

# Vulnerability Among Adolescents In Foster Care

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## Introduction

The study examines the prevalence of suicidal behaviour among adolescents aged 13-19 years in foster care in Denmark. It was published as a report in December 2012.

## Method

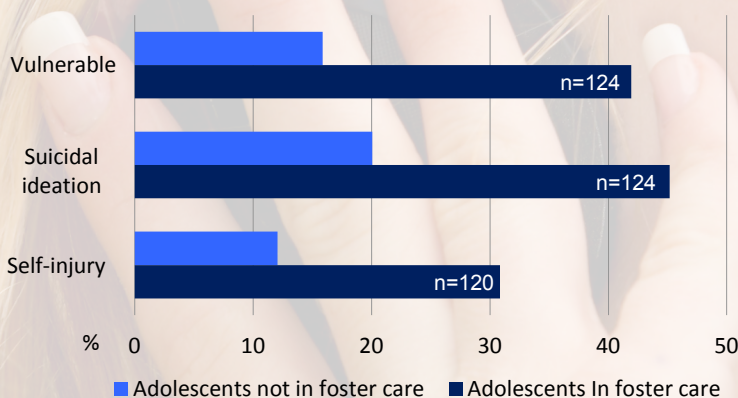
The study is based on nine questionnaire surveys conducted between 2001-2011. Two of these formed part of the Child and Adolescent Self-harm in Europe study (CASE), seven formed part of the Saving Young Lives Everywhere study (SAYLE).

A total number of 17,708 questionnaires were completed. 124 adolescents were identified as being in foster care (0.7 %). Due to the small number of cases, the statistical analyses were limited to two-way interactions for significance.

## Definitions

Vulnerable adolescents are defined as having had personal, emotional or mental health problems where they needed professional help within the past year. Marginalized adolescents are defined as either being vulnerable and/or with suicidal ideation and/or a self-injury attempt.

**Figure 1: Vulnerable adolescents, suicidal ideation, and self-injury among adolescents based on foster care status**



## Main Findings

Compared with their peers, adolescents in foster care have a higher risk of:

- Being vulnerable (OR 3,83;  $p < 0,0001$ )
- Suicidal ideation (OR 3,29;  $p < 0,0001$ )
- Self-injury (OR 3,25;  $p < 0,0001$ )
- Being marginalized (OR 3,57;  $p < 0,0001$ )

Compared to other marginalized adolescents not in foster care, those in foster care are characterized by a higher prevalence of:

- Problems with keeping up at school (OR 2,55;  $p < 0,01$ )
- Separated parents (OR 2,16;  $p < 0,01$ )
- Quarrels with parents (OR 3,25;  $p < 0,01$ )
- Quarrelling parents (OR 1,91;  $p < 0,05$ )
- Problems in the family (OR 3,89;  $p < 0,0001$ )
- Physical abuse (OR 3,82;  $p < 0,0001$ )
- Trouble with the police (OR 3,18;  $p < 0,0001$ )
- Death of close family member (OR 2,68;  $p < 0,01$ )
- Suicide attempt in the family (OR 3,20;  $p < 0,0001$ )
- Forced to sexual acts (OR 2,39;  $p < 0,05$ )

## Discussion

The study shows that adolescents in foster care are at an increased risk of mental health problems, suicidal ideation, self-mutilating behaviour, and negative life events. In addition, other results from the study uncover an increased risk of smoking, drug abuse, and eating disorder tendencies. Finally, fewer can depend on their family and fewer feel they matter much to their family compared to adolescents not in foster care.

Many of these results confirm the findings in literature about suicidal behaviour among adolescents in foster care and confirm that special preventive attention should be paid to this group.

**Figure 2: Life events for vulnerable adolescents based on foster care status (source: CASE)**

