

Children and young people in need and with vulnerabilities

Children and young people in need

Research shows high levels of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) in children and young people in need, and that SLCN is a risk factor for child abuse and neglect.

Insecure attachment, maltreatment and neglect

- Insecure attachment, a lack of quality stimulation, neglect and conflict all have negative effects on a child's development¹ including on their speech, language and communication skills.²
- Children with SLCN have been found to be **at greater risk of abuse and neglect**³ and maltreatment increases their vulnerability to SLCN.⁴
- High-risk young people, such as those who are subject to child protection orders because of suspected or confirmed maltreatment, and those who are engaged with the youth justice system, face an elevated risk for SLCN.⁵
- Boys with SLCN are at greater risk of hostile parenting.⁶

Sexual abuse and trauma

- Children with disabilities, including SLCN, are more than three times more likely to experience sexual assault than children without disabilities.⁷
- One study followed up five year olds with SLCN to adulthood and found them to be **nearly three times more likely to report childhood sexual abuse** than their peers.⁸
- Women with a history of SLCN were more likely to report sexual abuse than their peers.¹⁵

Domestic violence

- Pre-school children exposed to domestic violence are likely to be **at significant risk of developing significant SLCN**: comparisons between children's achievement in a Refuge play-centre and in the community showed a significant difference in hearing and speech development.⁹

Perinatal mental health

- Perinatal mental health issues have a negative effect on the mother¹⁰ and subsequently her ability to provide an environment and interactions that will encourage language development.¹¹
- They can also directly affect the emotional, cognitive and even physical development of the child.¹²

Children and young people with vulnerabilities

Research has also shown a high level of undetected SLCN in children and young people who have:

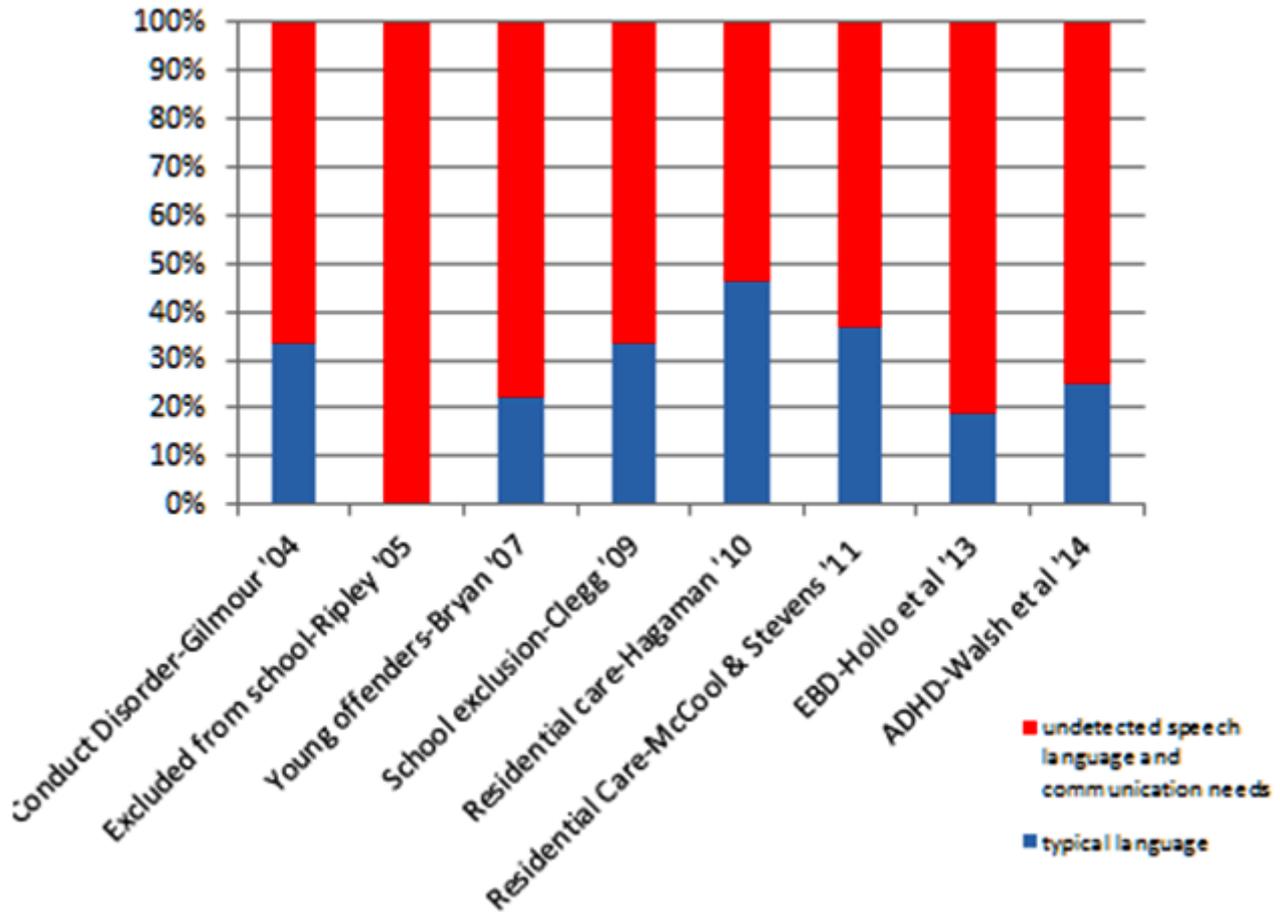
- social, emotional and mental health needs;¹³
- conduct disorder;¹⁴
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).¹⁵

Figure 1 overleaf illustrates this, as well as the high levels of undetected SLCN in care¹⁶ and justice settings,¹⁷ as well as children and young people excluded from school.¹⁸

Children and young people with disabilities

Children and young people with a range of other conditions will also have some form of SLCN, including brain injury, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, hearing loss, autism and learning disability.

Figure 1



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