

Study finds link between deprived areas and number of children in care proceedings in England

May 17 2023



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A strong link between the extent of deprivation of local authorities in

England and their numbers of children going into the care system through the family courts has been uncovered by researchers at Lancaster University.

The study, available online and due to be published in the July 2023 issue of the journal *Children & Society*, found that for every one unit increase in the standardized Office for National Statistics' (ONS) English index of multiple area deprivation, the number of [children](#) in care proceedings in English family courts increased by around 70%.

The research team analyzed data from the English Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) and area deprivation data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) from 2015 up until 2019.

The study, "Area-deprivation, [social care](#) spending and the rates of children in [care proceedings](#) in [local authorities](#) in England," was undertaken by Dr. Steffi Doebler, Professor Karen Broadhurst, Dr. Bachar Alrouh and Dr. Linda Cusworth.

The researchers also found that government spending on prevention, such as mother and child support, youth clubs, family help and advice centers, make a difference.

Each £1000 increase in social care spend per child, year and local authority has led to a 12% decrease in the rate of children in compulsory family court proceedings.

Lead author Dr. Steffi Doebler says, "Spending on prevention makes a real difference but the benefits are often hidden by the very large impact of deprivation.

"Local authorities in deprived areas are doing their best to support

vulnerable families, and they spend more of their budgets on social care than in non-deprived areas.

"But local authorities, especially in the most deprived areas, have been severely affected by austerity cuts over the last 13 years and are scrambling to compensate and afford prevention."

The study warns that Government funds received by local authorities are not enough to offset the "devastating effect" deprivation has had on families and children.

"We see, in highly deprived areas, the severe long-term harms caused by a decade of austerity," adds Dr. Doebler.

The authors conclude that if the UK government is serious about "leveling up," it needs to urgently reverse its austerity measures, tackle socioeconomic deprivation in local authorities and invest much more funding in preventative social care.

More information: Stefanie Doebler et al, Area-deprivation, social care spending and the rates of children in care proceedings in local authorities in England, *Children & Society* (2023). DOI: [10.1111/chso.12735](https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12735)

Provided by Lancaster University

Citation: Study finds link between deprived areas and number of children in care proceedings in England (2023, May 17) retrieved 23 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-05-link-deprived-areas-children-proceedings.html>

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