



**Looked after children in Scotland:  
Complex lives, complex solutions**

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# Outline

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- Complexity in child protection
  - Children's lives
  - Policy
- The research
  - Tracking change over time
- Findings
  - Children's lives
  - Policy in practice
  - Unintended consequences

# Complexity in child protection

- Child protection as a complex system
- Cause and effect embedded in complicated networks
- Reduced predictability
- Unintended consequences



# Complexity in child protection: Children's lives

- Attainment gap
- Lengthy paths to permanence
  - Majority waited over 4 years (Henderson et al., 2011)



# Complexity in child protection: Policy

- Getting it Right for Looked After Children and Young People: Early engagement, early permanence and improving the quality of care (Scottish Government, 2015)
- Early permanence: ‘We want to secure early permanence for as many as possible of those who do become looked after.’ (p.6)



# Complexity in child protection: Policy

- Getting it Right for Looked After Children and Young People: Early engagement, early permanence and improving the quality of care (Scottish Government, 2015)
  - Early intervention: ‘Advocates preventative work and early intervention to support children, young people and their families’ (p.6)
  - Out of home care: ‘We expect local authorities to “presume against” looked after at home status when planning interventions’ (p.17)

# Complexity in child protection: Policy

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- International context
- Policy shifts to earlier permanence across UK, Canada, USA
- Policy shifts to earlier intervention in Australia and Canada
  - Out of home care (OOHC) of young children increasing in Australia, Canada, England



# The research

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- Aim: To measure and track changes in...
- Complex lives
  - Looked after children's experiences in first 3 years
- Policy in practice
  - Early permanence
  - Early intervention: Out Of Home Care (OOHC)

# The research

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- All children under compulsory supervision at some point prior to 3 years of age
  - Random gender-balanced selection from 6 LA areas
  - Excluding siblings
  - Rural and urban areas across Scotland
- 110 children born April 2003 – Jan 2004
  - 55 girls, 55 boys
- 117 children born April 2013 – Jan 2014
  - 58 girls, 59 boys

# The research

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- SCRA staff extracted data from case files:
  - Children's lives
  - Permanence planning
  - OOHC
- Compared prevalence for 2003 and 2013 cohorts

