



ESRC Business and Local Government
Data Research Centre

Analysing local authority data about looked after children: who stays in care, who leaves, and where do children go?

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06/12/17

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Overview

- Business and Local Government Data Research Centre and collaboration with a local authority
- Research questions
- SSDA903 data return
- Care pathways of looked after children
- Future work



Business and Local Government Data Research Centre

- Established by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) across academia and non-academia
- Aimed to help local authorities and businesses nationwide to harness data more effectively
- Researchers from University of East Anglia, Essex, Kent and London School of Economics
- Research streams:
 - Support for vulnerable people
 - Methodologies for big data
 - Mapping public access to green infrastructure
 - Local economic growth



Research team focussing on children in social care

- Prof Beth Neil (principal investigator, social work)
- Prof Ruth Hancock (health economics)
- Prof Elena Kulinskaya (statistics)
- Dr Lisanne Gitsels (statistics)
- Dr Marcello Morciano (health economics)
- Dr Ferran Espuny Pujol (mathematics)



Collaboration with local authority

- Discussing research questions of both parties
- Obtaining and analysing data
- Presenting results → follow-up research questions



Research questions

What are the different profiles and pathways for looked after children, and what factors are associated with these different pathways?

- Leaving care within one year
- Reunification
- Adoption



SSDA903 annual data returns

- Aims to collect information about children who are looked after by local authorities during the financial year
- Data include demographic profile, previous permanence, episodes of care, adoption, and well-being
- Received SSDA903 annual returns of the one local authority for the years 2009/10 to 2016/17 (8 years)
- Validated the received data with the summary statistics published by the Department for Education
 - Maximum difference of 15 children



