

Extreme ethnic inequalities in the care system

December 5 2018

New research has found extreme inequalities between ethnic groups in the proportions of children being looked after in care in England.

'White British' children are ten times more likely to be in care than 'Asian Indian' children. 'Black Caribbean' children are 20 times more likely.

These inequalities are poorly understood and little attention is paid to them in children's services policy.

The implications for social justice are profound. So are the implications for the funding of services.

Funded by the Nuffield Foundation and carried out by a team from seven universities, led by Professor Paul Bywaters of University of Huddersfield, the Child Welfare Inequalities Project studied 6,000 children in England on child protection plans and 8,000 children in care, across a representative sample of 18 local authorities.

A number of headline findings came out of the work.

- Disproportionate numbers of children from Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Caribbean and African backgrounds live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Around three quarters of all children from these groups live in the most deprived 40% of small neighbourhoods in England, while 'White British' and

- 'Asian Indian' children are distributed more evenly.
- 'Asian' children overall are almost three times less likely to be in care than 'White' children and almost four times less likely than 'Black' children.
- But there are also big differences between 'Indian', 'Pakistani' and 'Bangladeshi' children, with 'Indian' children rarely the subject of children's services involvement.
- Black African' children in higher deprivation neighbourhoods are much less likely than 'White British' children to be in care or on a protection plan. But in low deprivation areas where they are few in number they are more likely than 'White' children to be in care.
- 'Black Caribbean' children at all levels of neighbourhood deprivation are more likely than 'White British' children to be in care. Amongst 16 and 17 year olds, 1 'Black Caribbean' child in 30 was in care, compared to 1 in 100 'White British' children.
- The proportion of children from minority [ethnic groups](#) in different local authorities varied from almost none to around four in five leading to large differences in demands on services.

Why are there such inequalities?

The study highlighted various areas for concern, which included:

- Policy makers and researchers appear to have paid little attention to ethnic inequalities in children's services over the past twenty years. We do not have the evidence we need to explain these differences in care rates.
- We do not know enough about the factors behind the large inequalities in family economic circumstances. And we do not know enough about the differential rates of children in care.
- Simplistic assumptions about strong extended families cannot explain why there are large differences between 'Indian',

- 'Pakistani' and 'Bangladeshi' sub-groups.
- Simplistic assumptions about 'Black' families cannot explain the large differences between 'Caribbean' and 'African' children.
- Low rates in care may mean some children in need are being missed or that some communities are more effective in supporting children's development than others. But we need better information.
- High rates bring high costs, both personal and economic.

What can be done?

According to Professor Bywaters, there is an urgent need to understand why these extreme differences occur in order to learn the lessons for policy and practice, and that a major research programme is required.

"Gaps in educational attainment have been significantly reduced over the last twenty years. Reducing inequalities in care rates should become a central government policy objective for the Department for Education.

"The scale of the inequalities has considerable implications for the direction of children's services and for how scarce funding is spent. If the proportion of children in [care](#) in all other groups was reduced to that for 'Asian Indian' [children](#), spending would be reduced by 90%," he said.

More information: Paul Bywaters et al, Paradoxical evidence on ethnic inequities in child welfare: Towards a research agenda, *Children and Youth Services Review* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.chilyouth.2018.11.042](#)

Provided by University of Huddersfield

Citation: Extreme ethnic inequalities in the care system (2018, December 5) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-12-extreme-ethnic-inequalities.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.