Analysing longitudinal data for looked after children in England

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Better **Knowledge**   Better **Society**

Children Looked After return

- Derived from an annual census of all local authorities

- Collated by the Department for Education since 1992

- Care records are linked over time via a child ID

- Data extract we analysed contained:

  complete care histories for

  $^1/_3$ of children

  born **1992 to 2011**

  who **entered care by 2012**

Using CLA data for research

Strengths

- More than 20 years of data collected

- Longitudinal record of children's care history

- Lack of selection or recall bias

- Detailed information on episodes of care

- Linkage to other datasets is possible e.g. education

Describing out-of-home care in England

- Number of children in care

  e.g. ever, at a single time point, during a period

- Type of care

  e.g. setting, legal status

- Duration of care

  e.g. length of first episode, total time, % of childhood

- Trajectories of care

  e.g. number of placement moves, destination, re-entry to care

How do these vary:
By age?
By gender?
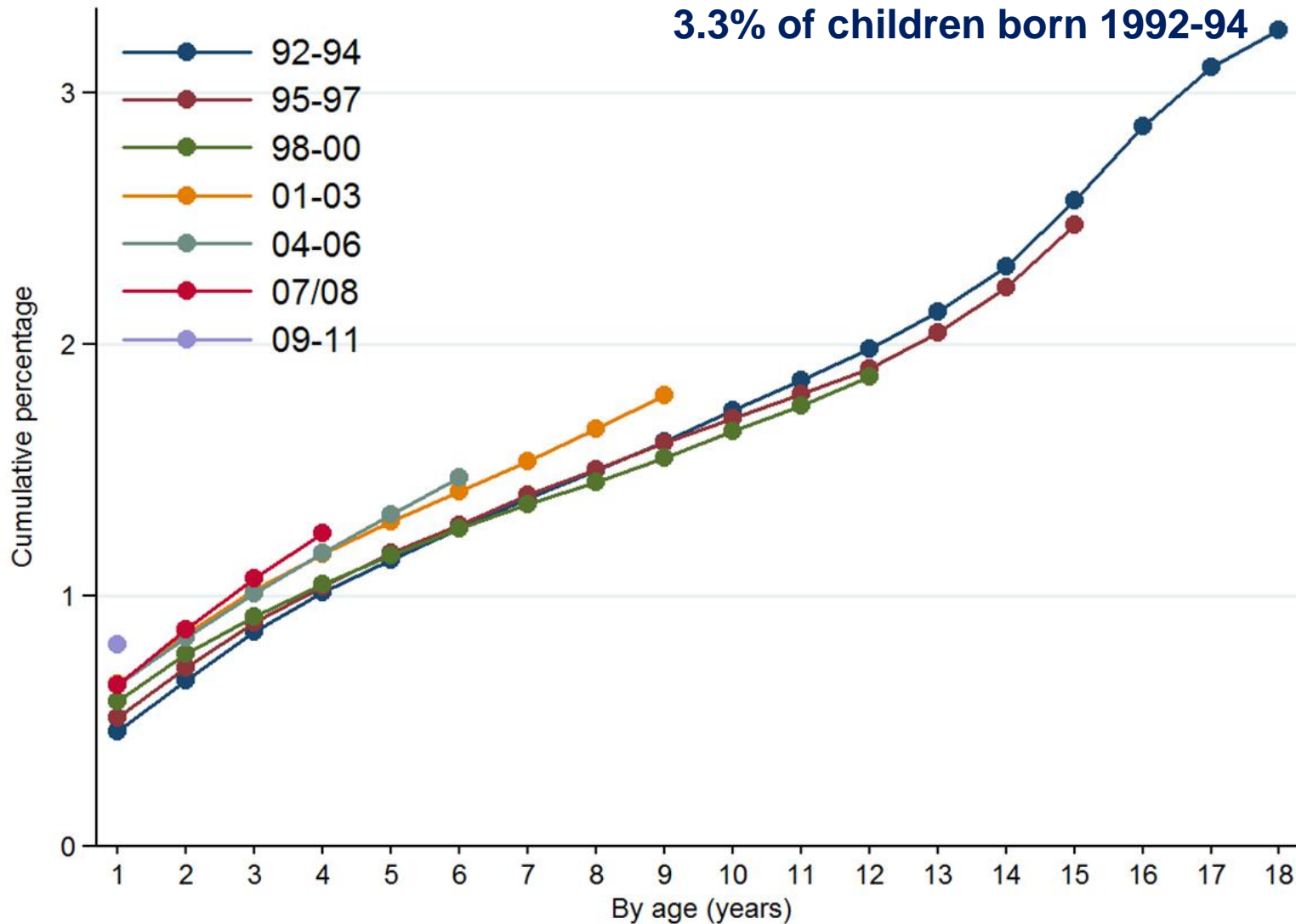By ethnicity?
Over time?
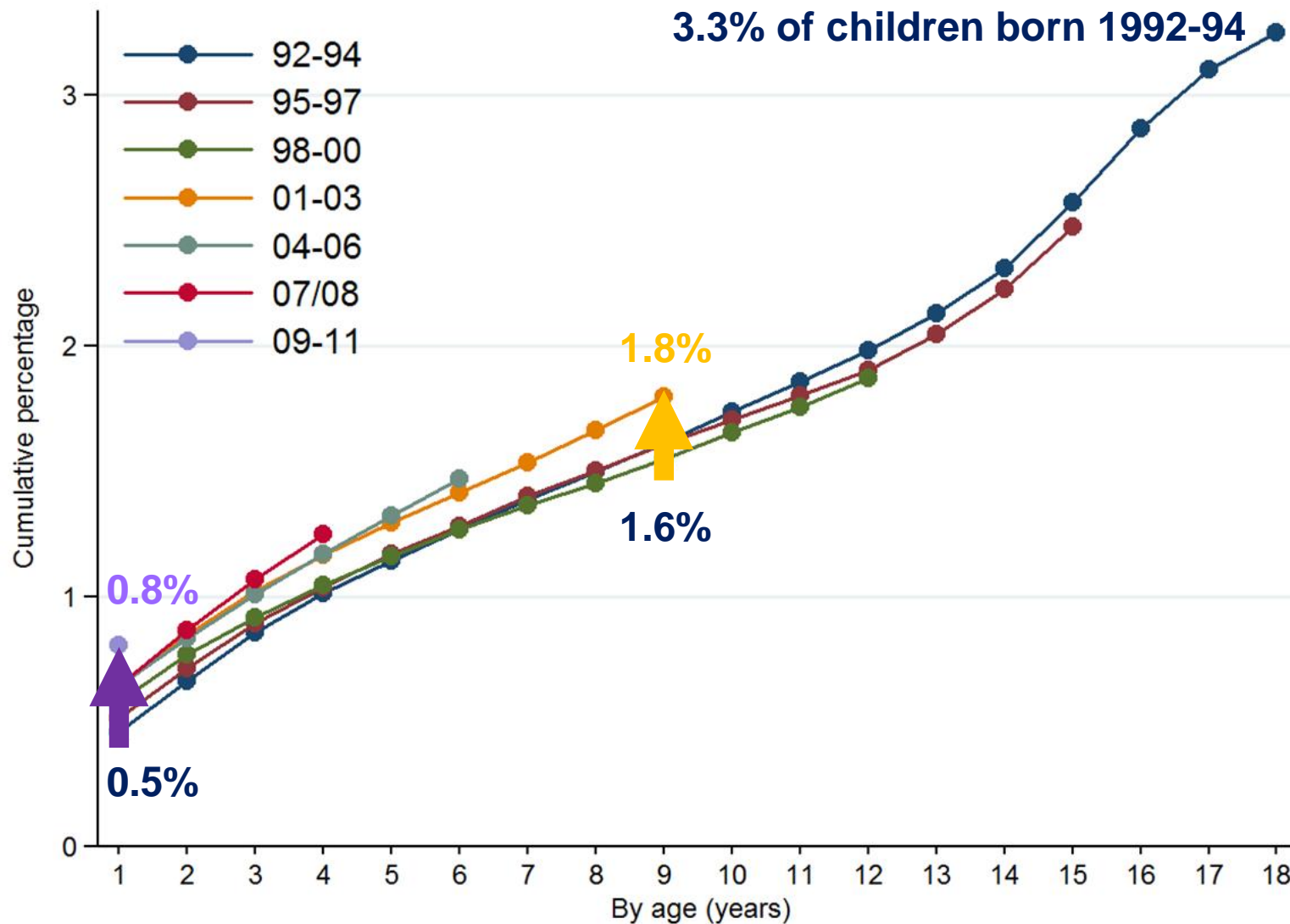Between LAs?

