INFANT OUT-OF-HOME CARE PLACEMENTS AND LONGITUDINAL LABOR MARKET ATTACHMENT OUTCOMES: A NATIONAL COHORT STUDY

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Background: Infant placements into out-of-home care have garnered increased research attention and societal awareness. Yet, despite the high, and in some countries, increasing rates of infant care entries, their long-term outcomes remain virtually unknown.

Aim: This study examines the association between infant placement and poor labor market attachment, defined as 'not in employment, education, or training' (NEET), considering both occurrence and persistence during emerging adulthood and early midlife.

Methods: Using longitudinal register data from 622,940 individuals born in Sweden between 1975 and 1981, including approximately 0.2% (n=1,524) placed in care during infancy (<12 months), and followed up to age 38, the infant care group is contrasted with both the general population and those placed at older ages by means of sex-stratified hurdle regression analyses.

Findings: Infants placed in care face higher risks of experiencing any year with a NEET status during the follow-up compared to their general population peers. However, infants have significantly lower risks compared to the older care groups. Additionally, among those with any NEET status, the infant group exhibit higher rates of years with NEET status compared to the general population. Sex differences were noted, with women in the infant group having significantly lower rates than those placed at older ages, while men in the infant group had somewhat higher rates than other young care groups.

Conclusions: Overall, infant placement in care indicates a significant risk for poor labor market attachment across the life course. Given the substantial number of infant entries into care, these findings underscore the necessity for enhanced resources to address the unique needs of this population.

Nyckelord: out-of-home care, infants, labor market, longitudinal, cohort study

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