

Scale of substance misuse among adolescents in residential care revealed

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Young people in residential care need better support to overcome a range of challenges, Cardiff University academics say.

The survey of school students aged 11 to 16 shows young people in [residential care](#) had the lowest mental wellbeing score, more than half (56 percent) had been exposed to bullying recently and nearly three quarters (74 percent) were involved in fighting in the past year.

This group also had less positive feelings about [school](#). These factors have been shown to be associated with risk of substance misuse.

Indeed, more than a third (36 percent) of young people in residential care say they have been drunk in the past 30 days, the research shows. This figure is compared to just 9 percent of young people not in care. A quarter (26 percent) of adolescents in residential placements said they smoke weekly in contrast to 3 percent of those who live at home.

Professor Simon Murphy, of the Centre for the Development and Evaluation of Complex Interventions for Public Health Improvement (DECIPHer), said: "The most striking findings from this study are the disadvantages young people in residential care face compared to those elsewhere in the care system and in stark contrast to those living outside it.

Data for the study were gathered from 85,000 students aged 11 to 16, who completed questions as part of the School Health Research Network Student Health and Wellbeing Survey, the largest survey of its kind in the UK. Currently 210 schools in Wales are part of the network. Students who took part were separated into four categories—those not in care, in [foster care](#), residential care or kinship care—where they are placed with another family member.

Professor Murphy added: "These findings demonstrate that the Welsh Government should be examining this problem further and considering ways in which improvements for those in care could be achieved."

At any given time, approximately 6,000 young people in Wales are "looked after" by [local authorities](#) in Wales, with 9 percent placed in residential care such as secure units, children's homes, independent living or in residential schools. As of 31 March 2018, the majority of [young people](#) "looked after" were accommodated in foster care (74 percent).

The School Health Research Network (SHRN) was established in 2013 and is led by DECIPHer. It is a partnership between Cardiff University, Welsh Government, Public Health Wales, Cancer Research UK and the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research Data and Methods (WISERD).

Provided by Cardiff University

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