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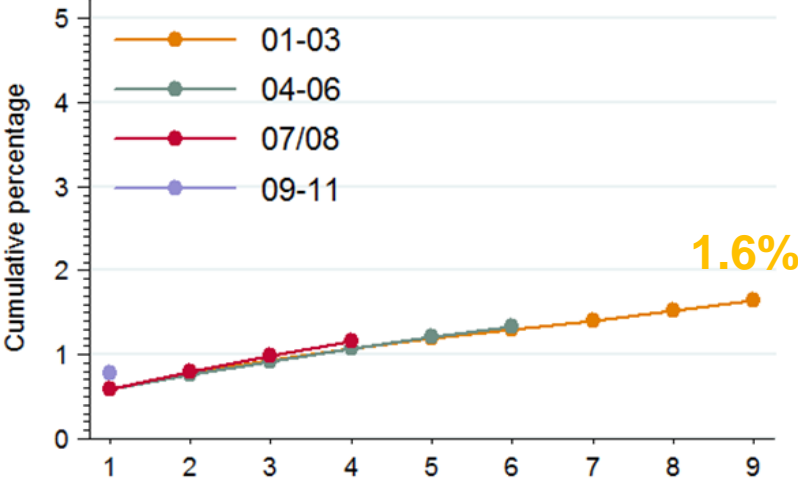
1 in 30 children in England enter OHC

From: Mc Grath-Lone *et al.* (2015) Child Abuse & Neglect
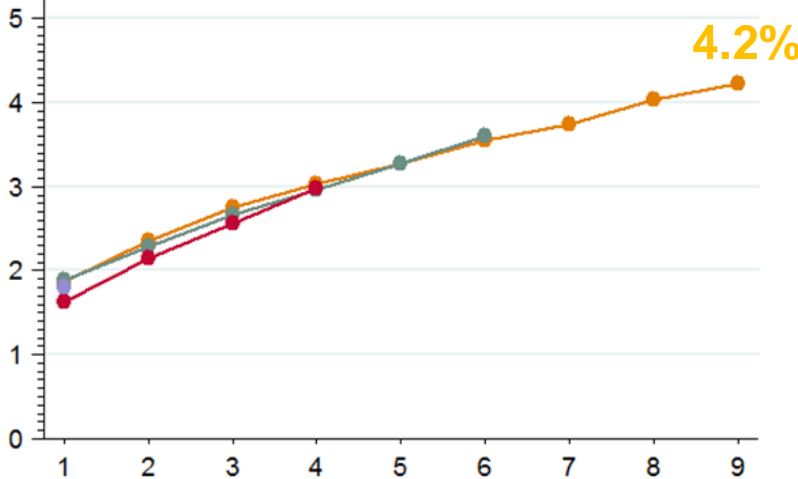
Rates of entry to care are increasing

