

Systematic Review Protocol
**A mixed methods rapid review of placement
outcomes of black children in out of home care,
compared to children from other ethnic groups
in out of home care in England**
Evaluator (institution): WWCS
Principal investigator(s): Aoife O'Higgins

Review title

Institutional affiliation	What Works for Children's Social Care
Principal Investigator	Aoife O'Higgins
Protocol Author(s)	Hannah Collyer, Ella Whelan, Nishi Ghedia, Fardawza Ahmed, Eva Schoenwald, Clare Clancy and Bev Curtis
Contact details	Eva Schoenwald - eva.schoenwald@whatworks-csc.org.uk

Summary

This document proposes a rapid review of the literature investigating differences in placement outcomes for Black children in care compared to other ethnic groups. For the purpose of this review, we will be using 'ethnic group' as the consistent term throughout the review. Ethnic group is defined as an "encompassing common ancestry and elements of culture, identity, religion, language and physical appearance" (ONS, 2011). Due to the limited available research on different ethnic groups in the care system, we have defined 'Black children' as children of African and Caribbean heritage as well as 'any other Black background' (ONS, 2011). Nonetheless, we are interested to find out if there are differences in placement outcomes for children in care who are of African and Caribbean heritage compared to other ethnic groups, with outcomes analysed separately for children of African and Caribbean heritage, respectively, if available. As little experimental evidence is expected to be reviewed, the review methods will be based on the methods of a rapid Qualitative Evidence Synthesis (rapid QES), which has been recently described in a review article by Biestly et al (2020). Studies will be included based on a search strategy based on predefined inclusion criteria, as well as by a manual search of online social work related research repositories, and after a process of filtering based on predefined exclusion criteria. The evidence will be analysed and synthesized using a 'best fit' thematic framework approach, and presented in a written text and table format. The risk of bias of each included study will be assessed using CASP's qualitative checklist, and summarised in an accompanying table. Finally, the quality of the body of evidence supporting each finding will be assessed using the GRADE-CERQual framework, and presented in an evidence profile table.

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Part 1) Rationale and question formulation

Rationale

WWCSC are conducting this rapid review to better understand the existing literature around placement outcomes of Black children in care, and whether this differs from the placement outcomes of children from other ethnic groups in care in the UK. Specifically, we seek to understand whether placement stability and reunification rates for Black children in care differs from other ethnic groups, along with health outcomes (mental and physical) and educational outcomes (attainment and exclusions).

For the purpose of this review, we will be using 'ethnic group' as the consistent term throughout the review. Ethnic group is defined as an "encompassing common ancestry and elements of culture, identity, religion, language and physical appearance" (ONS, 2011). Due to the limited available research on different ethnic groups in the care system, we have defined 'Black children' as children of African and Caribbean heritage as well as 'any other Black background' (ONS, 2011). We have included 'any other Black background' because some research might not be disaggregated. Nonetheless, we are interested to find out if there are differences in placement outcomes for children in care who are of African and Caribbean heritage compared to other ethnic groups, with outcomes analysed separately for children of African and Caribbean heritage, respectively, if available. While we

	<p>acknowledge that Africa and the Carribean are not an ethnic group, the lack of research into specific ethnic groups have limited our scope. If possible, we will make sure that we include specific ethnic groups in our review.</p> <p>Given that Black children are overrepresented among children in need in general and among children who are looked after compared to other ethnic groups (Owen and Statham, 2009), this review aims to broadly outline the existing research in relation to this topic and highlight gaps within the literature. This has important implications for both practice and policy in relation to caring for Black children in out of home care, and understanding whether any disparities exist in the placement outcomes of Black children compared to children from other ethnic groups. We seek to better understand the experiences of Black children in out of home care, and whether this group of children experiences differences in placement outcomes relative to children from other ethnic groups in the UK.</p>
<p>Research question(s)</p>	<p>Q1: Do placement outcomes for Black children in care differ from placement outcomes for children from other ethnic groups in the UK?</p> <p>a: Do reunification rates for Black children in care differ from children from other ethnic groups in care in the UK?</p> <p>b: Does placement stability for Black children in care differ from other ethnic groups in care in the UK?</p> <p>c: Do health outcomes (both mental and physical) for Black children in care differ from other ethnic groups in care in the UK?</p> <p>d: Do educational outcomes (attainment and exclusions) for Black children in care differ from other ethnic groups in care in the UK?</p>

