

NSPCC response to the Community Information Branch's assessment of Looked After Children statistics

September 2014

NSPCC welcome the opportunity to respond to your consultation on the comparability of statistics relating to Looked After Children (LAC) across the different countries in the United Kingdom. As a UK wide organisation, we routinely access published data to better understand the nature and frequency of children and young people who require greater vigilance in terms of their protection, therefore thank you also for publishing a succinct summary of data available for the four nations of the UK in one place.

How we use child protection data

The NSPCC is interested in the comparability of this (and other child protection data) and we have been grappling with some of the nuances and difficulties of comparing disparate sources. We publish a report annually called *How Safe Are Our Children*¹ which draws together the most robust and up-to-date child protection data that exists across each of the four nations in the UK. It sets out 20 different indicators and for each indicator we comment on why the measure is important, its limitations and data availability and comparability. The report also includes a section summarising the factors that influence a child's risk of abuse or neglect.

In our report we include a number of indicators related to looked-after children. Specifically how many children are looked after, or ideally looked after due to abuse and neglect (indicator 17) and the proportion of looked-after children who have three or more placements during the year (indicator 18).

Key gaps that we feel should be addressed

Category of need	England and Wales currently make data available on this, including whether they are looked after due to abuse and neglect. From a child protection perspective, this is important, yet this data is not available for Northern Ireland or Scotland.
Disability status	An area that has had insufficient attention in all nations is disability. There is strong evidence base that shows that disabled children are many times more likely to experience abuse compared with non-disabled children. (Please see How Safe 2014, page 10 for a brief summary) However none of the nations in the UK publishes formal data on how many looked after children are disabled – this means we do not know, for example, whether disabled

¹ Jütte, S., Bentley, H., Miller, P. and Jetha, N. (2014) *How safe are our children?* (London: NSPCC). Available at: www.nspcc.org.uk/howsafe

	children are over or under-represented compared within the population as a whole. ²
Ethnic group	NI is currently the only nation in the UK that does not publish a category for ethnicity amongst the LAC population. Available data set would better help us understand the increased vulnerability of minority ethnic children here compared with the rest of the UK.
Short term placements	From the tables in the DHSSPS report it appears that Northern Ireland is the only nation to include LAC in short term placements in the population statistics. It would be useful to extract the short term placement children from the figures to make them more comparable with other UK nations.
Children starting and ceasing to be looked after	In England and Wales this data only captures the first time a child is taken into or leaving care, whereas Scotland and Northern Ireland include all episodes (so a child may be counted more than once). In addition NI does not record destination on discharge or reason for discharge. A consistent approach across the four nations would be helpful.

I hope these comments are useful and please do not hesitate to contact us if you wish to discuss in further detail.

Yours sincerely,

Orla O'Hagan

² This point also applies to children on child protection registers in NI, Scotland and Wales and children subject to child protection plans in England.