

C.2. Data Availability About Adolescents and Young People At Risk: Educational Pathways and Risk of Social Exclusion

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Abstract: In the scientific literature, there is a lot of micro-level research relating juvenile delinquency to serious affective and behavioural problems and/or to child abuse and neglect during childhood. Many children with that kind of adverse childhood have been in care, in the child protection system of his/her country. In the European countries, the statistical availability of data on children and adolescents in care is traditionally very poor and cross-country comparability is usually impossible, because the inadequacy of the data available for that purpose poses a serious limitation.

One of the most relevant aspects of the lives of children in care for their future is their educational pathways and achievements. The lack of information on these topics brought about a partnership of research teams in five countries that proposed to the European Union an innovative analysis of the situation of young people in care and leaving care in Europe, based on comparing their pathways to higher education to those of the majority of youngsters in each country.

The new data produced (both statistics and qualitative data) revealed that children in care and young people leaving care are one of the social groups with higher risk of social exclusion in Europe, and they had never been identified as such a group by the European Union before. Social exclusion is one of the major risk factors for juvenile delinquency.

In a highly competitive market, the fact of not having higher education gives access only to non-qualified jobs, which have the lowest salaries – and they easily become unemployed, particularly in crisis periods. Children and adolescents in care are usually oriented to non-qualified professional training, because they are expected to earn enough money as soon as they are 16 or 18 years old. That does not happen with young people of the same age in the general population. Most of these youth are not offered any support to continue studying and, additionally, abused and neglected children frequently lose a school year during the period they are taken away from their birth family to be placed in care and have low expectations about their future. Of

course, not having a qualified job does not mean these young people are going to become offenders; however, it means one added risk factor to the many others they have already accumulated along their childhood.

By supporting and improving the educational pathways of children at risk we will diminish many negative consequences in their lives, including the risk of getting involved with the criminal justice, and we will increase their future expectations. Last but not least, in order to evaluate whether any social policy has an *improving effect* on the consequences of being at risk, we need systematic data at macro-level from all European countries about the educational pathways of all children in care and of young people leaving care in order to assess improvements achieved.

Keywords: Adolescents, young people, at risk, risk of social exclusion, data availability, educational pathways, child abuse and neglect, social exclusion, delinquency.

1. Children At Risk and Risk of Social Exclusion: Preliminary Considerations and Empirical Research

In some countries, certain social problems do not exist due to there being no data available on them. The statistical invisibility of such social realities makes it impossible to see them as a social problem, understand them, analyse their evolution and related dynamics, and openly discuss them. More serious still, it makes it impossible to rigorously evaluate the results and the impact of any social or political intervention aimed at improving these realities.

Social representations of social problems are related to existing information – scientific or not – regarding the represented reality in each concrete society and the possibility of openly communicating and discussing such information (Moscovici, 1981; Casas, 1996, 2006).

In European countries, the statistical availability of data on children and adolescents in care is traditionally very poor and cross-country comparability is usually impossible due to the inadequacy of the data available for this purpose. In this paper we are going to focus in only one rather invisible aspect of the lives of children in care and of young people leaving care: their educational pathways.

In such context, what seems evident to many practitioners and psychological researchers on a micro-level (i.e., a potential relationship between child abuse and neglect and future socially undesired behaviours) frequently cannot be tested at a macro-level due to this lack of appropriate data.

In the scientific literature, a lot of micro-level research exists relating juvenile delinquency to previous child abuse and neglect and/or serious affective and behavioural problems during childhood. As early as in 1950, Glueck and Glueck (1950, 1962) already reviewed this topic. The topic was also related to the

institutionalisation of abused and neglected children by international organisations, such as the Council of Europe (1973, 1979). The fact is that many children with an adverse childhood are frequently in care, under their country's child protection system.

At present, a majority opinion suggests that the relationship between child abuse and neglect and juvenile delinquency cannot be considered a direct effect: we know that some children who have been abused and neglected become juvenile offenders, but only some. We also know that some juvenile offenders have been abused or neglected when they were children, but not all. Since the meaning of *some* (i.e., the percentage in a concrete society) often cannot be empirically clarified, perhaps the most important question might be worded in some other way: Why do some abused and/or neglected children become juvenile offenders? Why do some others not? We may try to answer these questions by searching for predictors, but we can also retrospectively analyse pathways from abusive or neglected situations to the present day.