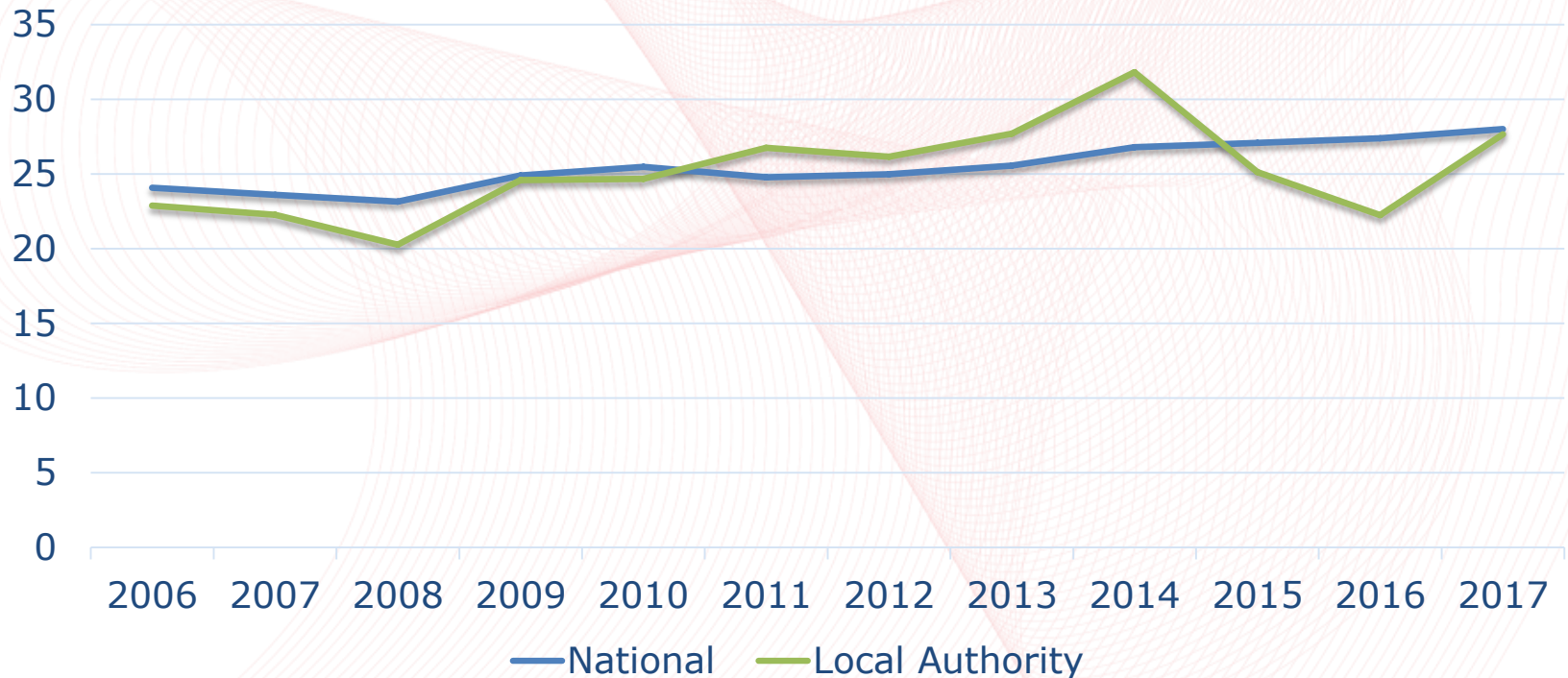
Data issues

| LAC table | Data issue | Number of times (unique children) |
|-------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Header | Multiple dates of birth | 41 (38) |
| | Multiple classified ethnicities (white/non-white) | 27 (27) |
| Episodes | Gaps between episodes of care while child did not leave care | 148 (143) |
| | Episode ceased because new one started, but no new episode started | 56 (42) |
| | Episode ceased after a new one started | 73 (55) |
| | Child left care and came back but this episode of care was not recorded as 'started to be looked after' | 51 (29) |
| Episodes & Header | Looked after while being overaged | 2 (2) |
| Total | | 398 (214) |



Children in care

Rate started to be looked after per 10,000 children



Profile children in care

- 3,011 children started to be looked after with 3,482 periods in care:
 - 53% boys
 - 39% aged 0-4, 17% aged 5-9, 23% aged 10-14, 21% aged 15+
 - 89% white ethnic background
 - 57% in care due to abuse/neglect
 - 30% from most deprived quintile vs 2% from most affluent quintile