Part 2) Identifying relevant work

Search Strategy

<p>Electronic databases</p>	<p>Piloting of search strings indicated that there was a small amount of relevant literature in published academic literature.</p> <p>We will search SCOPUS which is a large abstract and citation database of peer reviewed literature that contains a large number of social work titles, including jey publications such as the British Journal of Social Work (Oxford) or the European Journal of Social Work (Taylor and Francis). We would also expect a more diverse set of wider child and social science journals in SCOPUS</p>
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	compared to other databases. SCOPUS also includes key titles from Community Care's guide to the key social care journals
Other sources	We will also search the websites of the British Association of Social Work (BASW); Community Care; Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) online database; and government publications for relevant literature.
Key search terms	<p><i>Synonyms for children/young people: child*, "young pe**", adolesc*</i></p> <p><i>Synonyms for children in care, e.g.: CLA, LAC, "out-of-home care",</i></p> <p><i>Synonyms for ethnicity: Black, African, Carribean, race, ethn*</i></p> <p><i>Restricted geography: "United Kingdom", UK, England</i></p> <p><i>Restricted outcomes: "health", "reunif**", "educ**", stability</i></p> <p><i>Registered date of publication: 2000-2020</i></p> <p><i>Restricted language: English only</i></p>
Draft search strategy	<p>Present draft of search strategy to be used for at least one electronic database, including planned limits, such that it could be repeated (see the PRISMA-P guidance for an example).</p> <p>We will record the number of publications identified in SCOPUS for each search term separately and then the combinations generated by boolean operators.</p> <p>We will search in the title/abstract/keyword for all but the outcomes, provided the search will yield sufficient results.</p> <p>[Title / Abstract / Keywords] placement OR "care experience?" OR "out-of-home care"OR "residential care" OR "looked after" OR "looked-after" OR "foster care" OR "foster famil**" OR CLA OR LAC OR "children?? home" OR "care home" OR "in care"</p> <p>[Title / Abstract / Keywords] AND "child OR "young pe**" OR adolescen*</p> <p>Title / Abstract / Keywords] <i>Black OR African OR Carribean OR race OR racial OR ethn* OR BAME OR BME</i></p> <p>[Title / Abstract / Keywords] England OR UK OR "United kingdom"</p> <p>[Anywhere] ((reunif* or return*) AND (parent* OR family OR home)) OR health OR mental OR physical OR emotion* OR wellbeing OR SDQ OR ((educ* OR school) AND (attainment OR achievement or key stage* OR GCSE OR exclu* OR attendance)) OR stability OR permanence OR moves OR change* OR breakdown OR missing OR abscond*</p>

Study selection criteria

Inclusion criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studies which focus on the outcomes of Black children in out of home care, specifically rates of reunification, mental and physical health, reunification and education (attainment and exclusions). If there is little research on Black children in particular, we will widen the focus to ethnic minority children in care
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Studies in England, or the UK (Not exclusively focusing on Wales, N. Ireland or Scotland). ● English language only ● Empirical research only ● Years: Published in the last 20 years, favour most recent publications ● Journal articles, working papers, organisational reports.
Exclusion criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Studies which solely focus on the experience of children and young people who are white in out of home care ● Non-English language texts. ● Studies outside of the UK. ● Studies which talk about young people over the age of 18 ● Unpublished material such as dissertations ● Historical accounts. Autobiographies. Non-empirical works. ● Studies published more than 20 years ago ● Studies that do not explain the research and study design, the methods of sampling, and data collection or analysis.
Process of study selection	<p>The process will begin using search strings in selected databases to identify a series of primary papers. We will then exclude papers on the basis of title, abstract and keywords. All titles and abstracts will be double screened, blind to the other screener's findings. When disagreement exists about inclusion in the full study, the studies will be discussed with a third reviewer. We will then move on to the full texts using the outlined criteria.</p> <p>From the references in the final selection of primary papers, we will then select secondary papers using the same process. We will also look at forward citations using connectedpapers.com, and then screen using the same process.</p> <p>Duplicate, companion and self-plagiarised documents will be removed after filtering on full text content.</p> <p>This process will result in a final list of studies included for synthesis.</p>

Study records

Data collection	One person will extract the relevant list of studies identified through the string search on scopus, downloading the data in a RIS format.
Data management process	Search results will be uploaded to rayyan. Screening will take place in rayyan. Extracted data from included studies will be recorded in a shared excel / google sheet.
Data items	As the review is mostly quantitative, the team will focus upon the research questions in relation to the data. In practice this means that the following 'variables' will be collected:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DOI - Authors - Journal - Publication year - Article Type - Country - Whether it answers RQ 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d - Outcome measure(s) - Sample size - Sample age - Sample ethnicity - Findings - Study design - Implications for England
<p>Outcomes and prioritisation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The review will deliver clear articulation of what the research tells us about the experience of black children in care, including reunification rates, placement stability, health and educational outcomes. This will be compared with children from other ethnic groups in care in the UK. - Increased understanding of barriers and facilitators in this area of social care practice.

