

# PLACEMENT INSTABILITY AND MENTAL HEALTH IN THE UK CARE SYSTEM: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND META-ANALYSIS

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## INTRODUCTION

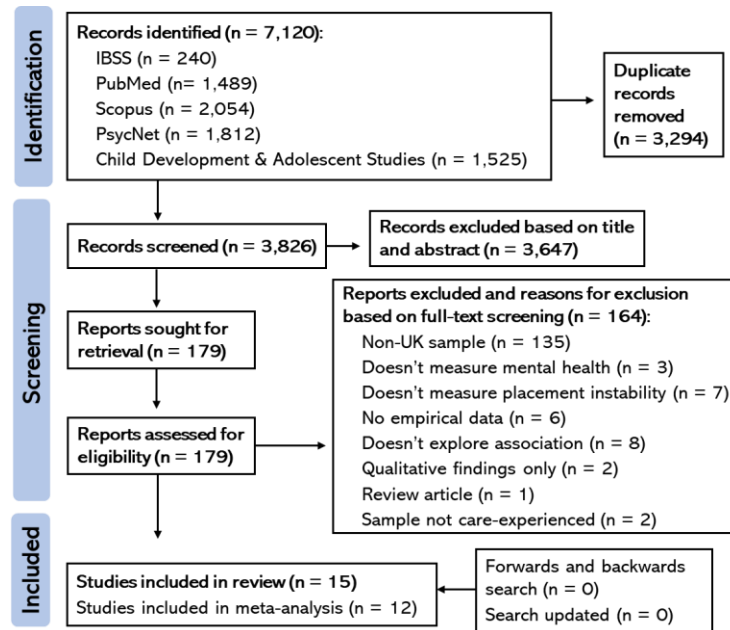
- Over 100,000 children are in care in the UK, mainly due to abuse or neglect<sup>1, 2</sup>.
- 30% of these children experience  $\geq 1$  placement change each year<sup>1</sup>.
- Placement instability is likely to be both a cause and consequence of poor mental health<sup>3-6</sup>.
- Research on this relationship is mostly cross-national, with limited applicability to UK policy and practice.

## OBJECTIVE

To conduct the first UK-specific review and meta-analysis on the bi-directional relationship between placement instability and mental health.

## METHODOLOGY

- We searched 5 databases for UK-based peer-reviewed studies exploring the association between placement instability and mental health in care-experienced samples.
- Unadjusted odds ratios (ORs) were pooled in a random-effects meta-analysis.
- Newcastle-Ottawa Scale was used to assess study quality.



## KEY FINDINGS



### Narrative synthesis

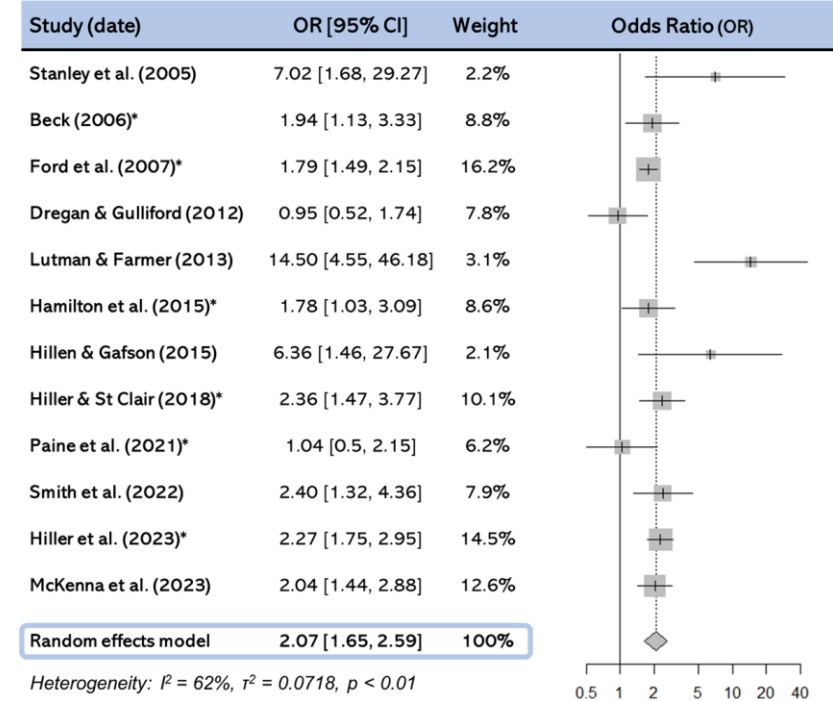
15 studies  
N = 6,905



### Meta-analysis

12 studies  
N = 5,536

- Those with unstable placements were over twice as likely (OR = 2.07) to have mental health difficulties compared to those with stable placements.
- Direction could not be determined due to a lack of causal evidence.



## CONCLUSION

- Stable placements are associated with better mental health outcomes in the UK care system.
- Longitudinal research is urgently needed to clarify the (bi)direction of this relationship and inform targeted interventions.