Retrospective studies that analyse the past of people who have suffered abuse come to conclude that in these cases there have been very high rates of intergenerational transmission of abuse. Blades et al. (2011) pointed out that children in the care system and care leavers have long been over-represented in prisons in England: 27% of the adult prison population had once been in the child protection system; concerning adolescents aged 15-18 years old in juvenile justice centres, between a quarter and a half have been in care before. This method does not take into account the majority, however; that is, those with no problems.

Cross-sectional studies have pointed out at a diversity of behavioural problems – both short and long term – among children that have been abused or neglected –, delinquency just being one among many possible non-adaptative behaviours (Duarte, 1995).

Longitudinal or prospective studies conclude that only a small proportion of children at risk become delinquents or abusers themselves. This fraction is however higher than that identified in studies conducted on the general population. According to Landsford et al. (2007), although some studies have linked early maltreatment to delinquency, this connection is less clear because much of them use retrospective reports of childhood maltreatment. Using a prospective longitudinal design, these authors found out in USA that the abused and non-abused young adults did not significantly differ on the more subjective measures such as self-reported violent or nonviolent delinquency.

It has been found that the intergenerational transmission rate can range anywhere from **18% to 90%**, depending on the procedure applied (Kaufman & Zigler, 1987, cited by Vanistendael & Lecompte, 2002). The concept of intergenerational transmission of abuse must be taken into account if we are to develop strategies to minimize it: “This study demonstrates both the greater risk

of becoming an abuser after being abused, but also the fact that, in most cases, this risk does not become a reality (Vanistendael & Lecompte, 2002).”

Shofield et al. (2011) pointed out that some risk factors for young offenders coincide in most cases with factors experienced by children in the care system, depending basically on the accumulation and interaction among said risk factors. For example, according to these authors, child abuse is associated with anxiety and problems with attention, and these aspects usually affect behaviour at school, and may contribute to offending.

Studies regarding residential care showed that the care environment may present a set of risks for adolescents that reinforce offending behaviour such as the risks associated with being out of education (NACRO, 2012). On the other hand, one of the findings presented by The Adolescent and Children’s Trust (TACT, 2012) was that 74% of respondents felt that children in care are at a higher risk of unnecessary criminalisation. They state that one of the measures to support looked after children and prevent this criminalisation is to promote education ensuring children in care continued engagement with education, which is seen as a strong protective factor against involvement in offending (TACT, 2012).

In social psychology, we know that the most relevant variable in understanding personal and social processes is often context. The contexts of children’s lives are often very complex to assess. It is not possible (and is it even ethical?) to collect detailed data from abused and neglected children *just in case* they become juvenile offenders. What we can alternatively do is try to understand the personal and contextual variables involved in the life-pathways followed by abused and neglected children and try to identify which of them involve higher probabilities of undesired behaviours. For this purpose, we require both prospective and retrospective studies involving all stakeholders’ points of view – that is to say, we also need the perspective of young people who were abused or neglected regarding their own life-pathways.

Two of the most relevant aspects of the lives of children in care with regard to their future are their educational pathways and achievements. In 2008, the lack of regular statistical information at European level led to the forming of a partnership of research teams across five countries. This partnership then submitted a proposal to the EU for an innovative analysis of the situation of young people in and leaving care in Europe based on comparing their pathways into higher education with those of the majority of young people in each country (the YIPPEE project: <http://tcru.ioe.ac.uk/yippeee>).

The new data this produced (both statistical and qualitative) revealed that children in care and young people leaving care are one of the social groups at higher risk of social exclusion in Europe. They had never been identified as such a group by the EU before.

In a highly competitive labour market, not having completed higher education gives access only to non-qualified jobs, which have the lowest salaries – therefore,

anyone in this situation easily becomes unemployed, particularly in periods of crisis. Children and adolescents in care are usually guided towards non-qualified professional training because they are expected to earn enough money to be able to live by themselves by the time they are 16 or 18 years old (pay for an apartment, clothes, food, etc.). Hard unqualified work usually delays or terminates educational activity. Most of these young people are not offered any support to continue studying. What is worse, abused and neglected children have frequently missed at least one school year during the period they were taken away from their birth family to be placed in care and as a consequence they are delayed and in a situation of unequal opportunities within the education system (Jackson & Cameron, 2010).