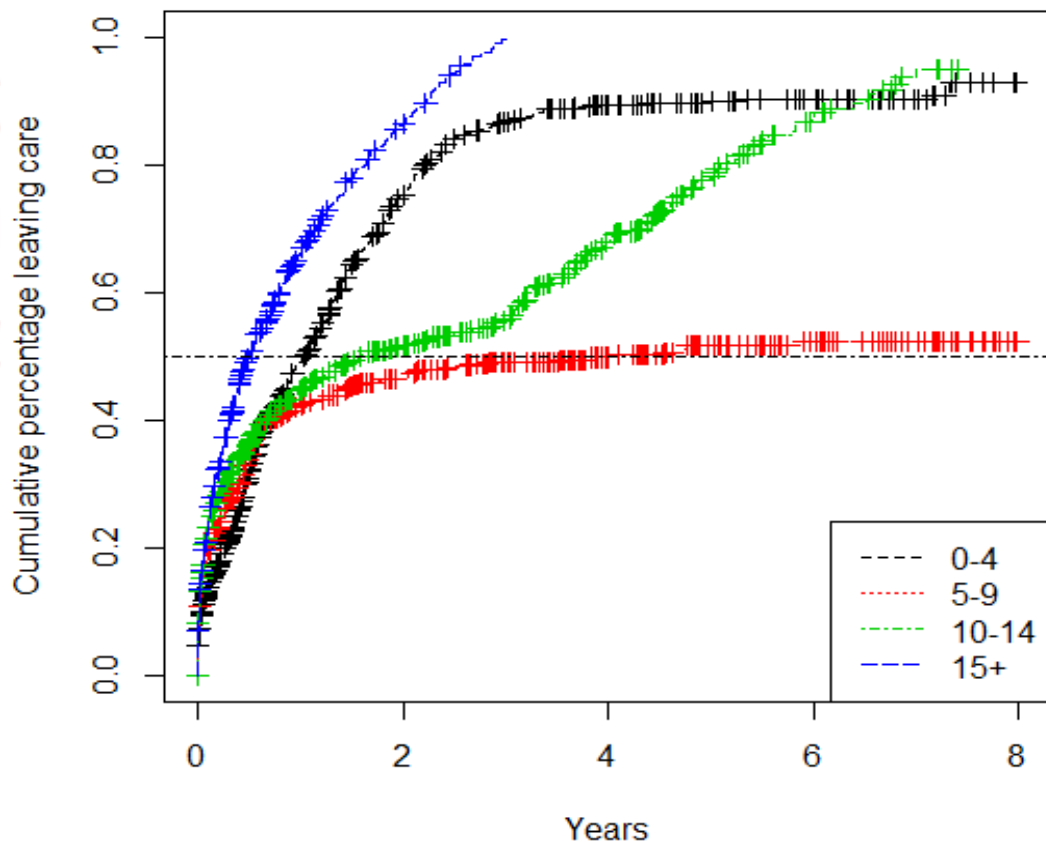
Time in care

- Median time in care 354 days
 - After 5 years: 17% remain in care
 - After 8 years: 12% remain in care
- Children staying longer in care:
 - White ethnic background
 - In care due to abuse/neglect
 - Aged 5-9
- No differences in time in care by:
 - Sex
 - Deprivation



Time in care by age

Leaving care by age group

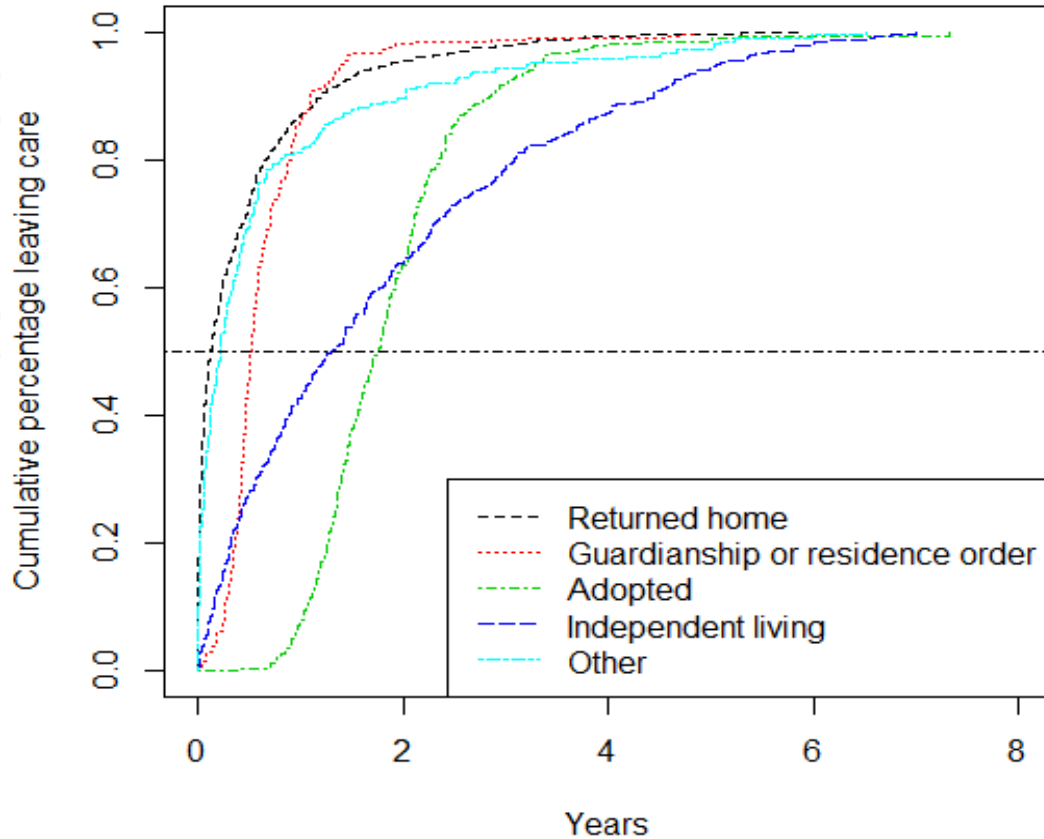


| Age at entry | Prevalence |
|--------------|-------------|
| 0-4 | 1,341 (39%) |
| 5-9 | 606 (17%) |
| 10-14 | 807 (23%) |
| 15+ | 728 (21%) |