From: Mc Grath-Lone *et al.* (2015) Child Abuse & Neglect

Some ethnic minorities are more likely to enter care

From: Mc Grath-Lone *et al.* (2015) Child Abuse & Neglect
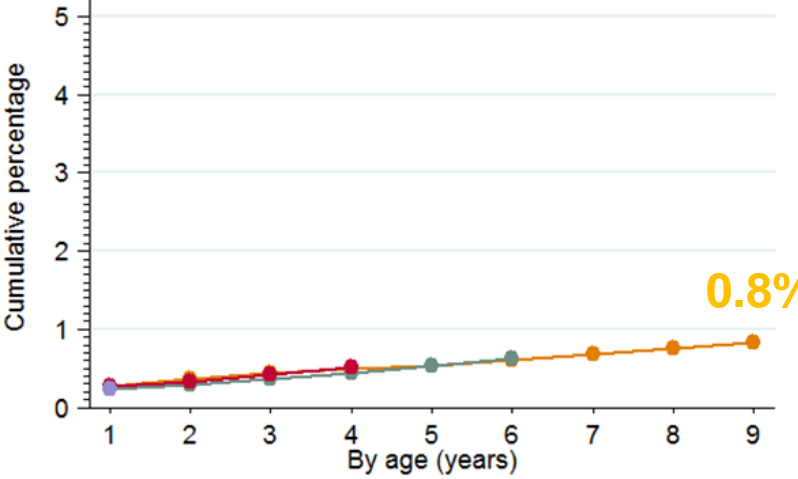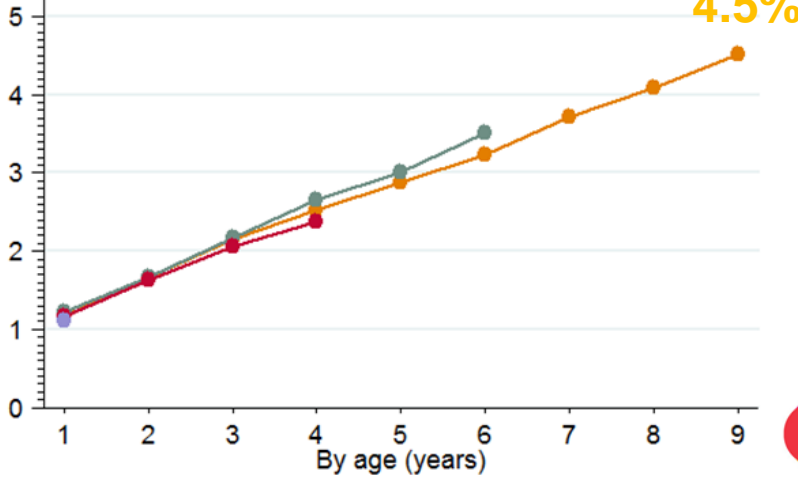
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Children are placed in a variety of OHC settings

Family setting

Foster care by:

- relatives

- family friends

- strangers

Group setting

Children's home

Mother & baby unit

Residential school

Supported living unit

Health-related institution

Other settings

Independent living

Secure unit

Young offenders' institute

Most children are placed in family care

First placement by year of birth and age at first entry

	Born in 1992			Born in 2000			Born in 2008		
	Family	*Group*	*Other*	*Family*	*Group*	*Other*	*Family*	*Group*	*Other*
<1 year	90%	8%	2%	90%	10%	0%	91%	9%	0%
1 to 4 years	96%	2%	2%	98%	2%	0%	99%	1%	0%
5 to 10 years	91%	8%	1%	96%	4%	0%			
11 to 15 years	73%	23%	4%						
16+ years	30%	35%	35%						

Children are more likely to be placed in family care

First placement by year of birth and age at first entry

	Born in 1992			Born in 2000			Born in 2008		
	Family	*Group*	*Other*	*Family*	*Group*	*Other*	*Family*	*Group*	*Other*
<1 year	90%	8%	%	90%	10%	%	91%	9%	0%
1 to 4 years	96%			98%			99%	1%	0%
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11 to 15 years	73%	23%	4%						
16+ years	30%	35%	35%						

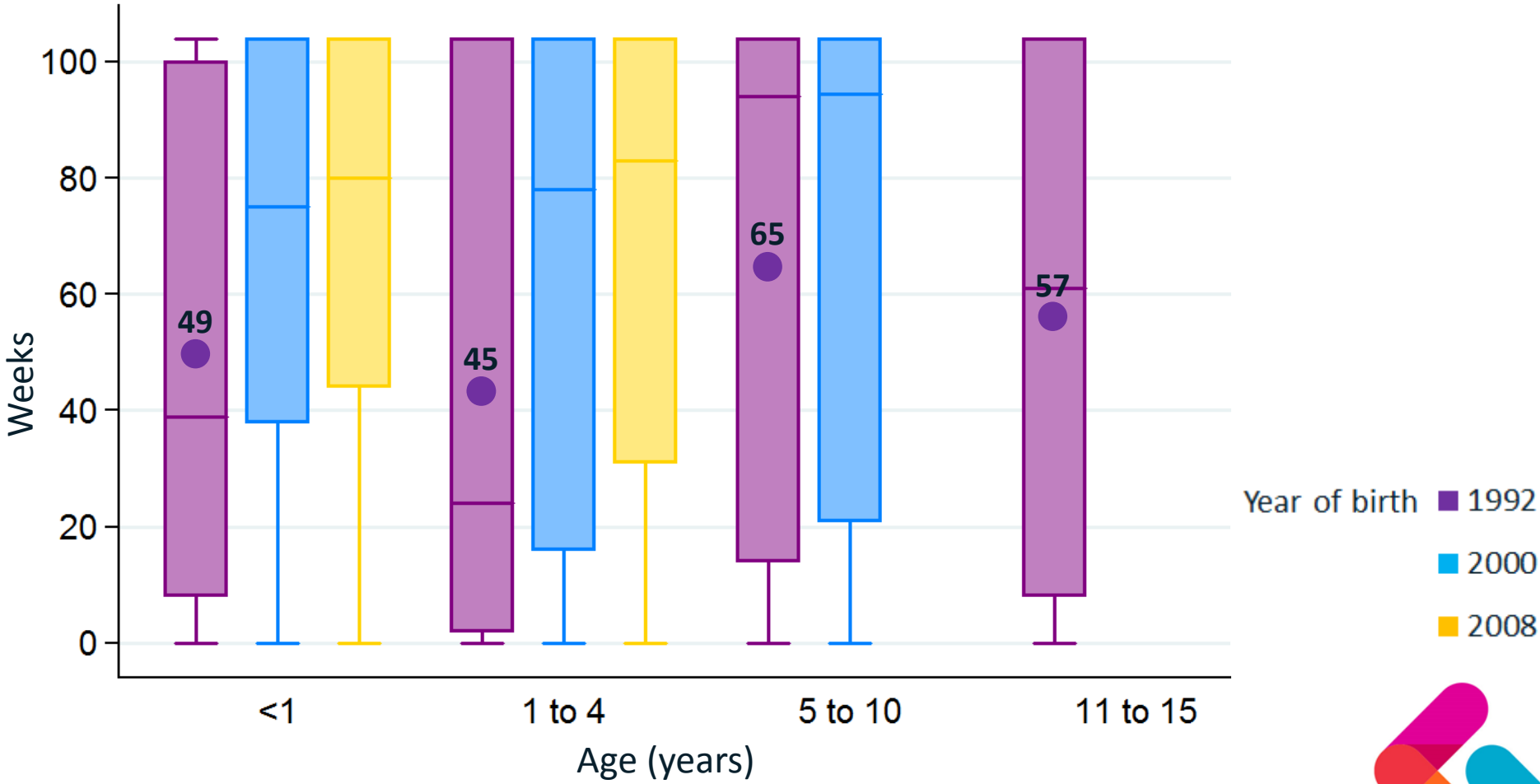From: Mc Grath-Lone *et al.* (2015) Child Abuse & Neglect