With no concrete future prospects regarding education, labour market instability, and an uncertain future, the risk of social exclusion dramatically increases, including the possibility of involvement in undesired behaviours.

What kind of data do we have or should be systematically produced to determine the situations and processes that lead to a high risk of social exclusion in Europe among children and adolescents in and leaving care? Which data would allow us to evaluate actions or programmes aimed at preventing young people leaving care ending up in situations of social exclusion?

A prior question to this is, who are the children that are cared for in the child protection system in different countries? Do they share the same characteristics?

The surprising first answer is that there is no existing common definition, even among European countries. Who a child in care is depends on legal, technical, and political considerations.

There is some agreement that they usually come from *families suffering from severe deprivation* and are separated from their biological families only in extreme circumstances. Most children in child protection systems have suffered serious abuse or neglect (Jackson, 2010a, 2010b).

However, what does *extreme circumstances* mean in different countries, with different welfare systems?

Surprisingly, there is some statistical evidence to show that in the so-called *wealthier* countries, there are MORE children in the child protection system than in the poorer countries. Of course, this does not mean that in poor countries there are fewer children needing care and protection (Table C.2.1). The number of children in care and in the child protection systems does NOT depend on the number of children with family or personal problems, but rather on the social and political sensitivity of a country towards its children ... and of the public budget allocated to care for children!

Table C.2.1. Distribution of Children According to Type of Placement

2008	% Residential care	% Family Foster Care	% Other resources	Total in care 0-17	% on overall children 0-17 y.o.
Denmark	41	47	12	12,346	1.3
Hungary	50	50	–	17,220	.8
Spain	48	52		43,294	.6
Sweden (0-20)	25	75	–	1,800	1.00
United Kingdom (England)	14	71	16	59,500	.5

2. Data Availability and Comparability Regarding Children At Risk and Educational Pathways

In those European countries with available research data it has been demonstrated that those young people who have been in the child protection system are overrepresented in all social indicators of social disadvantage, such as poverty, homelessness, unemployment, delinquency, and adolescent pregnancy (Petrie & Simon, 2006).

These young people lacking the same opportunities to follow mainstream educational pathways are associated with a greater risk of social exclusion because with fewer skills training the likelihood of obtaining a well-paid and stable job is low.

At present, a wide array of documents adopted by the European Union and other international organisations point to the importance of supporting young people's high-level educational training in order to achieve a more competitive market and a better society.

Among the goals adopted by the European Union in some of its documents, we may highlight the following:

- Broadening higher education access. Improving social and human capital (Bologna process).
- Fighting the social exclusion of young people through qualified training and preventing school drop-out (Council of the EU, 2006).
- Reducing drop-out rates to below 10% (Europa, 2020).
- Promoting social inclusion through education (A European Youth Pact for young people).
- Identifying groups at risk of early school drop-out (Lisbon strategy).
- At least 20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion (Europa, 2020).

In addition, some of the OECD documents include the following goals:

- Creating jobs, providing equal opportunities, and restoring the trust of our citizens (Better policies for better lives).
- Education is a key strategic priority: a human capital stock. To know how the acquisition of skills affects individuals and society (OECD Skills Strategy. Better policies for better lives: Education).
- Help the insertion of youth into the labour market. New tools and approaches in education, research, and training (Jobs for Youth. Better policies for better lives: Employment and Skills, 2012).
- Child abuse and neglect should receive more attention (Doing Better for Families, 2011. Doing Better for Children, 2009).

Last but not least, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child includes the following statements:

- Each child has the right to an education, and this right should be developed on the basis of equal opportunity (art. 28).
- The UNCRC also commits signatories to providing an education system to develop the child's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential (art. 29a).
- Ensuring the highest possible levels of educational achievement for all children addresses this commitment.

If such goals are to be fulfilled, it is clear that we need data to identify where we now stand and evaluate the results achieved after a certain period of developing policies to reach said goals.