Time in care by reason leaving care

Reason leaving care



| Reason leaving care | Prevalence |
|---------------------|-------------|
| Home | 1,147 (45%) |
| SGO/RO | 326 (13%) |
| Adopted | 384 (15%) |
| Indep. Liv. | 434 (17%) |
| Other | 211 (8%) |

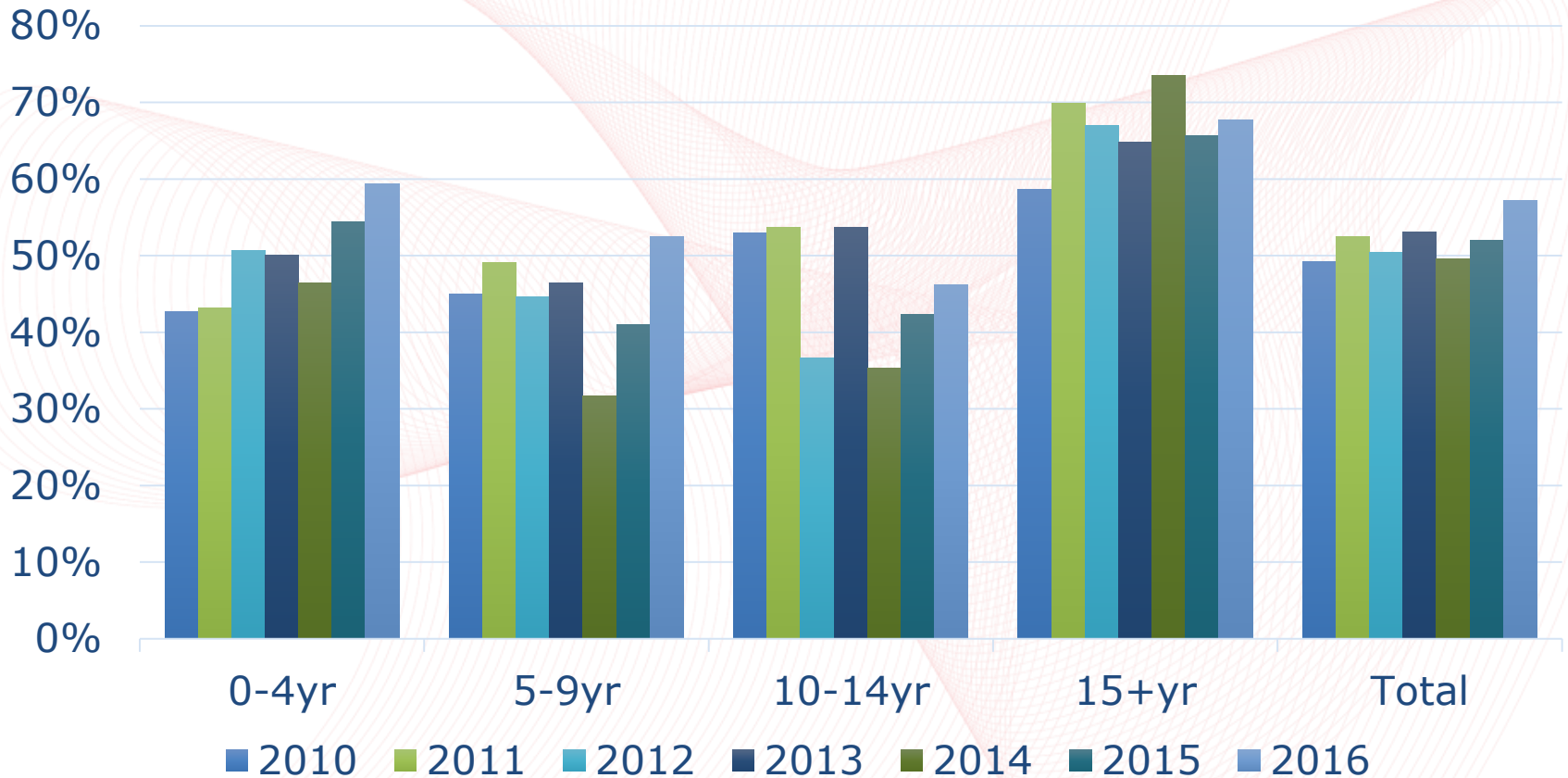


Changes in trajectory in care over time

- Fewer returning home
- More special guardianship or residence order or adopted
- Faster adoption
- Fewer returned to care and returned fewer times



