care. A copy of the form, (which can be submitted to

the Department either in manuscript, or electronically), together with a list of the codes that local councils can use, are reproduced in Appendix B. All SSDA 903 data received by the Department is subjected to a rigorous validation procedure, and any records that fail validation are returned to the local council for correction. From 1 April 1997 authorities were required to provide data for only a sample of their children; children born on a day of the month divisible by three are included in the sample.

The information collected contains details normally available when the child starts to be looked after (sex, date of birth, category of need, legal status under which looked after and the type of placement) and all subsequent changes to the legal status or placement (including ceasing to be looked after). On each occasion that there is a change, the date and reason for the change are recorded on the form. Information for each child is supplied to the Department of Health annually, and these records are then linked (by means of a unique identifier for each child) to any supplied by the same local authority in preceding years (from 1992 onwards).

It should be emphasised that an individual child may start and cease to be looked after more than once in a particular year, or a single period of being looked after may span several years. As far as possible, the analyses presented relate to children rather than individual episodes of care. (For the purposes of collecting data on form SSDA 903, the care history of each looked after child is recorded in "episodes". In general, when a child's placement, or legal status changes, a new "episode" is generated).

Until 31 March 1991, statistics were collected on children in care under the legislation that preceded the Children Act. Children looked after by local council's include a number who would not previously have been counted as children in care, for example those for whom a series of short term breaks was provided. For this reason the number of children looked after is not directly comparable with the number of children in care under old legislation.

The CLA100 collection

This publication also includes aggregate data from the CLA100 collection. This return was introduced during 1998 to enable the Department to publish summary statistics in advance of the more detailed data presented here. Provisional figures for 2000/01 based on the CLA100 collection were published in a Department of Health Statistical Bulletin in October 2000. A copy of the CLA100 form is reproduced at Appendix C. The approach used to combine CLA100 and SSDA 903 data in this

publication is described in the Technical Notes.

Performance Assessment Framework

In October 2001 the Department of Health published the Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) data for 2000/01. Local authorities provided their PAF figures for the year on three returns – the PSSEx1, the KS1, (copies of which are on the Department's web site) and the CLA100. For those indicators relating to looked after children the PAF figures provided by authorities should have been consistent with their CLA100 or SSDA 903 returns. However, this was not always the case. In this publication, data have mainly been based on the SSDA 903 returns rather than the PAF data. The only exception to this are the adoption figures in Table 16, where PAF figures have been used from 1998/9; this is because the numbers involved for many authorities are relatively small and therefore cannot be estimated reliably from the SSDA 903 one-third sample.

Agreed series of short term placements

The statistical collection covers all children accommodated under an agreed series of short term breaks (under Regulation 13 of the Arrangements for Placement of Children Regulations 1991). Since April 1992 authorities have been given a choice of either recording every short term placement as a separate episode or recording, as one episode, the continuous period spent under an agreement. When this information was first collected, in 1991/2, authorities were only offered the first of these options. The difficulties experienced by many authorities in gathering this level of detail made it necessary to provide a second option. Because of this alternative approach to recording these placements, figures on children accommodated under an agreed series of short term placements are not included in the main national and local authority analyses. The information available about these short term placements is summarised at national level in Table I and at local authority level in Table 2.

Tables presented

Tables A to D to F, K, N, and S, present data at the national level for recent years. Tables L to R and T to X provide more detailed figures at the national level for the year ending 31 March 2001 only. Tables 1 to 18 give figures for individual local

¹ Social Services Performance in 2000/01,
Department of Health

² www.doh.gov.uk/paf

authorities, whilst Table A1 in Appendix A gives population data for each authority. Also included at Appendix A, is Table A2 on data quality, where for each local authority, comparisons are made between the information received on the CLA100 and the results of analysing the one-third SSDA 903 sample. For further information on data quality see Technical Notes. All tables are available on the Department of Health's web sites; see below for the address.

Figures on children looked after at 31 March 2001 relate to all children looked after by a local authority at 31 March, excluding children who were the subject of an agreed series of short-term placements under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. Figures on children who started to be looked after relate to those who began a period of care during the year. The legal status, placement and age details represent the position when they started to be looked after. If they started to be looked after more than once during the year the figures relate to the first occasion. Where a period of care was initiated by an agreed series of short-term placements under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, this episode is ignored in producing the tables in this volume. Consequently, children with periods of accommodation initiated by and consisting only of these short-term placements are completely excluded. However, where an agreed series is followed by the child being looked after under another legal status (a care order, compulsory care or a single placement under Section 20), it is the start of this second period which is treated as the point at which the child "started to be looked after" for tabulation purposes.

Figures for children who ceased to be looked after are based on those who had a period of care that ceased during the year to 31 March. Where a child ceased to be looked after more than once during a year the figures relate to the last occasion. Where a child was the subject of an agreement for a series of short-term placements when he or she ceased being looked after, this period of accommodation has been ignored in producing the tables. Consequently, children who were only looked after for agreed series of short-term placements during the year are completely excluded from these tables. Conversely children are included if a period under such an agreement was preceded by a separate period which ended while the child was looked after under another legal status (a care order, compulsory care or a single placement under Section 20).

Revisions to the figures for previous years

Revised estimates for the years ending 31 March 1997 to 31 March 2000 have been included in this publication; these revised figures replace those previously published for these years. For further information on the revisions of data, particularly for the year ending 31 March 2000, see under Technical notes.

Further enquiries and analyses

Copies of the tables in this publication have been placed on the Department's web sites; they are also available on computer disk from the address below. Further analyses of the data can also be provided, although large requests may incur a charge to cover the costs involved. Please write to:

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SD3A, Department of Health,
Room 451C, Skipton House
Elephant and Castle
80 London Road
London SE1 6LH

Telephone: 020 7972 5799 Fax: 020 7972 5662
E-mail: steve.maslen@doh.gsi.gov.uk

The Department of Health's web site contains all the tables from this publication, which may be downloaded. They can be found at:

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

Welsh Data

Enquiries on published information for Wales should be made to:

Health Statistics & Analysis Unit
The National Assembly for Wales
Cathays Park, Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

Telephone: 01222 825041 Fax: 01222 825350

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May 2002*