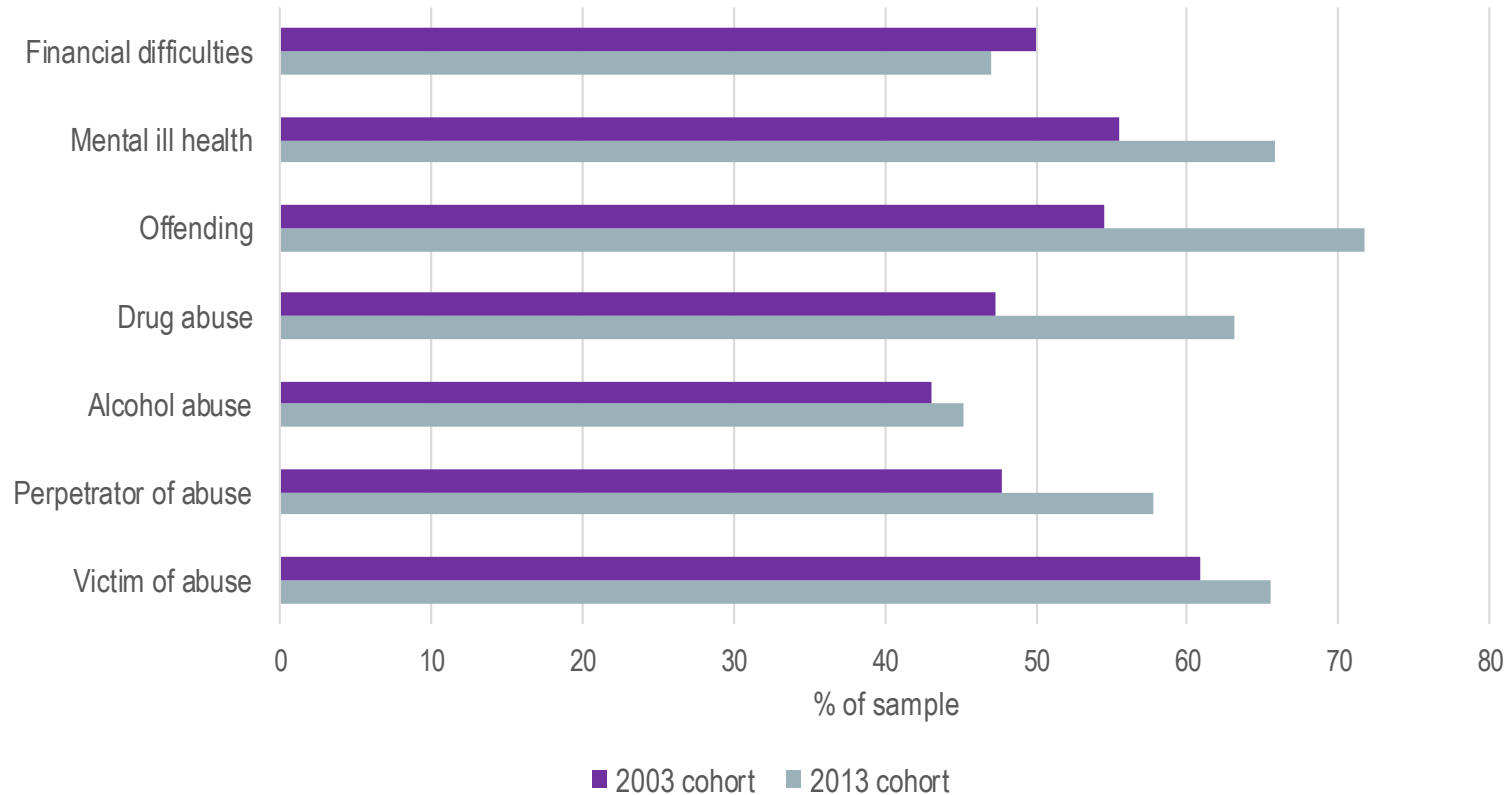
# Findings: Children's lives

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- Problems faced by birth parent(s)
  - 2003 cohort: 7.22
  - 2013 cohort: 8.36
- 16% increase

# Findings: Children's lives

## Problems faced by birth parents



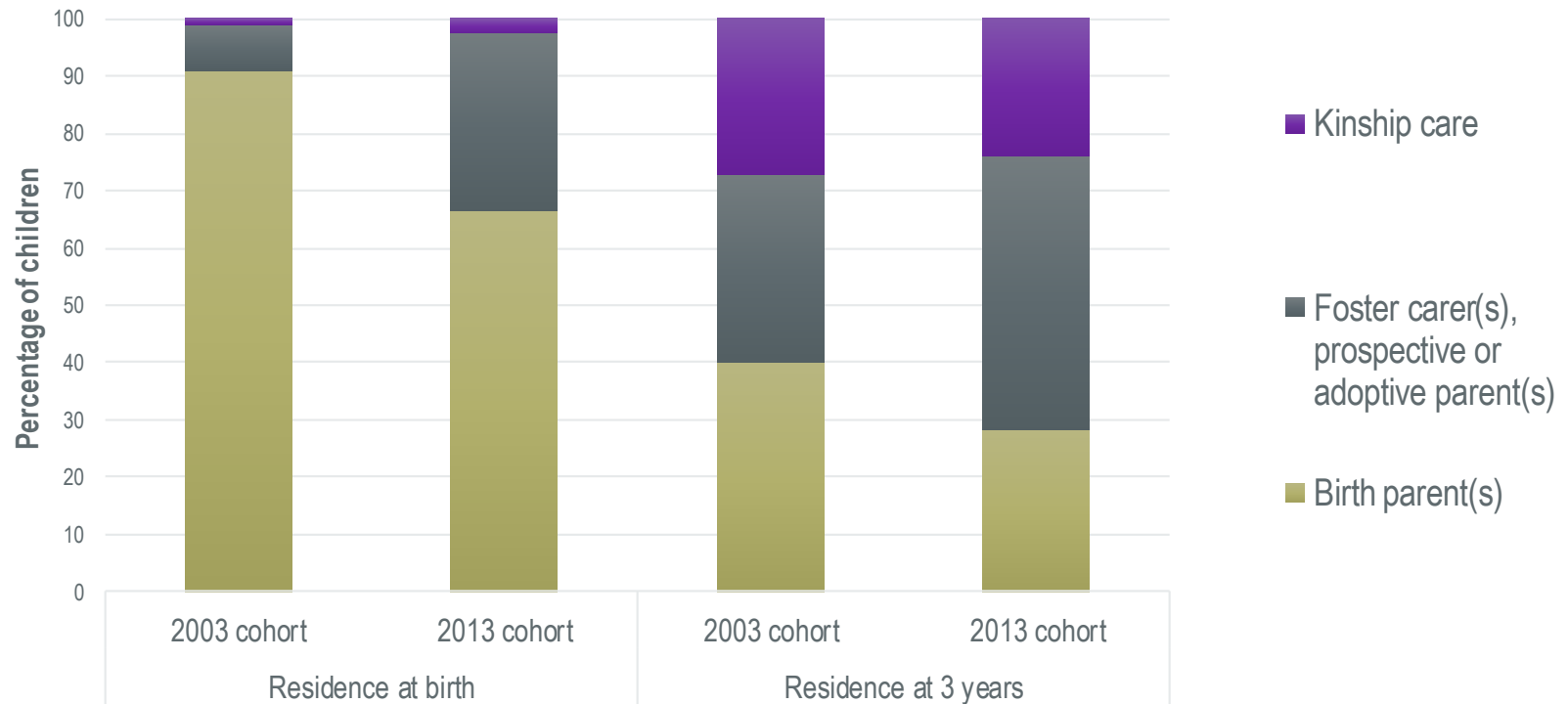
# Findings: Policy in practice

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- Early permanence increasing
- Percentage of children in OOHC at 3 years, with permanence plan in place
  - 2003 cohort: 67%
  - 2013 cohort: 83%

