

# **DETAINED! A study of the role of social workers in the admission of young people to psychiatric hospitals in a county in England.**

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The Mental Health Act (1983) in England and Wales provides the statutory framework for the assessment and admission of people experiencing mental health distress. It is now recognized that the onset of mental health distress occurs much earlier in life than previously thought and the peak risk period for first onset psychosis is from the age of 14 years.

In England, social workers make applications for people to be detained in hospital based on the recommendations of two doctors.

They cannot be over-ruled by medics and make independent decisions about whether to accept the recommendations made by doctors. Therefore social workers occupy a very powerful position. Compulsory detention under the Mental Health Act (1983) overrides the Human Rights Act (1998) with potentially life changing consequences for the young people (and others).

This paper presents research on the use, by social workers, of the Mental Health Act (1983) in the assessment and admission of children and young people (17 years and below) to psychiatric hospitals in a county in England within a 24-month timescale (January 2012 – December 2013).

The research aimed to answer what clinical and social issues social workers need to consider when working within a statutory framework.

The methodology includes documentary analysis of social workers' reports regarding the referral, assessment and outcome for the young person. Methodological triangulation is achieved using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with a sample of social workers that have assessed and admitted young people.

The results indicate a significant increase in the number of young people being assessed.

Self-harm and suicidal ideation are the most common presenting clinical issues, with social issues including loss, previous and current abuse, and substance misuse.

The paper concludes with a discussion of the findings and the challenges for social workers in balancing risk with promoting human rights.

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