Describing out-of-home care in England

- Number of children in care
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  e.g. setting, support, access to services

- Duration of care
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- Trajectories of care
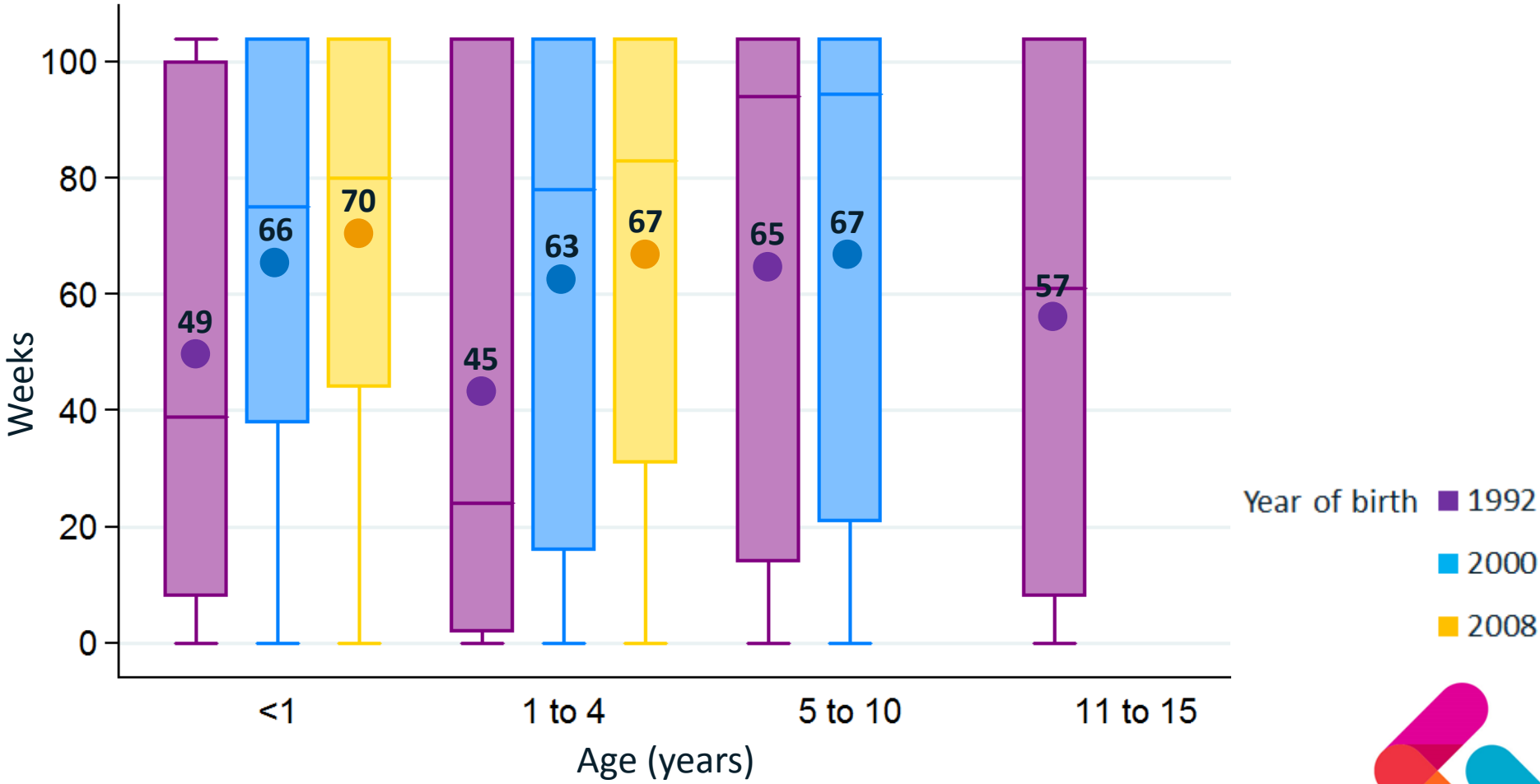 e.g. number of placement moves, destination, re-entry to care

Average time spent in care varies by age

Weeks in out-of-home care in the two years following first entry to care

From: Mc Grath-Lone *et al.* (2015) Child Abuse & Neglect

Average time spent in care is increasing

Weeks in out-of-home care in the two years following first entry to care

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  e.g. <u>re-entry to care</u>, number of placement moves, destination