# Findings: Policy in practice

- Early OOHC increasing
  - 30% increase at 3 years





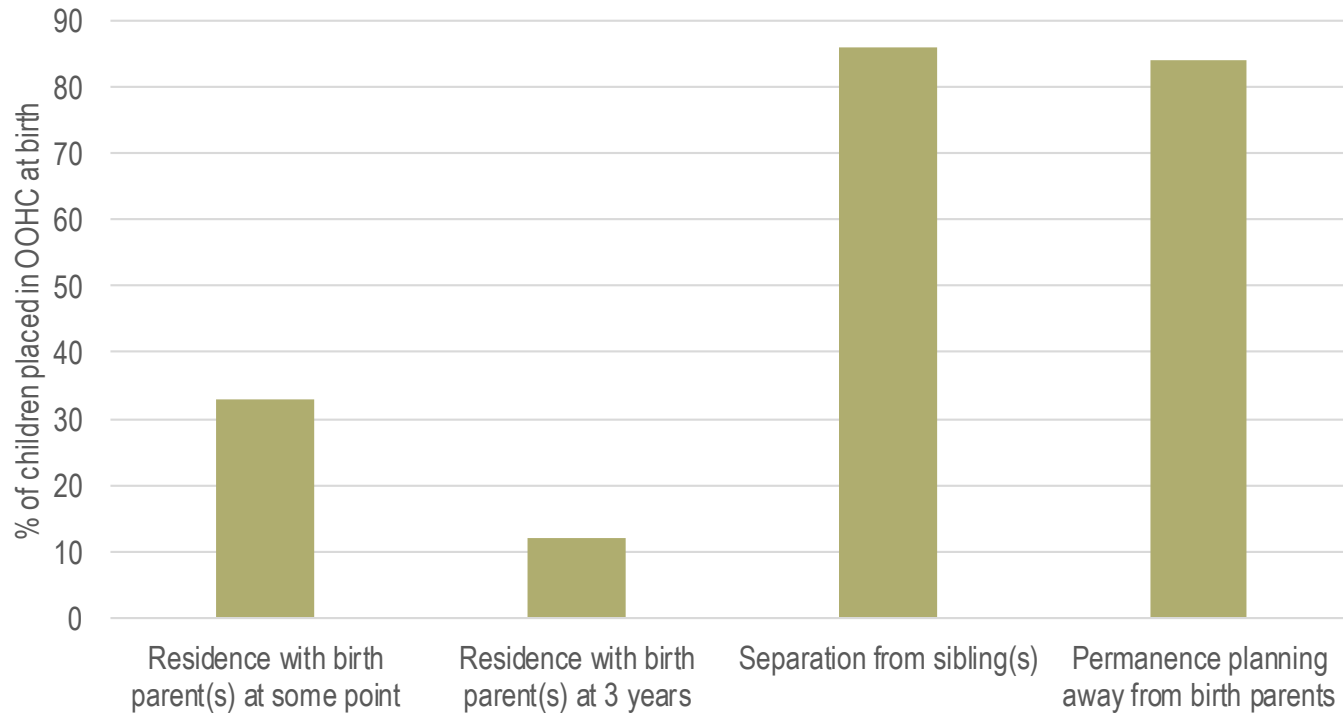
# Findings: Unintended consequences

- Implications for family fragmentation

	Percentage of cohort	
	2003 cohort	2013 cohort
Separation from biological sibling(s)	55	69
Separation from both birth parent(s)	71	86

# Findings: Unintended consequences

- Combining early out of home care **and** early permanence
- Babies born into care



# Conclusions: Complex lives, complex solutions

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- Complex lives
  - Multiple parental problems
  - Increasing over time?
- Complex solutions
  - Increasing early permanence and OOHC
- Unintended consequences
  - Family fragmentation
  - Permanent removal at birth
- Positive and negative effects of policy

# To learn more...

- [R.woods3@rgu.ac.uk](mailto:R.woods3@rgu.ac.uk)
- Briefing paper
  - CHIP website
- Research published as:

Woods, R. & Henderson, G. (2018). Changes in out of home care and permanence planning among young children in Scotland, 2003 to 2017. *Adoption & Fostering*, 42(3), 282-294. DOI: 10.1177/0308575918790435

Woods, R., Henderson, G., Kurlus, I., Proudfoot, P., Hobbs, N. & Lamb, D. (2018). Complexity in the Lives of Looked After Children and their Families in Scotland: 2003 to 2016. SCRA Report available at: <http://www.scra.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Complexity-in-the-lives-of-looked-after-children-and-their-families.pdf>