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Patterns of service contacts for children who have experienced maltreatment and are known to social services: a Linked Routine Administrative Data Study in Wales, England and Denmark

Amrita Bandyopadhyay¹, Natasha Kennedy¹, Laura Cowley¹, Peter Fallesen², Marcella Broccia³, Troels Græsholt-Knudsen⁴, Eliazar Luna⁵, Catherine Quantin⁶, and Sinead Brophy¹

¹Swansea University, Swansea, United Kingdom

²ROCKWOOL Foundation, Copenhagen, Denmark; Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden

³Dept. of Paediatrics and Adolescent, Zealand University Hospital, Roskilde, Denmark; Dept. of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, Herlev and Gentofte Hospital, Herlev, Denmark; Dept. Of Clinical and Translationel Research, Steno Diabetes Center Copenhagen, Herlev, Denmark

⁴Department of Forensic Medicine, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark

⁵UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, University College London, London, United Kingdom

⁶Biostatistics and Bioinformatics (DIM), University Hospital, Dijon, France; Inserm, CIC 1432, Dijon, France; Dijon University Hospital, Clinical Investigation Center, Dijon, France; Université Paris-Saclay, UVSQ, Univ. Paris-Sud, Inserm, Villejuif, France

Maltreated children may have multiple contacts with services both before and after possible identification by social services. This study examines contact patterns and pathways through public services among maltreated children who are known to social services, providing evidence about potential gaps in support. This study is part of the European Commission Horizon Health 2024 SERENA project. We link children recorded in child protection (CP) and children looked after (CLA) registers in Wales, England (Growing up in England and ECHILD) and in Denmark with their routine administrative data on health (hospital admissions, emergency care, general practice), education, employment and justice. This enables comparison of public service utilisation between children known to social services and a propensity-matched cohort not known to social services, from two years before to two-ten years after social ser-

vice involvement. Result Findings will be presented by each country to examine whether consistent service contact patterns can help to identify maltreated or high-risk children, along with the pattern of service usage after the initial social service contact. Preliminary findings from Wales indicate that children on the CP register, but not CLA, use emergency departments more than the matched general population. Furthermore, CLA are more likely to depend on benefits and experience unemployment in adulthood compared to matched children and those on the CP register. Mapping service usage among maltreated children can inform targeted interventions to mitigate adverse outcomes and support early identification to prevent further harm, with potential for cross-national learning.