However, at present no European country (excepting the United Kingdom) produces regular statistics regarding the educational pathways and educational achievements of children in care or young people leaving care.

It is usually argued that children are in the child protection system because they are children at risk. In fact, some of them continue to be at risk while staying in care and after leaving care (O'Sullivan & Westerman, 2007). In particular, those not finishing compulsory or post-compulsory education will have unequal opportunities to find qualified jobs and should be targeted by specific programmes in order to prevent them becoming at risk of social exclusion. According to Blades et al. (2011), "children need to have hope for the future to give them a reason not to offend. For some, this will come through education, training or employment."

2.1. The United Kingdom experience.

Research in the UK prior to 2000 showed a huge gap between parental support and expectations and that of practitioners dealing with children in residential care with regard to any issue related to school and learning.

Middle-class British parents felt committed and were prepared to fight against any difficulty detected in the educational pathway of their child – a huge range of supportive actions was mobilised. A completely different attitude – contrasting greatly with the above – was observed among adults responsible for the schooling and learning of children in the public child protection system (Jackson, 1987).

The UK was the first country to publish research on diverse achievements among young people leaving care, depending on whether they continued studying or not. Moderate educational success made a big difference to outcomes some years after leaving care. Particularly, among those with education qualification, none reported any problem with the criminal justice, while among those without education qualification, 18.2% had some affair with criminal justice (Jackson & Martin, 1998; Martin & Jackson, 2002) (Table C.2.2).

Table C.2.2. Situation of Young People with a Care Background According to their Education

YP with care background	Education qualification	No Education qualification
Looking for a job	2.6%	72.7%
Single mother	3.8%	41.7%
Criminal justice	0%	18.2%
Living independently	73.7%	13.6%
Sharing house	23.7%	63.6%
Homeless	2.6%	22.7%

In the year 2000, a cross-ministerial Commission of the ministries responsible for education and child care was created after identifying the low achievements of children in the child care system in secondary education. In the UK every school was obliged by law to appoint a *designated teacher* with special responsibility to promote educational progress and advocate for pupils in out-of-home care. A training plan for these teachers was also established (O’Sullivan & Westerman, 2007).

The new 2004 Children Act introduced the obligation to “promote the educational achievement of boys and girls in the protection system.” Central Government also commissioned the coordination of statistics to be collected by local authorities in order to keep track of the results of actions implemented to improve the situation (Simon & Owen, 2006).

The systematic collection of data included:

- Data on academic achievement, school attendance, and early school leavers for those children of compulsory school age after at least one year in the social protection system.
- Data on the academic achievement of those young people aged 16 or over who left the protection system during the school year.
- A report on young people who had been in the protection system and were now 19, specifying whether they were still in education, working, and/or some other form of training.

The United Kingdom was the first country to show with systematic and reliable data that children in care and young people leaving care are the group with the highest inequality of educational opportunities, doomed to labour market integration problems, and at high risk of social exclusion (Casas & Montserrat, 2009) (Table C.2.3).

Table C.2.3. United Kingdom Academic Data

Level	Age	Overall population	Population in care
KS1	7	86%	58%
KS2	11	80%	44%
KS3	14	73%	27%
GCSE 5 A*-C	16	58%	14%
Post compulsory	16-19	68%	19%
Higher Education	19+	43%	6-9%

3. Results from European Research in 5 Countries

The aims of the YIPPEE research project were (Jackson & Cameron, 2010):

- To study the educational pathways of young people leaving care after compulsory schooling.
- To analyse how to have more young people leaving care studying in post-compulsory and further education.

Data collection was performed in Denmark, Hungary, Sweden, Spain, and the United Kingdom and took place from 2008 to 2010. Detailed information can be found at <http://tcru.ioe.ac.uk/yippeee>.

Denmark (Table C.2.4) conducted a secondary analysis of official statistics comparing the educational attainment of 17-year-olds in the protection system and those that were not, and the differences were clear to see.

