

# Rapid review of the characteristics and outcomes of children involved in private family law proceedings due to parental separation

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## Background

Private law children's proceedings typically involve **court disputes between parents** who:

- have separated
- disagree about child arrangements
- are asking the court to determine where a child should live and with whom they should spend time.

Children involved in private law are **potentially vulnerable**, and often receive **insufficient support through policy**.

## Aim

To shine a light on the **wellbeing and other important characteristics or outcomes of children in private law cases**, and to **identify the support needs** of these children who are often overlooked in policy.

## Evidence Base

The review included literature published between 2001 and 2022.

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relevant documents were identified, reporting on 22 different studies including:

- 8 academic journal articles
- 17 non-academic reports

Most studies aimed to describe the **characteristics** of children involved in private family law proceedings.

The studies reported on were conducted in the following countries:



13 x England and Wales



7 x Australia

1 x Canada

1 x New Zealand

## Key Findings



### Mental health and wellbeing

Almost all studies included in the review addressed this topic.

In Wales, children with a history of involvement in private law proceedings had **higher incidence of depression and anxiety than children in the general population.**

The international literature provided **written accounts**, describing children as having **anxiety, depression, anger, post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, eating disorders, experiencing self-harm and suicide attempts.**

It was unclear whether this was linked to parental separation, court proceedings, court orders, or other factors.

Other areas addressed by the report include:



Access to mental health services



Behaviour



Development



Social relationships



Learning and education



Physical health

## Policy and Practice Implications



A public health response to the needs of these children is required to

- identify vulnerable children
- provide timely support

as many children in private law cases **experience acute distress.**

## Next Steps

Further research is needed to understand:

- **the specific support needs of children in private law proceedings** compared to those of separated parents who did not use courts.
- **the short- and long-term outcomes of children in private law**, to inform their support needs and how these might change over time.

For more information, and to read the **full rapid review including Economic Considerations, click here.**