

HENDERSON, G., ROGON, P., KURLUS, I., HENDERSON, S. and WOODS, R. 2021. Educational attendance and offending outcomes. Home compulsory supervision orders: effectiveness of decision making and outcomes, Report 7. Stirling: SCRA [online]. Available from:
<https://www.scra.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Report-7-Offending-and-Education-May-2021.pdf>

Educational attendance and offending outcomes.

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2021



Report 7

Educational attendance and offending outcomes

Home Compulsory Supervision Orders - effectiveness of decision making and outcomes



Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	2
Summary	3
Introduction	4
Methods	5
Findings	7
Discussion	9
Educational attendance	9
Offending outcomes	10
Conclusion	11
References	11
List of reports in this series	13

Acknowledgements

This report is dedicated to the memory of Dr Paul Rogon, 1979 to 2019.

This research was part of a larger project on the outcomes of children looked after at home in Scotland. The authors wish to thank the Research Advisory Group for the project for their guidance and support. The Research Advisory Group had representatives from Barnardo's Scotland, Centre for Youth & Criminal Justice, Children's Hearings Scotland, Includem, Scottish Government, and Social Work Scotland.

This research was commissioned by the Scottish Government which also contributed to its funding.

Author contributions

Ruth Woods was involved in the initial design and scoping of the research, and provided feedback on the draft paper.

Paul Rogon, Indiya Kurlus and Gillian Henderson developed the research methodology, and extracted and collated the data.

Sarah Henderson carried out the statistical analyses.

Gillian Henderson and Sarah Henderson drafted this report.

Summary

This is the last in a series of seven research reports on the effectiveness of Compulsory Supervision Orders where the child remains at home with their parent(s) (home CSOs).

In the Children's Hearings System, the most common legal measure made for 12 to 16 years olds is to be 'looked after' at home on a CSO. In 2020, home CSOs accounted for 46% of all the 8,875 CSOs in place, meaning that 4,071 children in Scotland were looked after at home. The most common reasons for these home CSOs to be made are that the child is not going to school or is committing offences. This research looked at the effectiveness of home CSOs in improving school attendance and in reducing the volume and gravity of offending. The sample comprised of 172 children from across Scotland. Data on school attendance, numbers of offences and gravity of offences were collected at three time points – pre-home CSO and one and two years after it was made - and analysed using inferential statistics.

There was a significant increase in school attendance from a mean of 45% attendance before the home CSO to 57% after a year. There were no significant changes in the volume and gravity of children's offending after their home CSOs were made.

The circumstances of these children are more complex than them simply not going to school or committing offences. There were concerns for these children across all aspects of their wellbeing, some of which were about the children's own behaviour but most related to how they were cared for and treated by others. For the children in this study, their home CSOs were made when their truancy or offending were already entrenched. That their home CSOs resulted in significant improvements in school attendance indicates that this intervention can be successful. It is more difficult to determine the efficacy of home CSOs in addressing children's offending.

Introduction

This is the last in a series of research reports on the effectiveness of Compulsory Supervision Orders (CSOs) where the child remains at home with their parent(s) (Rogon et al, 2019a).

All children with CSOs are legally considered as 'looked after children'. Where CSOs are relatively unique, is that a child with a CSO can remain at home with their parent(s), in other words they are 'looked after at home' (for ease of reference referred to as 'home CSOs'). In fact, home CSOs are the most common type of CSO made by Children's Hearings and accounted for 46% of all the 8,875 CSOs in place in 2020, meaning that 4,071 children in Scotland were looked after at home (Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, 2020).

The reasons that most children come to have home CSOs made are because they are not going to school (truancy) or because they have committed offences. However, despite the home CSO being the most common legal intervention used to address these problems, there was little evidence available on whether home CSOs are efficacious in improving educational attendance and in reducing offending.

This part of the study aimed to fill these gaps by exploring two hypotheses:

1. That for those children with home CSOs due to truancy, school attendance one and two years after their Children's Hearing will be significantly higher than attendance prior to the Hearing when their home CSO was made.
2. That for children with home CSOs related to offending, their offending in terms of volume and gravity will be significantly reduced following their home CSO being made.

