


**Continuities and discontinuities:
implications for the well-being of children in care**

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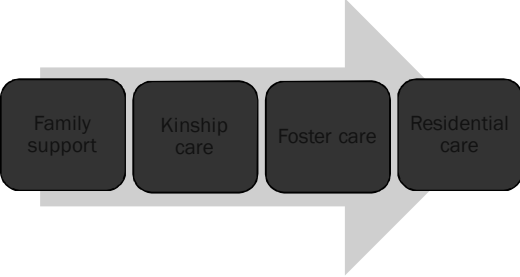


Children in care

<p>England</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1:161 children in care • 11% in residential care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Two thirds of them in children's homes with av 4 residents – Under fives not reported • 74% fostered (11% with relatives) • 14% leave for adoption (4350 in 2016-7) 	<p>Flanders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.116 (Belgium, 2008) • 57% in residential care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 3% under five • 43% fostered • Minimal local adoptions
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Care careers (England)



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Regardless of our differences:

- England and Flanders both have problems concerning unstable placements
- This is a common problem in Western societies
- It is also longstanding and continuing (In England 10% (7260) children in care had three or more placements in last year – reduced by 6% in 16 years).
- Many children experience instability before, during and after care




Who moves and why?

- Loughborough cohort studies of looked after children (1996 -2004)
 - 242 in first cohort, followed for 3.5 years
 - Interviews with 49 children and young people (followed for 5.5 years)
 - Further follow-up of infants aged under one at entry
- Costing study 478 children for 20 months – 2000-2001
- Longitudinal study of infants at risk of significant harm (2007-2015)
- Outcomes study of 210 children placed for adoption by Barnardos Australia (1985-2017)

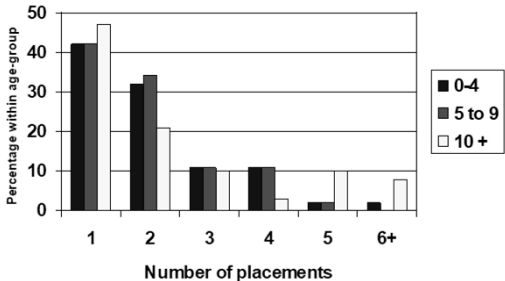


Factors that relate to instability

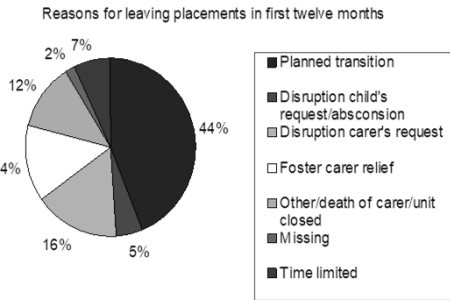
- Age of child
- Reasons for endings
- Needs of child
- Type of placement



Number of placements in first twelve months



Why do children move?




Why so many planned transitions?

- Most children are best with their families
- Effort goes into preventing children from coming into care
- 80% already well-known, but 90% of first placements unplanned and temporary → planned second placements
- Shortage of foster carers (c.7,600 in UK) → temporary placements
- System geared to providing short-term placements for children who will quickly return home. Planned/unplanned temporary placements → planned/unplanned long-term placements
- Planned moves between respite foster care placements
- Sequential temporary placements reinforce perceptions of transience



Increased stability over time

- In first twelve months 31% of the cohort had three or more placements
- In third twelve months 11% of the cohort had three or more placements


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Reasons for increased stability

- The longer children stay in care or accommodation the more likely they are to find a stable placement
- The greatest amount of movement occurs in the first twelve months of being looked after
- Those children and young people for whom it is most difficult to find placements tend to leave earlier


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Needs related to costs (n=478)


Group	Number	%age	Cost
None (A)	129	27	1
EBD (B)	129	27	1.5
Offend (C)	46	10	1.7
UASC (D)	10	2	1.9
CWD (E)	30	6	2.2
CWD + EBD (F)	46	9	2.9
EBD + Offend (G)	72	15	3.2

Differences in stability over 20 months

<p>Group A</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 83% one placement • 1% 5+ • 18 months average length of foster placement • 9 months average length of residential plt 	<p>Group G</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21% one placement • 31% 5+ • 5 months average length foster placement • 5 months average length residential plt
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Children with no additional support needs


- Placement stability , family based care
- Better opportunities for contact
- Better educational outcomes
- Meet eligibility criteria for additional support
- A virtuous circle