Table C.2.4. Denmark Academic Data

Highest level of education achieved	17 year-olds (in care) (N=1,800)	17 year-olds (general pop) (N= 64,286)
Compulsory education not finished	20.8%	3.8%
Compulsory education finished	79.1%	96.2%
Vocational training	0.1%	–

They also wanted to determine whether this delay in schooling is recovered over time and therefore analysed the results of young people in Denmark aged between 27 and 30 according to whether they had been in the protection system or not. As Table C.2.5 shows, differences still persist at this age (Jackson & Cameron, 2010).

Table C.2.5. Academic Achievements of Young People Aged 27-30 in Denmark

Highest level of education achieved by the age 27-30	Young people leaving care (N= 3,419)	Young people general pop. (N= 257,904)
Compulsory education not finished	11.9%	1.3%
Compulsory education finished	50.0%	17.8%
Vocational training	26.7%	37.6%
Upper secondary	4.1%	8.5%
Higher education	7.3%	34.8%
Total	100%	100%

Sweden also conducted a secondary analysis of official statistics between 2008 and 2010 and the results obtained were no more encouraging than those of other countries (Jackson & Cameron, 2010):

- 14% of the in-care population suffer from school drop-out (unfinished compulsory education) compared to 3% of the general population.
- Marks are noticeably lower among the in-care population as a whole in compulsory education.
- The in-care population is predominantly guided towards vocational training programmes.
- One in 5 young people in care begins post-compulsory secondary education receiving special support.

- 60% of young people in care (cf., 18% of the general population) do not finish the three years of post-compulsory education. And when they do the marks are lower.
- Only 13% of young people in care enter higher education compared to 41% of the general population.

In Spain, this secondary analysis could not be performed due to the lack of official statistics in this area. However, thanks to the YIPPEE project, in 2008-2009 data collection began in Catalonia on adolescents in the protection system. This data collection, which lasted for five consecutive years, represented a step forward in terms of collaboration between the Departments of Education and Welfare, historically distanced from one another (Casas, Montserrat, & Malo, 2010). By way of example, we present data obtained in 2009-2010 (Table C.2.6), which are compared with the general population (Table C.2.7), significant differences being observed both within the protection system (with results of particular concern for those who are in residential care) and in comparison with the general population (Montserrat, Casas, Malo, & Bertrán, 2011).

Table C.2.6. Catalonia (Spain). Academic Level of Adolescents in Care (15-16 year-olds) in 2009-2010

	Residential care		Non-kinship foster care		Kinship foster care		Total	
Year 10	37	23.4%	12	40.0%	35	45.5%	84	31.7%
Year 9	67	42.4%	15	50.0%	28	36.4%	110	41.5%
Year 8	33	20.9%	2	6.7%	6	7.7%	41	15.4%
Year 7	2	1.3%	0	–	0	–	2	0.8%
Spec. Ed. Sch.	19	12.0%	1	3.3%	8	10.4%	28	10.6%
Total	158	100%	30	100%	77	100%	265	100%

Table C.2.7. School Data for Adolescents in Care Compared with the School Population in Catalonia (2009-2010)

	General population	Population in care
At expected level according to age	69.4%	31.7%
Repeat years in secondary education	9.1%	64.5%
Graduates at the age of 16	60%	20.6%
Special education at the age of 15	1.1%	10.6%

The same data collection provided information which indicated that:

- 30.9% of the sample abandon compulsory education without graduating at the age of 15 .
- 12.9% of the sample presented absenteeism during the 2009-10 academic year.
- 29.4% have serious behavioural problems which lead to disciplinary measures.
- Half are guided towards apprenticeship courses (non-formal education), while the percentage for the general population is only 4.4%.

One interesting result worth noting is that the more years they spend at the same school, the fewer behavioural and attendance problems observed. Generally speaking, the results are very disturbing for adolescents in residential care. That said, although those in foster care – both non-kinship and kinship – obtain better results, it is clear that these children also need additional support at school (Montserrat, Casas, & Malo, 2012).

Some important aspects are worth highlighting with regard to this study that has been conducted in Catalonia since 2008. It constitutes a first step both in terms of collaboration between these two Departments – initially with the YIPPEE project, but continuing once it had ended – and evidence of results that give visibility to a problem that is very much hidden in this country. However, there is still a long way to go on both a political and practical level, as well as in the field of research.