In addition, comparisons in school attendance were made between children with home CSOs related to truancy and those with home CSOs not related to school attendance.

Methods¹

Sample²

Data were collected on 172 children, selected randomly, from across Scotland, who were aged 12 years or more when their first home CSO was made and this was between 1st April 2013 and 31st March 2014. The sample comprised of three groups of children (Tables 1 and 2):

1. Education non-attendance – grounds are not attending school³, 90 children.
2. Offending – grounds are has committed an offence(s)⁴, 51 children.
3. Control – grounds are not related to offending or school non-attendance, 31 children (for most, the grounds related to lack of parental care).

Table 1: Mean age and standard deviation of the children in the three groups when home CSOs made

Group	No.	Mean age (years)	Standard deviation
Education non-attendance	90	13.43	0.64
Offending	51	13.57	0.70
Control	31	12.81	0.40

Table 2: Gender balance of the children in the three groups

Group	Gender	No.	Percentage
Education non-attendance	Male	42	46.70
	Female	48	53.30
Offending	Male	44	86.30
	Female	7	13.70
Control	Male	12	38.70
	Female	19	61.30

Data collection

Information was extracted from the case files held in SCRA's Case Management System between August 2017 and March 2018. These case files include statutory documentation from Children's Hearings and courts, and reports from social work, police, schools and other agencies.

The cases were followed for at least two years, and data were collected at three time points:

- When home CSO first made (between 1st April 2013 and 31st March 2014) – T1

¹ Ethical approval for the study was granted by SCRA's Research Ethics Committee on 19th July 2017

² Further information on the demographics of children in the sample is available from Report 1 in this series – 'Residence and Contact Conditions'.

³ Section 67(2)(o) Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 'the child has failed without reasonable excuse to attend regularly at school'

⁴ Section 67(2)(j) Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 'the child has committed an offence'

- After at least a year (i.e. at their Children’s Hearing closest to 31st March 2015 that made a substantive decision) – T2
- After at least two years (i.e. at their Children’s Hearing closest to 31st March 2016 that made a substantive decision) - T3

The data collected at each of the three time points are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Data variables

	Variable*	Measure	Data type
Education-related variables	School non-attendance referrals prior to current time point	Frequency	Ratio
	School attendance	Percentage	Ratio
Offending-related variables	Number of offences over specified period	Frequency	Ratio
	Number of offence referrals 3 months prior to current time point	Frequency	Ratio
	Gravity of nearest offence committed prior to CSO/Children’s Hearing	Categorical 1: Low 2: Medium 3: High	Nominal

* It should be noted that some of these variables are limited due to missing or incomplete data sets.

Assessment of gravity of offences

The gravity of the offence referred to the Hearings System nearest to each of the three time points was assessed using a scale of ‘high’, ‘moderate’ and ‘low’ (Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration, 2015). Examples of high gravity offences include: assault with a weapon, sexual offences involving coercive sexual behaviour, supply of drugs; examples of medium gravity offences include: assault resulting in injury, assault of a police officer, theft by housebreaking, possession of a drug other than cannabis; examples of low gravity offences include: shoplifting, vandalism, assault with no or minor injury caused, possession of cannabis.

Analysis

All hypotheses were assessed using inferential statistics.

Confidentiality

Unique linkage identifiers for cases in the sample were used for the purpose of data collection, and these were destroyed when this was complete. No identifiers (names, dates of birth, post codes, etc.) were collected and used in any data analysis or reporting. Only anonymised data were shared with the researchers at Robert Gordon University.

Findings

Hypothesis 1: School attendance for children with home CSOs with education non-attendance grounds will be significantly higher one and two years after the Hearing that made the home CSO

There were insufficient data for the education non-attendance group at all three time points to allow comparison between T3 and T1 and T2. This was because almost all (91%) of the 90 children's CSOs were terminated by Hearings within two years of them being made (Henderson et al, 2019).

A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare school attendance before and one year after their Hearing that made their home CSO - 56 children were included in the analysis. There was a statistically significant increase in percentage school attendance from pre-Hearing ($M=45.46$, $SD=19.18$) to one-year post-Hearing ($M=57.23$, $SD=31.52$); $t(55)=-2.61$, $p=0.012$.