Modes of exit from out-of-home care in England

Return home
No longer looked after

Placed with parents
Local authority retains role of corporate parent

Adopted
Transfer of all parental rights

Special guardianship order
Transfer of most parental rights

Residence order
Transfer of some parental rights

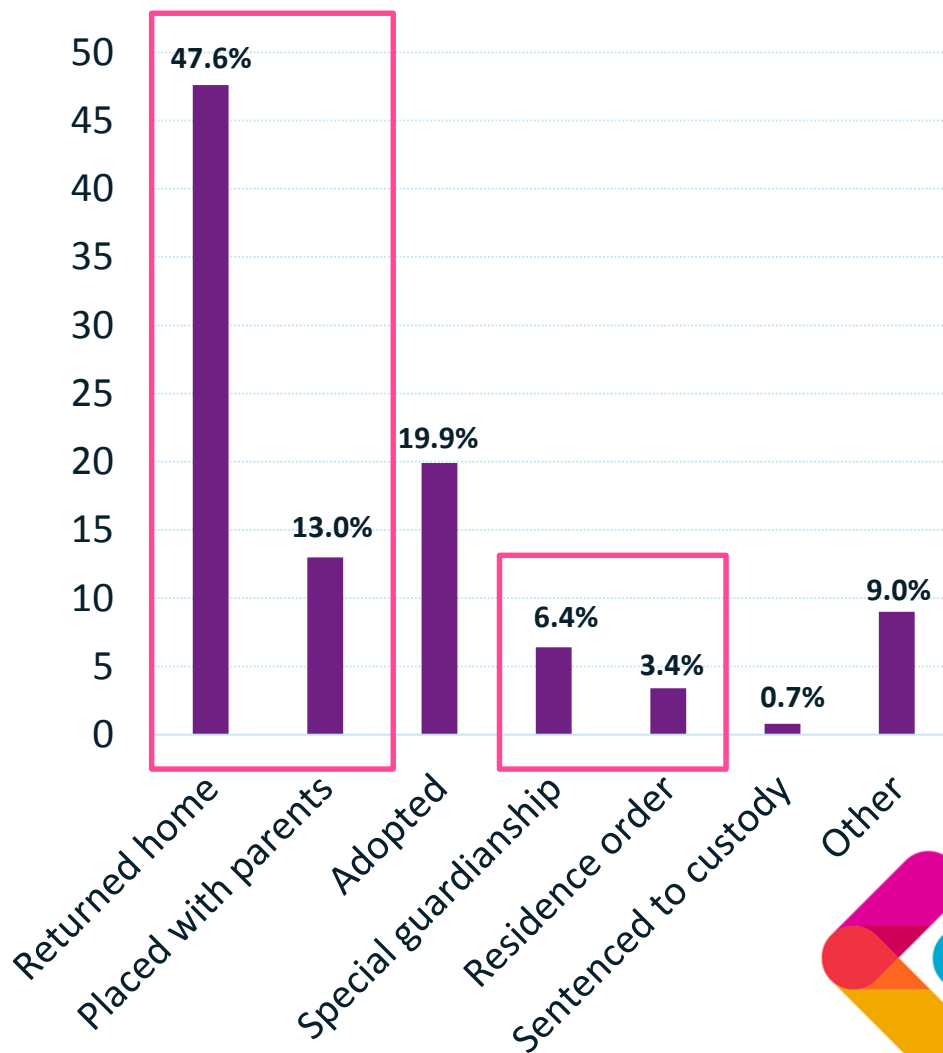**Sentenced to custody**
Moves to YOI or prison

Most children return home when exiting care

Overall 5,226 children aged <16 years exited out-of-home care in 2008

More than 60% returned home to their parents

Almost one in five children were adopted

Mode of exit from care in 2008 (%)

Mode of exit	Percentage
Returned home	47.6%
Placed with parents	13.0%
Adopted	19.9%
Special guardianship	6.4%
Residence order	3.4%
Sentenced to custody	0.7%
Other	9.0%

Exclusions from re-entry analysis

When child is **adopted** they acquire a new legal identity.

- If they re-enter care, it will not be linked to their previous care history.

Children **sentenced to custody** cannot re-enter care until they have completed their sentence.
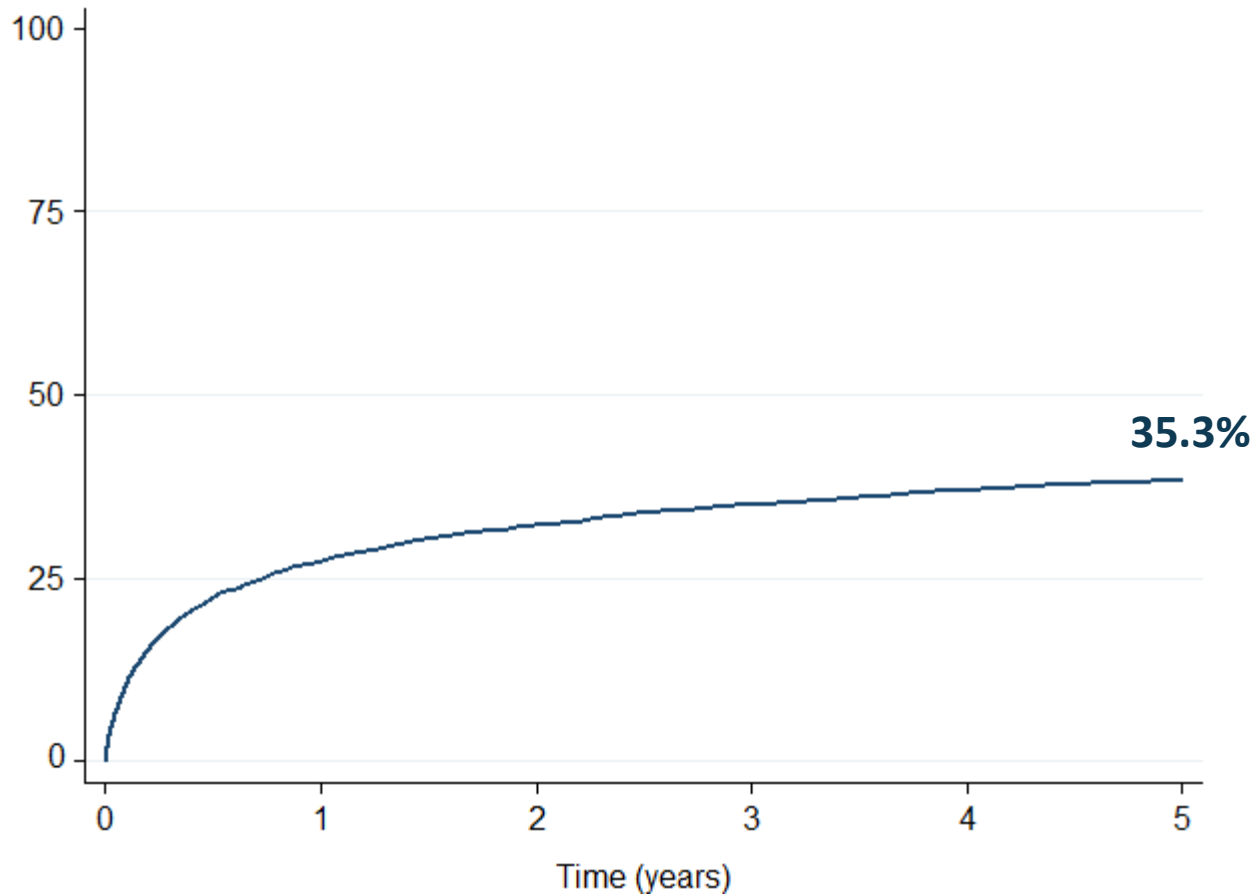
- This will affect re-entry timings.