4. Leaving Care: Qualitative Factors Increasing and Preventing Risk of Social Exclusion

Most of the YIPPEE project was developed using the same qualitative methodology in each of the five partner countries. Thus, in-depth interviews were conducted with young people who had been through the protection system and semi-structured interviews were held with managers in the social and protection services (as key informants) and with people designated by the young people due to their role as a key adult in his/her life path (most of them social educators or workers) (Jackson & Cameron, 2010).

In each country, interviews were conducted with 35 young people who met the following requirements:

- having been in care for at least one year;
- having been in care at age 16 and showing the ability to follow post-compulsory education;
- now aged 19-22.

Each young person was interviewed twice, the first time in 2008 and then again in 2009. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and categorized using the N*VIVO software package.

This research identified the following factors that facilitate young people continuing with their studies while in the protection system:

- stability of foster care (that is, no changes of placement);
- stability in reference adult;
- staying at the same school;
- priority given to schooling during placement;
- high involvement of guardian in schooling issues;
- high expectations of the guardian in schooling issues;
- transmission of the value of education by the guardian and teacher: Education can be the key to leaving their difficult social situation behind;
- their inclusion in a group of friends outside the protection system and integrated in the education system; this acts as their reference group and also the group they belong to, providing a positive social identity and neutralising social labelling to some extent;
- the involvement of the school;
- participation in regular free-time activities;
- maintaining relationships with siblings;
- the importance of feeling listened to;
- being fostered by a family or in a residence with only a few places facilitates inclusion in the school system, although not a sufficient condition of itself.

The following quotations come from the young people who participated in the project and illustrate some of the facilitating factors that were identified (translated from Casas et al., 2011):

... here they recommend you do a basic training course They want you to have a trade, to be alright, a professional career ... but they won't tell you like parents tell their children ... you have to be an engineer, a doctor or have a degree They tell you the quickest way to get a job (boy, 21).

My willpower and also seeing that without studies you don't get the job you want (girl, 20).

I don't want to be miserable like my parents and the only way I have to get ahead is to study (girl, 19).

Another important factor noted by various social agents as a facilitator, in addition to those already described, was, once they have reached 18 and left the protection system, the existence of support services: housing, scholarships, personalised support for those who require it, lowering the fear and insecurity

produced by reaching adulthood without family support. This means for them, among other things, not having to continually focus only on the here and now.

We also observed more specific views provided by each group of the social agents interviewed. Thus, young people were very concerned to show that although they had been in care they were able to study and succeed like others, fighting against the label that accompanies them. For their part, social service professionals denounced a lack of overall planning in child policy that includes resources, training, evaluation, and research. Social educators showed great concern about the economic situation of young people and the uncertain future that awaits them. Finally, school teachers highlighted the lack of programmes available to them and the constraints they experience working with this population (Casas & Montserrat, 2012).

Some outstanding considerations by interviewed youngsters are summarised in the following quotations (translated from Casas et al., 2011):

... I never said I lived with my grandparents, I was a normal person No one noticed. Until ... my sister's teacher found out and asked me if it was true that we lived with my grandparents and I said yes. And ... well, he said he never would have imagined we lived with my grandparents. Because we weren't conflictive people, ... we didn't have any problems... we didn't show it. It was as if we lived with our parents, ... we had a normal life (Maria, 20).

I am the victim of this and I have to move forward, but you have to stop making me the victim (Álvaro, 20).

Because I want to study, and ... I want to be somebody, overcome my limitations, I want to work, to make money, ... not make money just for the sake of it ... but to work hard and climb the ladder But I'm very scared, because I get stressed out a lot and ... sometimes ... I don't know ... I don't think I'm going to be able to handle it (Zoe, 19).

The YIPPEE project outlined some areas for improvement, focusing primarily on (Jackson & Cameron, 2010):

- Prioritising their schooling.
- Identifying them as a group with specific educational needs.
- Avoiding changes of centres and schools, working towards stability.
- Close collaboration between government departments and their respective services.
- Improved expectations for this group.
- Innovation in the light of current challenges facing the child protection population.

