

Official Statistics Release

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Introduction

This official statistics release reports on statutory notifications of incidents affecting children, aged under 18 years. The data are experimental, because the statistics do not yet meet the rigorous quality standards of National Statistics.

These data only reflect the extent of Ofsted’s current knowledge about all the details relating to the notifications that were received in the relevant period. For example, it may not reflect other, more up-to-date, information that has not been provided to Ofsted. It is important that users understand clearly the status of these data and their limitations.

Contents

Introduction	2
Key findings	4
Methodology	8

Requirement for local authorities to notify Ofsted

Under Local Authority Circular LAC(2007)25, local authorities are required to provide statutory notifications of incidents affecting children to Ofsted.

Local authorities should notify Ofsted of serious incidents involving children which:

- are serious enough that they may lead to a Serious Case Review, including where a child has sustained a potentially life-threatening injury through abuse or neglect, serious sexual abuse, or sustained serious and permanent impairment of health or development through abuse or neglect; or
- involve a child death and will automatically lead to a Serious Case Review (when a child dies (including death by suicide) and abuse or neglect is known or suspected to be a factor in the child's death); or
- should be brought to the attention of Ofsted and the Government because of concern about professional practice or implications for Government policy; or
- raise issues about a council's professional practice that may need to be considered further in the context of performance assessment; or
- have attracted or are likely to attract media attention.

Local authorities are also obliged to inform Ofsted of the death of a child looked after and of every case that becomes the subject of a serious case review. Ofsted passes the information from these serious incident notifications to the Department for Education.

Key findings

Notifications

From 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014, Ofsted received 298 Serious Incident Notifications, an increase in the number of notifications of almost one third from the previous year. The notifications were from 103 local authorities, an increase from 97. This may reflect an improvement in the reporting of serious incidents rather than an increase in the number of incidents themselves.

Just over half the notifications related to child deaths: 163, a decrease from 170 in the previous year. The other notifications, which related to incidents of serious harm, numbered 135, more than double the figure (61) in April 2012 to March 2013.

The number of notifications received during the time period covered in this statistical release does not necessarily equate to the number of incidents which have occurred within that time period. Some notifications relate to incidents which occurred before 1 April 2013, but about which Ofsted was not notified until after 1 April 2013. A small number of notifications relate to allegations by adults concerning historical abuse which, allegedly, occurred when they were children.

Although each child death has its own, separate, notification, the overall number of notifications does not equate to the number of children involved in the incidents notified. Notifications involving incidents of serious harm that is other than child death sometimes include information on family or non-related groups. The 135 notifications of serious harm related to 150 children. The underlying data for these cases, where it relates to the age range of the child, gives the age range of the child who is identified first in the notification.

Child deaths

At the time of a notification being made to Ofsted, the local authority may not have had full information about the cause of a child's death. Consequently, the authority may not have been able to provide complete information to Ofsted.

Where information has become available subsequent to the notification being made, such as by post-mortem or inquest findings, criminal convictions or further information from the local authority, Ofsted has used this information to inform the data in the table below. As stated above, the figures for child deaths do not all relate to deaths which occurred during the period.

Table 1: Cause of death for deaths notified to Ofsted between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014

Priority cause of death for deaths notified to Ofsted between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014

Priority cause	Number	%
Natural causes (incl. life limiting disability and illness)	48	29.4
Unknown or unascertained	38	23.3
Dangerous behaviour (incl. substance misuse)	30	18.4
Killing/non-accidental injury by parent or carer	26	16.0
Killing/non-accidental injury by unrelated person	5	3.1
Accidents (including possible overlay)	12	7.4
Neglect	4	2.5
Total with a cause of death	163	100

Forty eight children died from natural causes, of whom 32 were children with severe disabilities or life-limiting illnesses. Of these 32 children, 23 were looked after.

The term 'dangerous behaviour' has been used to signify actions by a child or young person, which has put them at risk of injury or death, including suspected suicides. This figure includes 20 young people who died by hanging.

Five children, all aged under one year, died from possible overlaying by a parent/carer or overheating.

Thirty one children and young people died from non-accidental death. These cases were assessed as non-accidental by using information from sources such as the local authority, and/or post-mortem or inquest findings. The alleged perpetrator/s in 26 of these incidents was/were the parent, parent's partner or the carer of the child.

There are some deaths that remain unexplained or where the cause of death is not known. This occurs where, for example, the results of a post-mortem may be inconclusive or where it has not been possible for the agencies investigating the death to fully ascertain the circumstances.

Serious incidents

From 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014, 135 notifications of incidents of serious harm, which were incidents not involving the death of a child, were received by Ofsted. These related to 150 children. This compared with 61 notifications in 2012-13, which related to 74 children.

At the time of a notification being made to Ofsted, the local authority may not have had full information about the serious incident. Consequently, the authority may not have been able to provide complete information to Ofsted.

Where information has become available subsequent to the notification being made, such as criminal convictions or further information from the local authority, Ofsted has used this information to inform the data in the table below. The table categorises the incidents by numbers of notifications and not numbers of children.

Table 2: Serious incidents, other than death of a child, notified to Ofsted between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014

Priority cause of serious harm for incidents notified to Ofsted between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014		
Priority cause	Number	%
Sexual abuse/CSE by unrelated person	35	25.9
Non-accidental injury by parent or carer	34	25.2
Other (incl. unknown or unascertained)	19	14.1
Sexual abuse/CSE by parent or carer	15	11.1
Neglect by parent or carer	13	9.6
Non-accidental injury by unrelated person	8	5.9
Accidents	4	3.0
Self-harm/Dangerous behaviour	4	3.0
Non-accidental injury by unknown person	3	2.2
Total with a cause of serious harm	135	100.0

Serious case reviews

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) in a local authority area has the responsibility for deciding whether a serious incident meets the criteria for the instigation of a serious case review (SCR).

In 143 of the 298 incidents for which Ofsted received notifications, the relevant LSCB decided to instigate a serious case review. This compares to 93 serious case reviews instigated from the 231 notifications in the previous year.

Of the 143 serious case reviews in this year, 74 were instigated in response to the death of a child or young person, compared to 69 instigated in response to deaths in the previous year. The number of SCRs that were instigated concerning an incident of serious harm almost trebled, from 24, in the year 2012-13, to 69, in 2013-14.

Methodology

The data in the release are from serious incident notifications received by Ofsted between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014.

The numbers of notifications received during the time period covered in this statistical release are not, necessarily, the number of incidents which have occurred during 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014.

Some notifications relate to incidents which occurred before 1 April 2013, but about which Ofsted was not notified until after 1 April 2013. The notifications also include a small number relating to allegations by adults concerning historical abuse, which allegedly occurred when they were children.

The number of notifications do not equate to the number of children involved in those incidents. Each child death had its own, separate, notification. Those notifications involving incidents other than child death sometimes included family or non-related groups in one notification document. The 135 incidents of serious harm relate to 150 children. The underlying data, where it relates to age band, relate to the child that is referenced first in the document sent to Ofsted.

There are some differences in the causes of death and incidents of serious harm, in Tables 1 and 2 above, compared with the data in the previous release. This is because the data aims to reflect as closely as possible the causes that are emerging in any one year. For example, in 2013-14 there were a number of cases that had been to inquest or post-mortem that were returned with an outcome of 'unascertained' so the data now reflects this rather than indicating 'unknown'.

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