

CHALLENGING DOMINANT NARRATIVES

Provider type and quality in Scottish residential child care

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DOES PROVIDER TYPE PREDICT INSPECTION-BASED QUALITY?

The dominant narrative predicts poorer quality in for-profit care. Scottish regulator data told a different story.

1 BACKGROUND

For-profit residential child care is often framed as lower quality, unstable and driven by organisational rather than children’s needs. Evidence specific to Scotland, however, is limited.

A Scottish test of a UK-wide assumption

2 METHOD

1 QUANT.

341 services, 12 months of Care Inspectorate data

2 QUAL.

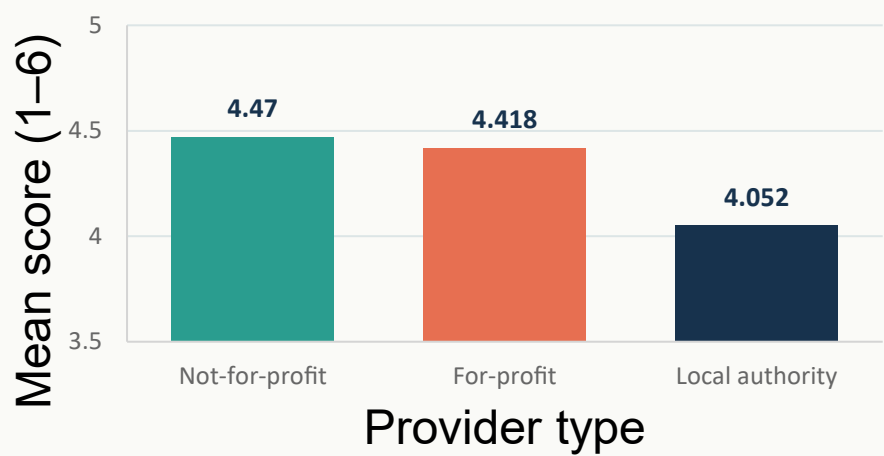
3 heads of children’s services semi-structured interviews

Sequential explanatory mixed-methods design

Cross-sectoral snapshot • Five quality indicators • Complaints and risk category considered

3 RESULTS

Inspection grades did not follow the expected hierarchy



341

registered residential and secure services

74 not-for-profit • 159 for-profit
108 local authority

INTERVIEWS ADDED CONTEXT

- “Last resort” duties constrain matching.
- Independent providers may reject referrals.
- Purchasers do not differentiate provider types.

Not-for-profit and for-profit means were close; local authority scores were lower across all five indicators.

CONCLUSION

Provider type alone is not a sufficient explanation of quality.

Use inspection data, but interpret it alongside matching constraints, statutory duties and the complexity of children’s needs. Build a less polarised, conversation about quality care, and a more collaborative mixed economy of care.



Limitations: cross-sectoral regulator data; 3 local-authority interviewees; findings are not causal or nationally generalisable.