

Outsourced children's care homes provide poorer quality care

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Credit: Pavel Danilyuk from Pexels

For-profit children's homes provide poorer quality services for children in care than homes run by Local Authorities, according to research from the University of Oxford's Department for Social Policy and

Intervention. Based on the use of Ofsted ratings, the research has been published in *Social Science and Medicine*.

Dr. Anders Bach-Mortensen, Carlsberg Foundation Visiting Fellow from Oxford's Department for Social Policy and Intervention, says, "It is well known, huge profits are being made by companies running these homes, but the response has typically been that the quality of the services justify the costs. Our [research](#) suggests quality is not the same in both sectors and should be of concern to commissioners."

Outsourcing and for-profit provision have become a dominant practice in the children's residential social care sector in England but, the researchers note, there is a critical absence of evidence of the impact this has had on the quality of these services—and the experience of children in care.

This new research reveals for-profit children's homes, on average, receive worse Ofsted ratings than Local Authority homes in all inspection domains. It also showed Local Authorities with higher levels of outsourcing to for-profits are also rated worse for their children social care services, and that for-profit homes violate more legal requirements of their care provision.

Benjamin Goodair, co-author and doctoral researcher, says, "Our analysis shows the outsourcing of these services has not delivered as promised in terms of securing high service quality for children in care. This is a cause for concern because most children are currently accommodated by for-profit providers."

The researchers created a dataset from more than 13,000 Ofsted inspections of [children's](#) homes, the providers being inspected by Ofsted, the area of operation and a measure of deprivation of that area, spanning from 2014 to 2021.

The authors note caution is needed in terms of regulating the sector going forward because many of the problems faced by Local Authorities are exacerbated by a lack of appropriate places, and the role of for-profit providers cannot be replaced without substantial coordination and long-term planning.

More information: Anders Malthe Bach-Mortensen et al, Outsourcing and children's social care: A longitudinal analysis of inspection outcomes among English children's homes and local authorities, *Social Science & Medicine* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2022.115323](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2022.115323)

Provided by University of Oxford

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