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Outcomes of Children Looked-After: Evidence from Growing Up in England

Richmond Opoku¹, Natasha Kennedy², Jonathan Kennedy³, Dan Bristow⁴, and Sinead Brophy⁵

¹The Centre for Population Health, Medical School, Swansea University, Swansea, United Kingdom; Administrative Data Research Wales (ADR-Wales), Swansea, United Kingdom

²The Centre for Population Health, Medical School, Swansea University, Swansea, United Kingdom; Health Data Research UK, Wales (HDRUK Wales), Swansea, United Kingdom

³The Centre for Population Health, Medical School, Swansea University, Swansea, United Kingdom

⁴Wales Centre for Public Policy, Cardiff University, Cardiff, United Kingdom

⁵The Centre for Population Health, Medical School, Swansea University, Swansea, United Kingdom; Administrative Data Research Wales (ADR-Wales), Swansea, United Kingdom; Health Data Research UK, Wales (HDRUK Wales), Swansea, United Kingdom

Becoming looked-after by a local authority represents a major disruption in childhood and is linked to long term consequences for health and social outcomes. While the intention of taking children into care is to provide protection where remaining at home is unsafe, limited evidence exists on how entering care shapes later outcomes compared with remaining in the family home under similar pre care conditions. This study examines outcomes after becoming looked-after and compares these outcomes with outcomes for children who remained with their family. Outcomes are being compared between children looked-after and children who were not looked-after using Growing Up in England (GUiE) Waves 1 and 2 datasets. These datasets contain linked population level administrative data on children between the 2010/2011 and 2015/2016 academic years. Children looked-after are matched to general

population controls on age and gender, with additional comparisons planned with children in need. Descriptive analyses, regression models and Blinder Oaxaca decomposition will be used to assess differences in outcomes and the extent to which these differences are explained by observed characteristics. Outcomes examined include health outcomes measured through the general health status flag and educational outcomes including school absences, exclusions and attainment. Results are expected by March 2026. Planned outputs include regression coefficients, odds ratios, mean differences in outcomes and decomposition estimates showing the proportion of differences that are explained or unexplained. These findings will contribute new evidence on the associations between becoming looked-after and subsequent health and education outcomes.