Part 3) Risk of bias assessment

<p>Risk of bias assessment criteria</p>	<p>As the review will include qualitative, mixed-methods, and quantitative (including randomised, non-randomised, and descriptive) empirical studies, a single assessment framework is not appropriate. After determining which of the above categories an included study falls into (using the algorithm on page 8 of the MMAT layout), we will use two established mixed method appraisal checklists, the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme checklists (CASP) (providing ten questions each) and the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT). Together this will give the reviewer 10-15 criteria with which to appraise the study. As recommended by CASP, the reviewer will spend 10-15 minutes on each study, assessing the RoB and the overall quality.</p> <p>The product of this will be a descriptive table as an appendix. Following the recommendation of Walsh and Downe (2005), this will categorise methodological types of each study, and provide a summary of the appraisal. Rather than working through all criteria, this will highlight the major limitations/advantages of the study in relation to bias.</p> <p>Also following Walsh and Downe (2005), we will include these criteria in a table in the appendix.</p>
<p>Purpose of risk of bias assessment</p>	<p>The risk of bias assessment will be used to assess the strength of inferences and make recommendations for future research.</p>

Part 4) Summarising the evidence

<p>Data synthesis</p>	<p>A scoping exercise revealed that there have been few studies done within the proposed topic using experimental/quasi-experimental research designs to estimate causal effects. As such, a meta-analysis or standardised reporting of effect sizes will not be appropriate.</p> <p>Following Biesty et al (2020)'s article reflecting on their approach to a rapid Qualitative Evidence Synthesis on COVID-19 interventions, the summary will be in the form of a thematic synthesis using a 'best fit' framework approach. This synthesis method is recommended for tight timeframes, and has been used in a variety of prior qualitative rapid reviews. The method involves the preliminary identification of important themes or concepts against which to map findings from included studies, potentially from a pre-existing model identified from the literature. As the study develops, more themes can be added, building on the existing framework. These themes are used to analyse and synthesise the included research by identifying and extracting findings in each study which fall under these themes (analysis), and then synthesising the evidence in the text body of the review and in table format.</p> <p>Analysis: Data to be extracted can include verbatim quotations from study participants or findings reported by authors (which can be extracted from the results section). We will assign two reviewers to the role of extracting these findings, and assigning them to particular themes, and creating new themes as needed. Throughout this process, the two reviewers will discuss the framework, and will add/revise themes as needed.</p> <p>Synthesis: Synthesis will be done simultaneously with the analysis and will have two outputs: text and a table. The main body of the review synthesis will be in the form of written text, (organised under subheadings for each theme), describing the findings under each theme, and the body of evidence (i.e. the studies) that support each finding. The table format will arrange each finding under the relevant theme and simply cite the studies (i.e. the finding's body of evidence) which support it. During the writeup and quality assessment (see below) different reviewers may be allocated specific themes to engage with in depth.</p>
<p>Meta-bias(es)</p>	<p>If relevant, we will produce a funnel plot to check for the existence of publication bias.</p>
<p>Confidence in cumulative evidence</p>	<p>We will assess the confidence in the cumulative evidence using GRADE-CERQual (Confidence in Evidence from Reviews of Qualitative research) (Lewin, Bohren, et al., 2018) which examines the methodological limitations, coherence, adequacy of data, and relevance and allows for an overall assessment in confidence in the findings.</p>
<p>Reporting and interpreting findings</p>	<p>The final report will address the research questions and be structured in such a way as to be of use to researchers, commissioners of</p>

services, policy makers and all with an interest in this field of child social care practice.

Registration

The review will be registered with the OSF.

Personnel

Eva Schoenwald (Researcher) will be leading on the work with support from Hannah Collyer (Senior Researcher) and contributions according to capacity from an internal working group of Fardawza Ahmed (Programmes Manager), Clare Clancy (Programmes Manager), Bev Curtis (Practice Development Manager), Ella Whelan (Research Assistant) and Nishi Ghedia (Senior Administrator). The working group have so far contributed to the research questions and protocol. It is intended that each member of the working group will focus on a particular placement outcome listed in the research question and collect data from their respective focus.

References

This protocol template is informed by the following sources:

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