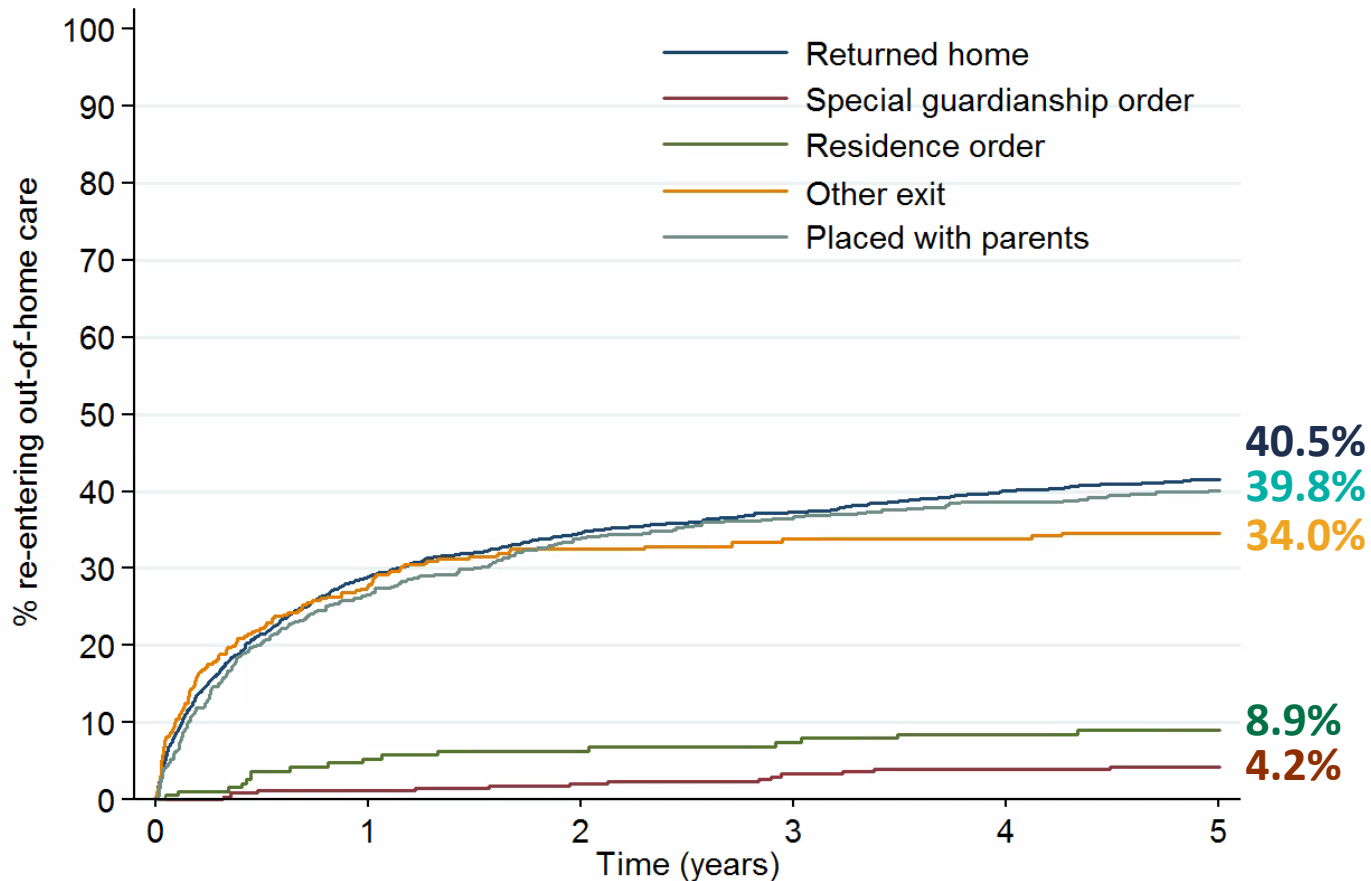➡ Re-entry can be explored for 4,076 children

More than one-third of children re-enter care

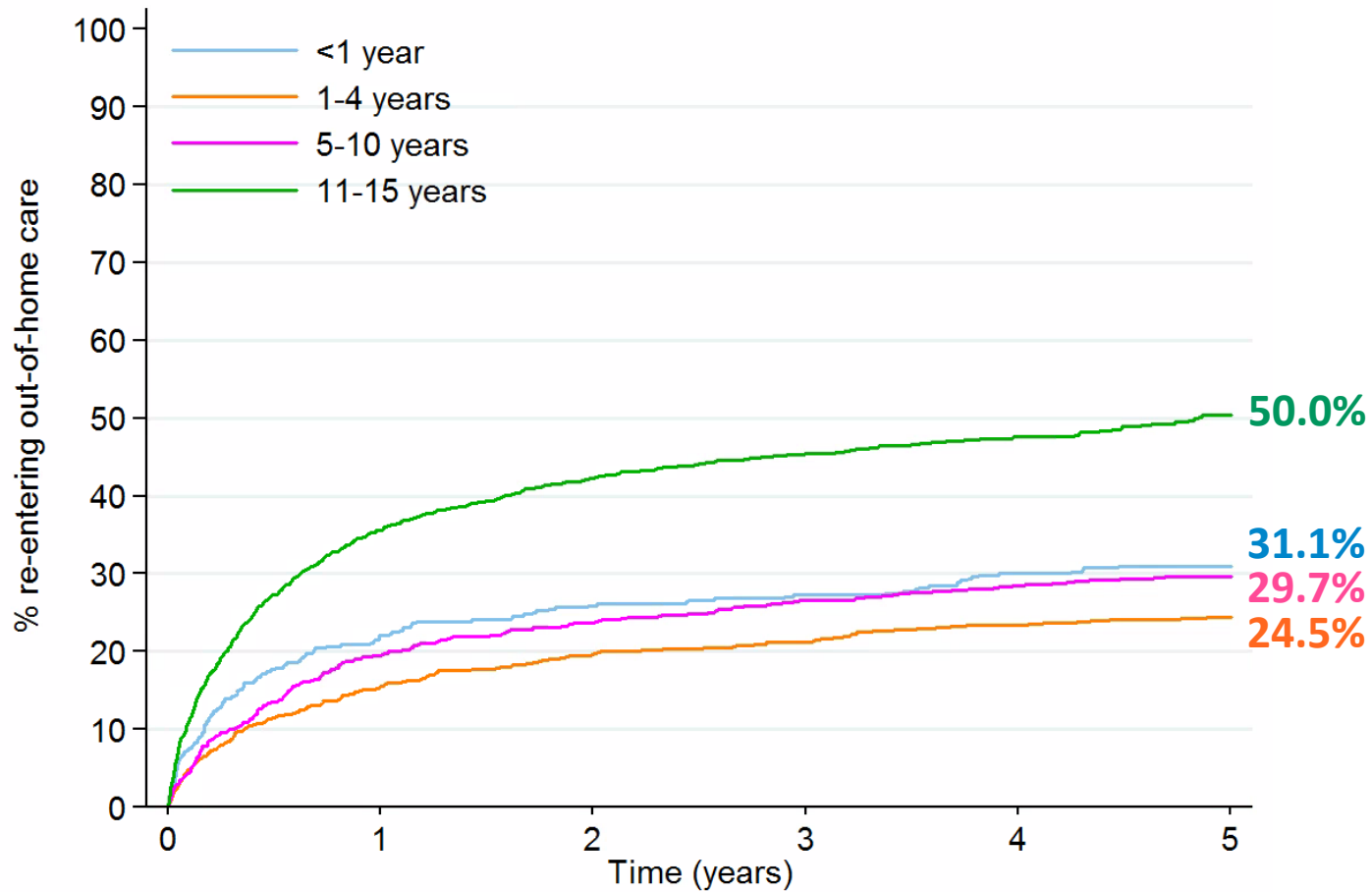*Percentage of children exiting care in 2008 who re-entered within five years*