Based on these areas for improvement, some proposed priority actions are as follows (Jackson & Cameron, 2010):

- Assign people responsible for monitoring the schooling of all children in the protection system.
- Establish the obligation to generate anonymous statistics at the end of each school year regarding the educational results of all children in care.
- Issue appropriate internal circulars and regulations providing precise information and instructions for better systematic data collection on the schooling process and its achievements.
- Intensified actions to analyse and deepen understanding of obstacles and opportunities in the educational pathways of these children.
- Promote a wide range of social support and educational mechanisms they can be provided with.
- Implement an agreement for the administrative bodies responsible for both education and the child social protection system to jointly assess the results of these actions.

5. Discussion

Paradoxically, although many publications have contributed for many years with micro-level data to the debate about the relationship between children at risk and offending behaviours, a nuclear fact is that the personal evolution of children at risk – and particularly of these in the child protection systems – has seldom been studied at macrosocial level due to the lack of cross-country comparable systematic statistics. Many of the children in the child protection system have been abused or neglected. Many have lost a school year while a care resource was decided for them, but that is an invisible problem, due to the lack of public available information about their education. For that reason we have focused the present paper on the educational itineraries of children at risk. Our point is that after being abused or neglected many children face inequality of opportunities in education in comparison with the overall population, because the child protection systems are unable to compensate for their personal gaps.

This paper has not aimed to identify how often children who have been abused or neglected and enter the child protection system end as juvenile offenders. Instead, we have tried to point out a set of negative consequences of being in the child protection system – one of them being the risk of becoming a young offender, although it is not one of the most frequent consequences and perhaps not even the most serious one in many cases. These negative consequences cannot be isolated from each other, because they cannot be properly predicted as separated factors – a big range of factors interact in a fuzzy, complex way.

The consequences of inequality of educational opportunities can be very serious at short, medium, or long term for the lives of young people. We have

emphasised the relationship between being in care, being delayed or even excluded from education, and being unable to get a qualified job in a competitive market – all of these factors increasing the risk of social exclusion or even delinquent behaviours.

We have used the findings from the YIPPEE European research project, in order to contribute with recent specific qualitative and quantitative data from five European countries to the necessary international debate. A first consideration from this project is that the inequality in educational opportunities suffered by children in-care must be drawn out from its statistical and social invisibility. To do this, there is first and foremost a need for comparable information and indicators from all European countries which also allow for the monitoring of improvements achieved by any action plans that are implemented. We must then use the knowledge of professionals and young people themselves to reduce barriers and maximize opportunities to provide them with educational pathways that improve their access to the labour market.

The question that the YIPPEE project aimed to answer was: how can the protection system compensate for the deficits these young people suffer from and offer them educational opportunities? The answer was: first establish education as a priority, including when they are 18-21 year-olds.

Results from this European project show that children in-care and young people leaving care are a population with more potential for resilience and achievement than generally thought, when they receive appropriate support. They may also set very ambitious goals, but when they do achieve them it is very late in comparison with the general population (such as reaching post-compulsory and higher education). It is a population with educational pathways which are at a *social moratoria* (in a *social limbo*) (Verhellen, 1994) due to multiple traumatic events and experiences at different occasions in their lives. Therefore, they need generalised support to compensate for this delay. It should be possible for their workplace integration processes to be delayed, and for them to receive the support necessary to extend their period of studies in a similar way as to the general population of the same age.

In addition, we must also adapt expectations of this population, which are generally low and stereotypical. A strong political will is required for change in order to urgently link the social protection system with the education system and ensure the implementation of compensatory actions that enable greater equality of educational opportunities.

According to the results from the research by Jackson & Martin (1998), some years after leaving care 18,2% of the young people that had not reached an education qualification had had some involvement with the criminal justice, while among those who had managed to reach an educational threshold, none had any problem with the criminal justice. Independently of how *representative* this sample can be

of the UK's overall population in child protection systems as regards Europe, it seems a reasonable conclusion that by supporting and improving the educational pathways of children at risk we will diminish many negative consequences in their lives, including the risk of getting involved with the criminal justice. Last but not least, in order to evaluate whether any social policy has an *improving effect* on the consequences of being at risk, we need systematic data at macro-level from all European countries about the educational pathways of all children in care and of young people leaving care.

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