Therefore the hypothesis, that school attendance would improve following a home CSO, was supported.

Comparisons in school attendance between children with home CSOs related to truancy and those with home CSOs not related to school attendance

An additional independent samples *t*-test was performed to compare school attendance 1-year post-Hearing (as a percentage of total possible attendance) between two groups - the education non-attendance only group, and offending and control groups.

There was a significant difference in scores for those with a home CSO based on education non-attendance grounds ($M=56.49$, $SD=30.94$), and those based on other grounds [$M=80.74$, $SD=17.49$; $t(55.18)=-4.26$, $p<0.001$]. The magnitude of the differences in the means was large (mean difference = -24.25 , 95% CI: -35.64 to -12.85 ; Cohen's $d = 0.96$).

This means that school attendance is significantly lower for children with home CSOs linked to education non-attendance grounds than for those with home CSOs on other grounds.

Hypothesis 2: Offending in terms of volume and gravity will be significantly reduced following the home CSO being made

A mixed ANOVA was carried out to see if there was a main effect of time following the home CSO on number of subsequent offence referrals. It also assessed whether or interaction between time and number of offence referrals and gravity of offences.

There were 32 children where there were data on offending at each of the three time points: at pre-home CSO – 16 had low gravity offences, nine had moderate gravity offences and seven had high gravity offences. The children in the low gravity category had a mean of 7.38 offence referrals between T1-T2, those in the moderate category had a mean of 4.78 offences referrals, and those in the high category had a mean of 2.57 offence referrals (Table 4).

Table 4: Mean number of offence referrals, per gravity of offence pre-home CSO, up to two years post-home CSO

Gravity of offences	Number of children	Mean offence referrals		
		Pre-home CSO	Between T1-T2	Between T2-T3
Low	16	7.38	7.25	5.88
Moderate	9	4.78	6.55	2.89
High	7	2.57	2.29	1.57
All	32	5.59	5.97	4.09

The independent variables were the gravity of the offence pre-Hearing (low, moderate, high), and the point in time (pre-home CSO, between T1 and T2, between T2 and T3). The dependent variable is number of offence referrals between each time frame.

Due to the small sample size, there is a violation of the homogeneity of covariance matrices (i.e. $p < 0.001$ and the sample sizes are uneven), this suggests the test is not suitable and should not be used.

To try and address this, the final time point (T2-T3) was removed. There were 51 children included in these two time points: Pre-home CSO – 32 had low gravity offences, 11 had moderate gravity offences and eight had high gravity offences. The children in the low gravity category had a mean of 5.56 offence referrals pre-home CSO, those in the moderate category had a mean of 4.18 offences referrals, and those in the high category had a mean of 3.38 offence referrals (Table 5). The independent and dependent variables were as above (although only two time points were used in this case).

Table 5: Mean number of offence referrals, per gravity of offence pre-home CSO, up to one year post-home CSO

Gravity of offences	Number of children	Mean offence referrals	
		Pre- home CSO	Between T1-T2
Low	32	5.56	5.59
Moderate	11	4.18	5.73
High	8	3.38	2.38
All	51	4.92	5.12

There was no significant main effect of gravity of offence; $F(2, 48) = 0.98, p=0.38$, partial eta squared = 0.039, or main effect of time; Wilks' Lambda = 0.999, $F(1, 48) = 0.024, p=0.877$, partial eta squared = 0.001. There was also no significant interaction between time and gravity of offence; Wilks' Lambda = 0.988, $F(2, 48) = 0.29, p=0.749$, Partial eta squared = 0.012.

These findings mean that there was no change in the number of referrals for the children in this sample, from when their home CSO was made and up to one year later.

Discussion

The reasons that most children come to have home CSOs in Scotland are because they are not going to school or because they have committed offences. Evidence from other countries suggests that home-based interventions can be effective (Goemans et al, 2016), therefore it would be reasonable to expect improvements in school attendance and desistance from offending for children as a result of the intervention of a home CSO. This research found improvements in school attendance but no changes in offending volume and gravity after home CSOs were made.