35.3%

Children who exit via a special guardianship order are least likely to re-enter

Percentage of children re-entering care within five years, by mode of exit

Children aged 11-15 are most likely to re-enter

Percentage of children re-entering care within five years, by age group

Effect of child characteristics

Children aged 11 or older have up to **50% higher** hazard of re-entering care compared to younger children.

White or Mixed ethnicity also have **50% higher** hazard of re-entry.

Sex has no effect on re-entry.

Hazard ratio for child factors with constant proportional hazards

Age group	HR	p-value
<1	(ref)	
1 to 4	0.98	0.64
5 to 10	0.89	0.30
11 to 15	1.49	**<0.001**
Ethnicity		
White or Mixed	1.50	**<0.001**
Black, Asian or Other	(ref)	
Sex		
Male	(ref)	
Female	0.99	0.81

Effect of other care factors

	0 to 3 months	
	HR	p-value
In care due to family stress/dysfunction	1.48	**<0.001**
In care due to child's disability	1.30	0.35
In care due to absent parenting	0.54	**0.03**
Previous exit from out-of-home care	1.44	**<0.001**
Average placement is 3-9 months long	0.46	**<0.001**
Average placement is >9 months long	0.34	**<0.001**
1-4 placement changes overall	1.03	0.63
>5 placement changes overall	1.50	**<0.001**
In care voluntarily (i.e. not court-mandated)	1.83	**<0.001**

What factors affect re-entry to care?

More likely to re-enter care

A history of previous exits

In care due to child's disability, family stress or dysfunction*

Placed with parents or "Other" mode of exit*

Aged >11 when exiting care

White or Mixed ethnicity

Short average placement length*

High number of placement changes*

Voluntarily in care

Less likely to re-enter care

First exit from care

In care due to absent parenting*

Returned home or exit under a legal order*

Aged <11 when exiting care

White or Mixed ethnicity

Long average placement length*

Low number of placement changes*

In court-mandated care

* Time-varying effects

Predicting re-entry to care

More likely to re-enter care

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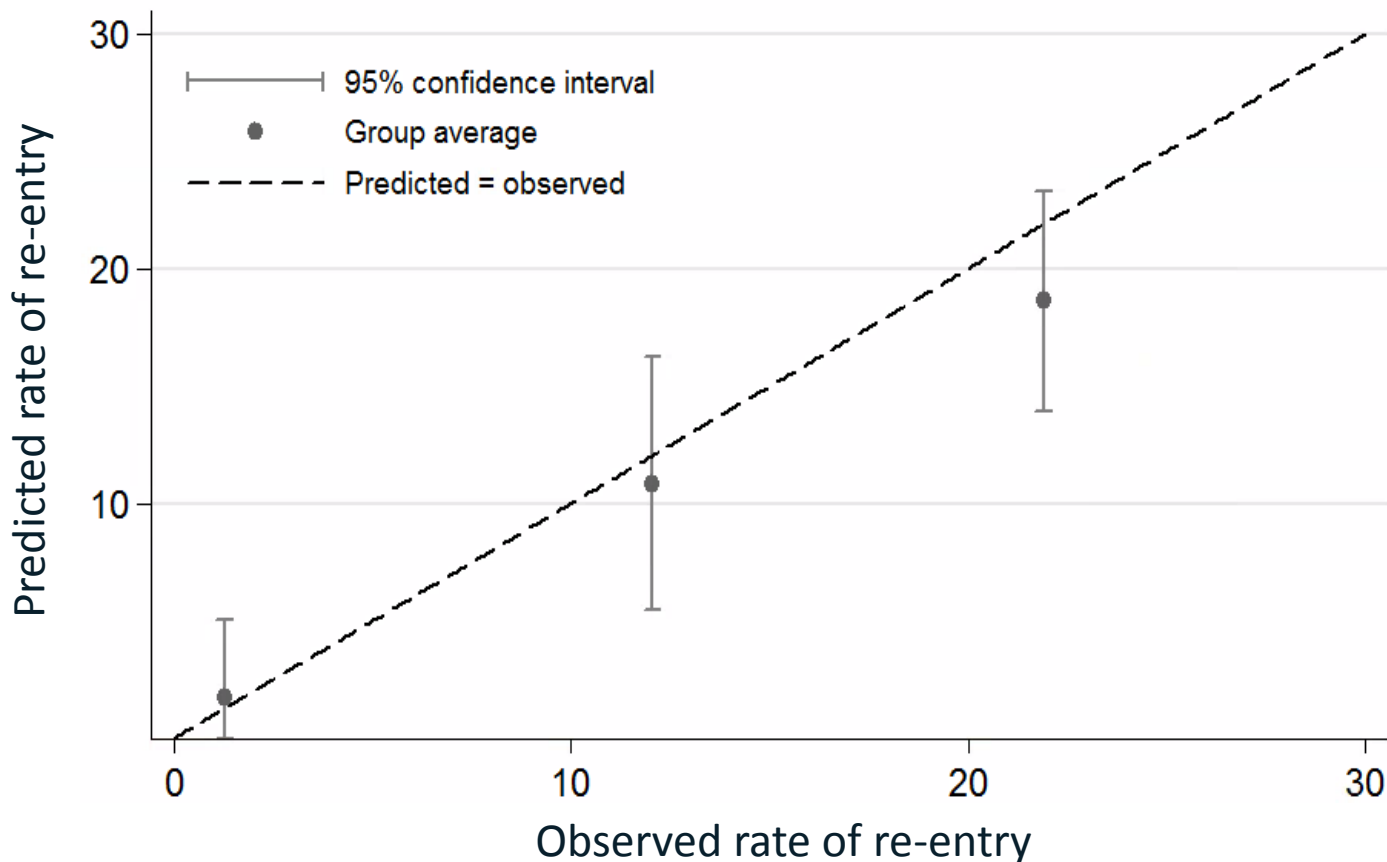
* Time-varying effects