Left care within 365 days (n=1,670)

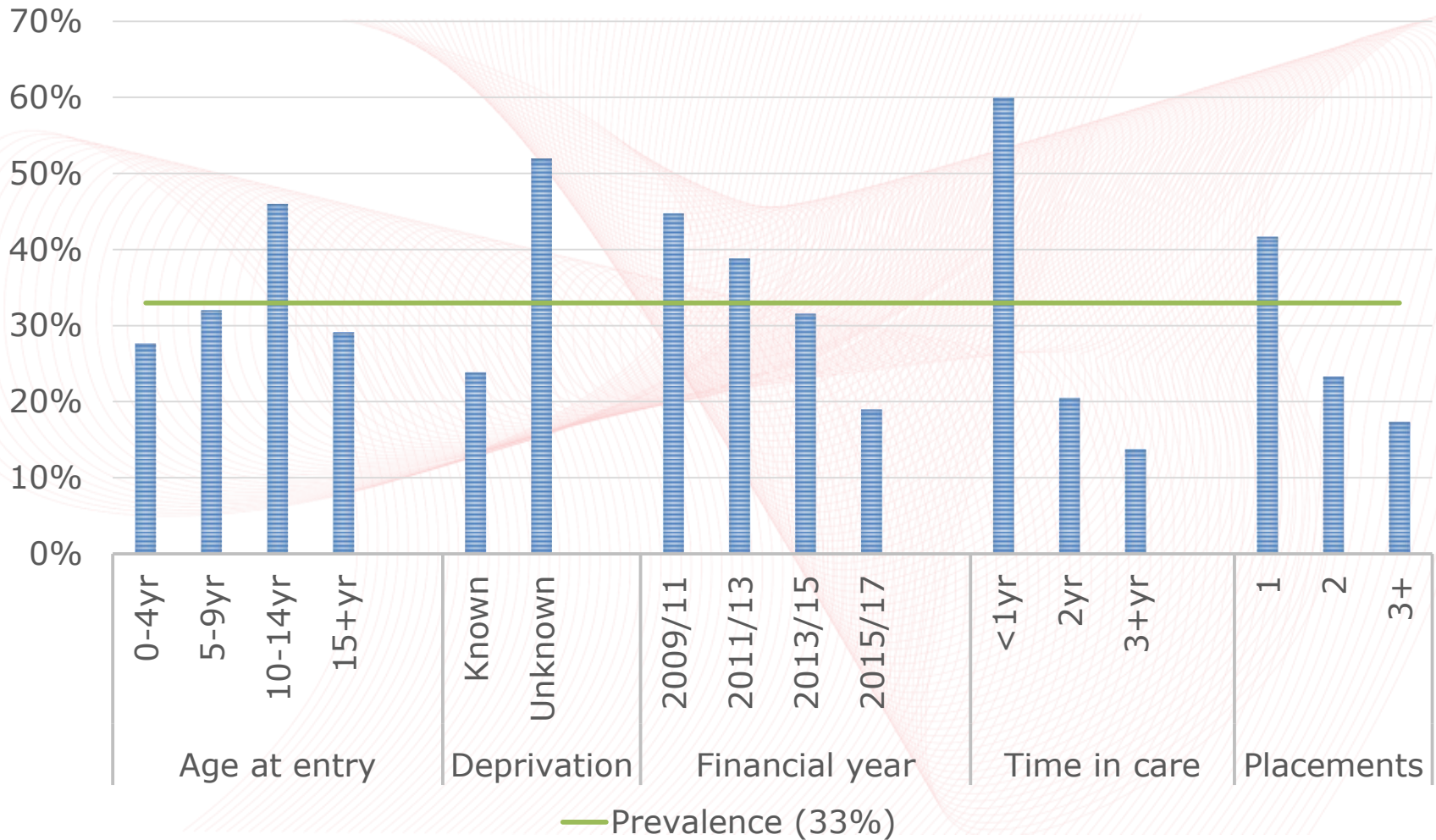


Reunification of children from care

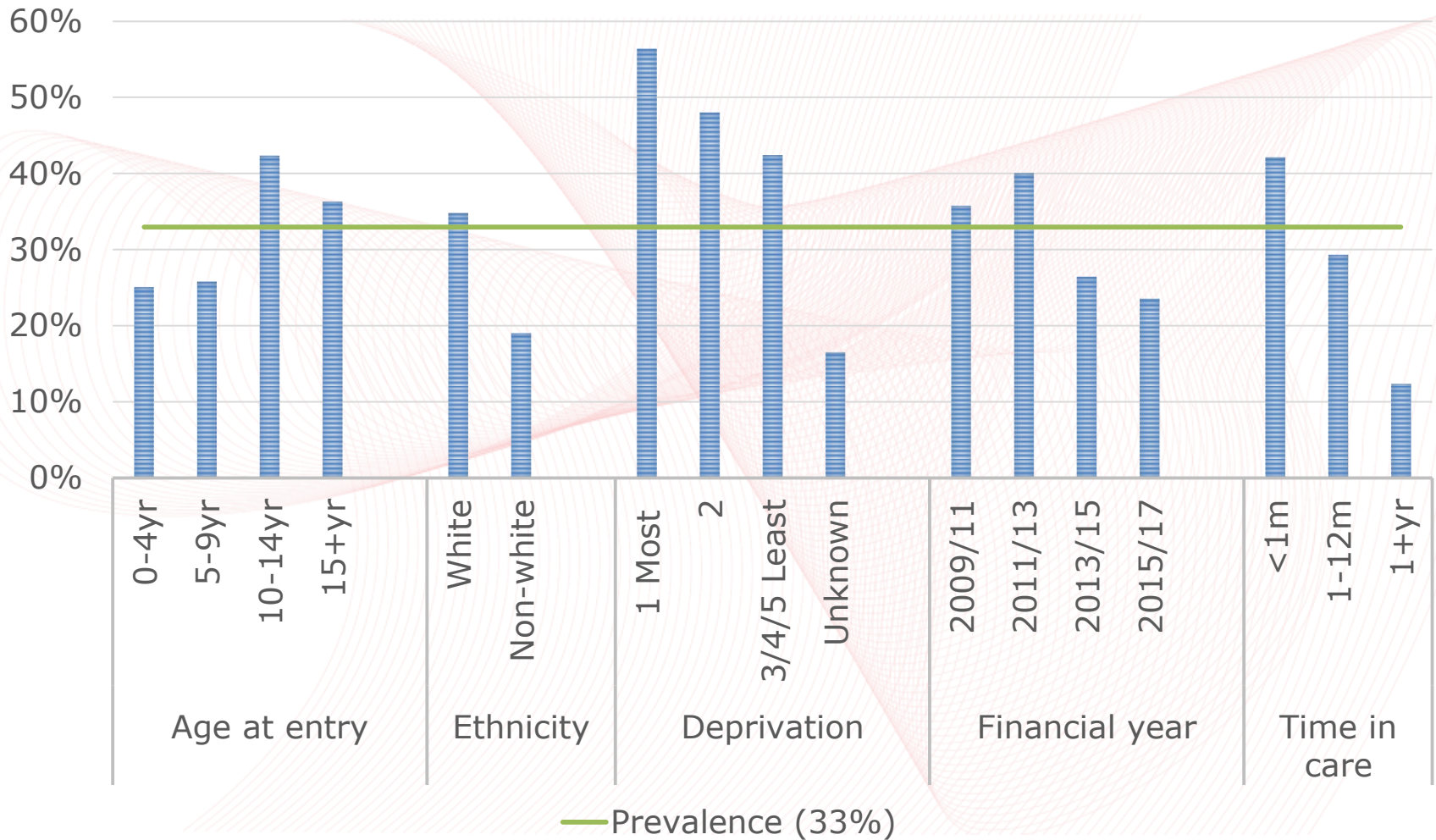
- One third of children in care exit to live with parents (DfE 2017)
- Rates of re-entry 40% after 5 years (McGrath-Lone, 2017)
- Successful returns associated with:
 - Adequate preparation of parent & child
 - No history of physical abuse, caregiver supports return & actively sought it
 - Adequate support & involvement of vol. org or health visitor
 - Change to household composition
 - Child does not show attachment problems, and has not been 'in and out' of care (Farmer & Wijesada, 2012)