Educational attendance

Children referred for not going to school had lower rates of attendance than other children with home CSOs. This is not surprising as it could be expected that those in the non-attendance group would have worse school attendance than other children looked after at home, partly or solely because they entered the Hearings System for this very reason.

Before their home CSOs were made, the children in this research had effectively disengaged from education through their poor attendance. Our findings show that, despite this, their school attendance did significantly improve from a mean of 45% attendance pre-home CSO to 57% after a year. However, this is still significantly lower than the school attendance of 81% for children referred on other grounds after a year post-home CSO.

Schools in Scotland have reported finding it difficult to engage with parents of children looked after at home. It's also been found that there are also low educational expectations of children with home CSOs by professionals, their parents and by the children themselves and that the provision of services to support their education can be variable (Hennessy et al, 2014). The legal intervention of a home CSO in itself is therefore not sufficient to address truancy, a child

must also be supported by their family and professional working with them to engage with education. Almost all the children in the education non-attendance group were offered or provided with support for their school attendance and, for those who required it, support for their educational attainment when their home CSOs were made (Rogon et al, 2019c). That there was some increase in school attendance provides some evidence that this statutory intervention does result in children getting more support to go to school.

Offending outcomes

Prior to their home CSO, children who committed low gravity offences tended to have more offences referrals (mean of 7.38 offence referrals) compared to those who committed high gravity offences (mean of 2.57 offence referrals). This pattern continued in the year post-home CSOs. For these children, their involvement in offending was entrenched and continued unchanged. Despite this, over a quarter (28%) of these children were not offered or provided with support to address their offending as part of their home CSOs (Rogon et al, 2019c).

In Scotland, almost all children in conflict with the law are dealt with within the welfarist approach of the Hearings System. This is in recognition that they are most often the vulnerable members of society and are likely to have experienced high levels of trauma, adversity and victimisation (Youth Justice Board, 2017). For example, in 2017-18, less than 400 children were prosecuted in Scottish courts (Lightowler, 2020) and, in comparison, 3,060 children were referred into the Hearings System for offending (Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, 2018).

Questions have been raised about whether the Hearings System is still the most appropriate way to deal with children involved in offending and the complexities of their lives (Children & Young People's Commissioner Scotland & Action For Children, 2018). There is also evidence that involvement in the Hearings System itself is stigmatising and inhibits desistance from offending (McVie & McAra, 2010).

Children involved in offending are often multiply disadvantaged. There are links between experiencing multiple adverse childhood experiences and engagement in risk taking behaviour, which can sometimes be associated with criminal behaviour (Vaswani, 2018). The children in this research were no different, with those in the offending group experiencing problems around their care, their self-worth, their engagement with education, and their safety at home and in the community (Rogon et al, 2019b). These concerns reduced over the two years following the home CSOs being made (Rogon et al, 2019b), however, there were no impacts on the volume or gravity of their offending.

The circumstances of these children are more complex than them simply not going to school or committing offences. There were concerns for these children across all aspects of their wellbeing, some of which were about the children's own behaviour but most related to how they were cared for and treated by others (Rogon et al, 2019b). It should also be acknowledged that the largest contributory factor in a child's chances of being looked after, including looked after at home, is deprivation (Bywaters et al, 2017).

Conclusion

It is perhaps too simplistic for the intervention of a legal measure in itself to change long standing problems in a child's life. For the children in this study, their home CSOs were made when their truancy or offending were already entrenched. These entrenched problems are likely to require long term intervention and which may need to continue beyond the termination of the home CSO. However, that home CSOs resulted in significant improvements in school attendance indicates that this intervention can have some success in these cases. It is more difficult to determine the efficacy of home CSOs in addressing children's offending, although it may lead to reduction in concerns over their overall wellbeing.

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Home Compulsory Supervision Orders - effectiveness of decision making and outcomes

List of reports in this series:

- Report 1. Residence and contact conditions
- Report 2. Wellbeing outcomes for children and young people
- Report 3. Care planning and interventions
- Report 4. Professional trust and relationships in Children's Hearings
- Report 5. Decision making in Children's Hearings
- Report 6. The views and experiences of young people and parents
- Report 7. Educational attendance and offending outcomes



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May 2021