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Children with emotional or behavioural difficulties AND offending behaviour

- Frequent placement changes
- Financial and emotional costs to each change
- Each change increases likelihood of institutional placement
- Fewer opportunities for contact
- Exclusions and changes of school
- Not eligible or refusal of additional support
- A vicious circle



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Why does instability matter?
Part One

Obvious issues

- Disrupted schooling and poor educational outcomes
- Inconsistent health care

Hidden issues

- Difficulties in forming attachments
- Loss of key relationships
- Poor social integration and loss of friends




Changes of placement in context

Before entry to care and after leaving many children will experience:

- Discontinuities of domicile, household, education, relationships


These experiences are reinforced in care with discontinuities of :

- Domicile (placement)
- Household (children and staff)
- Education
- Relationships (social workers, carers, friends)
- Loss of treasured possessions




Transience before and after care

- In a sample of 42 babies who entered care before their first birthday, 7 had had two or three and 11 had had four or more addresses before admission. Five had had four or more carers.
- In a sample of 242 children in long-term care, one in three (33%) had experienced one and one in eight (12%) had experienced two or more previous admissions



Frequent changes of domicile, carer and household

'Well my Dad took me to live with him and my stepmother and then after two weeks he gave me to my Granny and he said 'Here, you have him, I don't want him', and then after a week he came down and took me to my Nana's and then after six weeks I was at my Dad'sand then after four days I was living with my Auntie for three weeks and then I started living with my Nana again'
(Gary, aged 12)




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Transience within care

There's so many kids coming in and out of children's homes. You can have a best friend one day and then, you can go to the shop and they've gone and they're not allowed to tell you where..


Anthony age entry 14



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Transience within care

I used to hate it when I either had to change social workers or change placements or something like that because it was just another thing to get used to....just settling into new families and starting all over again....fitting in with other kids that live there especially if it was their birth children....it varied how they treated you, especially when they compared you to their own, and when they got annoyed with you because you didn't know how to take them or anything. (Eliza. Age at entry: 12 years. Age left: 13 years old.)




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**Why does instability in care matter?
Part Two**


More hidden issues:

- Reinforcement of perceptions of transience
- Impact on emotional and behavioural development
- Adverse impact on developing sense of identity
- Adverse impact on self-esteem




Impact on emotional and behavioural development

- 37% children in care with emotional/behavioural development rated as 'cause for concern' (SDQ)
- Placement instability associated with post traumatic stress (Villodas et al, 2016)
- Defined as institutionalised emotional abuse



Transience and the identity formation process
(Chandler, Lalonde et al, 1987, 2003, 2006, ongoing)

- Reconciliation of need to change and develop alongside need to remain the same
- Understanding that, 'despite all the changes that life and time has in store, you can claim confident ownership of your own past and feel a strong commitment to your own future...'
- Dislocated moments when continuity preserving thread that guarantees a personal stake in the future is lost
- Adolescents negotiating numerous transformations of identity risk losing this thread
- Self-destructive behaviours show lack of concern for future wellbeing
- Sense of personal and cultural persistence are key to successful identity formation






Personal and cultural persistence grounded in symbolic and treasured possessions

Loss of symbolic and treasured possessions

- I never really had things...just boxes....I'd moved so much everything got lost somewhere along the line
- My family refused to give me anything belonging to my Dad or my TV or my toys....They basically said I didn't deserve them any more....
- They (foster carers) took all my photos I had of them....

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Movement and belongings

'She bought me a sheath knife, 'cause I went to scouts, and they used to do camp, she bought it for me, it had my name on the case...she bought it for me, it said my name on the back, so it's mine, she bought it for me and me alone and then when I were coming out I never got my sheath knife back'

Marcus, aged 9 at entry



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Implications for policy and practice

- Understanding placement changes in context
- Understanding child's lived experiences – how change is experienced; material consequences
- Policies and practices to promote stability –
 - In decision-making
 - In workforce planning
 - In placement planning
 - In support for carers



Final word from a carer

'Yes, they are resilient, but if you move a child several times before their adoption then the adoptive parents are going to have a very long struggle to get them to realise that this is where they are for good, this is where they are going to stay. Because children will be very hesitant to give you their love, to trust you....It takes years....I would like to say that, I don't know whether anything can be done about it, but that **children don't bounce**'




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Thank you

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