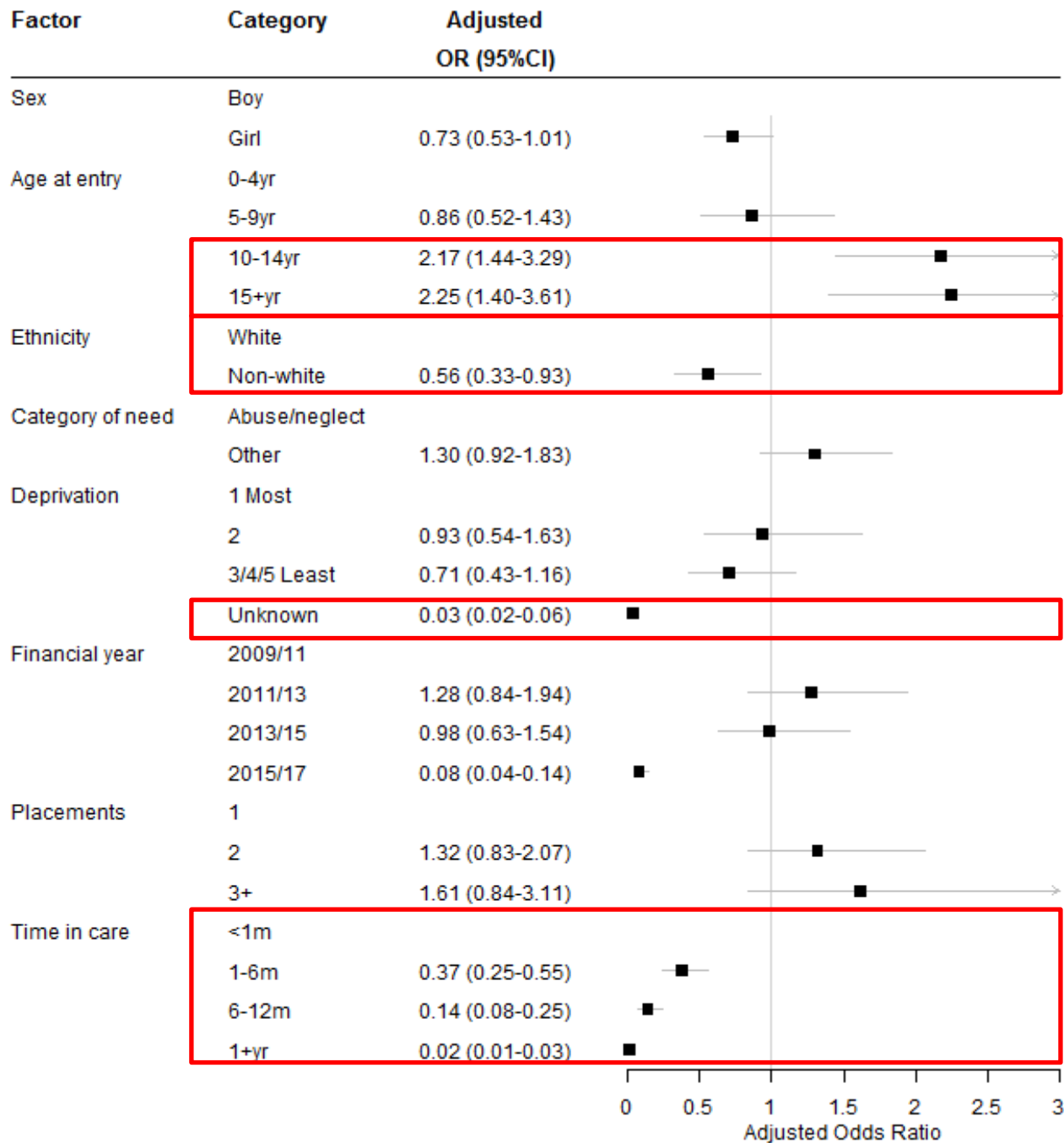
Reunification (n=1,148)



Unstable reunification (n=377)



Unstable reunifications



Future work

- Local authority: further analysis by linking LAC data to Children in Need (CIN) data
- National:
 - Adoption pathways using CIN and LAC data
 - Offending using CIN, LAC, and MOJ (ministry of justice) data





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