Absolute predicted risk ≈
baseline hazard + ∑(baseline hazard*hazard ratio)

Calibrate predictive model

- Restricted to rapid re-entry within 3 months (time-varying hazards)
- Three risk groups: **low** (<5%), **medium** (5-15%) & **high** (>15%)
- Plot average predicted risk against average observed risk for each group
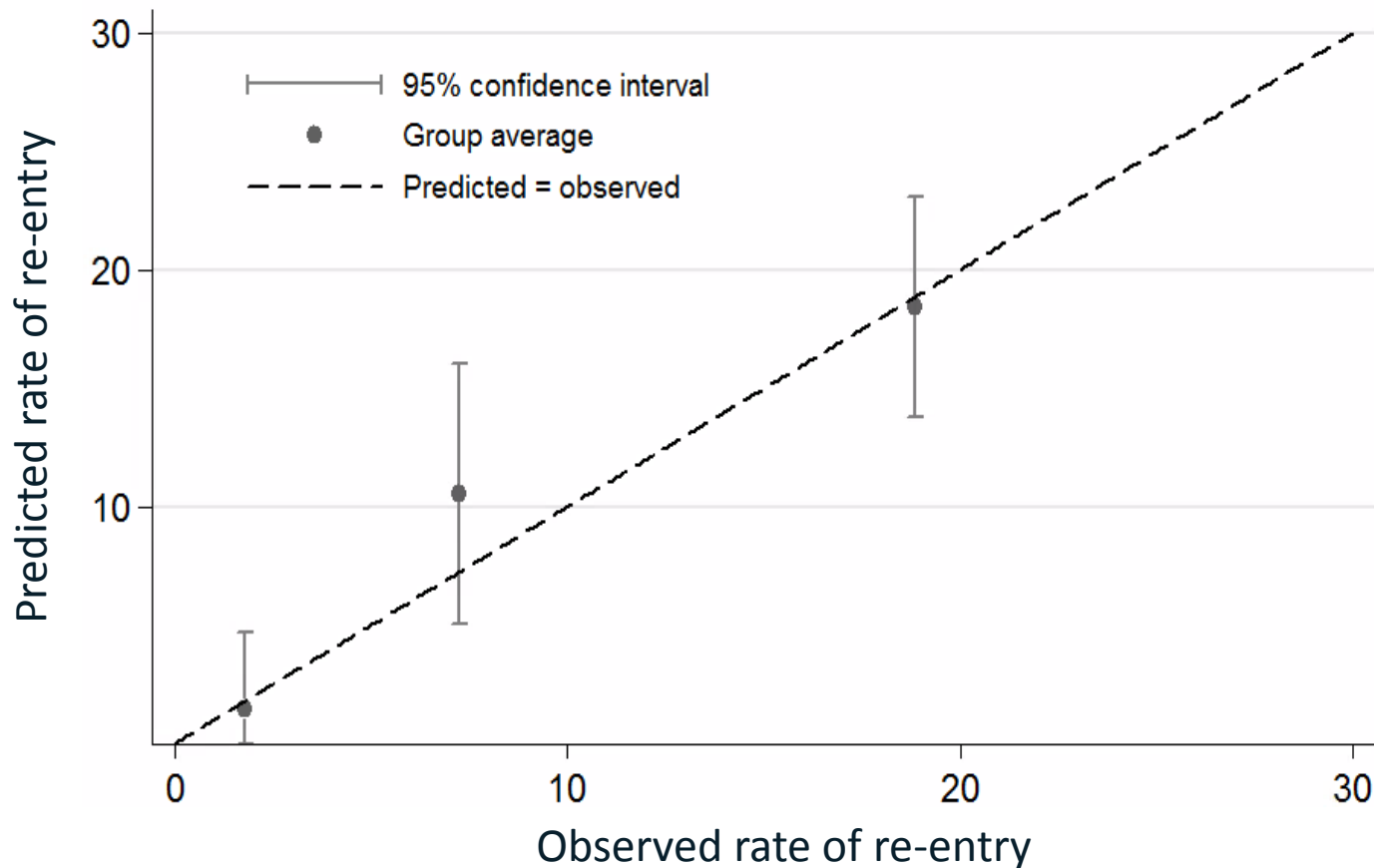

High-risk:
Obs = 21.9%
Pred = 18.6%

Medium-risk:
Obs = 12.0%
Pred = 10.9%

Low-risk:
Obs = <1%
Pred = <1%

Validate predictive model

- Using external dataset of children who exited care in 2012 (N=4,650)
- Develop an online calculator based on validates predictive model

High-risk:
Obs = 18.8%
Pred = 18.4%

Medium-risk:
Obs = 7.2%
Pred = 10.5%

Low-risk:
Obs = 1.7%
Pred = 1.4%

How old is the child?

5-10 years ▾

What is their ethnicity?

Black ▾

Why is the child in care (i.e. what is their category of need)?

Abuse or neglect ▾

Is this the first time the child is leaving care?

Yes, this is their first epsiode of care that is ending ▾

How long has the child been in care (current episode only)?

3-6 months ▾

Is the child in care voluntarily (i.e. Section 20 accommodation)?

Yes ▾

How is the child leaving care?

They are being placed with their parents but will continue to be looked after ▾

The predicted risk of re-entering care within three months for children in this group is:

10%

Risk group (low, medium or high)

Children with these risk factors are placed in the medium-risk group and are at higher risk of re-entry to care than other children.

The proportion of children re-entering care in the medium-risk group ranges from 5% to 15%. On average, 1 in 8 children re-enter care within 3 months.

Will be published online and freely available
Contact louise.mc-grath-lone.13@ucl.ac.uk for details

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Questions?