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A tale of multiple data sources: pathways and outcomes for infants who become looked after in Scotland

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Background

Permanently Progressing? Building secure futures for children in Scotland is the first study in Scotland to investigate decision making, permanence, progress, outcomes and belonging for children who became looked after aged five or under. A significant proportion of these children become looked after away from home in the first few weeks after birth. It is important to understand more about the circumstances in which accommodation occurs, and the pathways and outcomes for these children.

cluding experience of maltreatment, removal of siblings, and parental substance misuse), and suggests that outcomes (emotional, behavioural and attachment) were generally better for children who were accommodated and placed with carers and adoptive parents at an earlier age and remained there.

Methods

Anonymised child-level data (Children Looked After Statistics) was provided by the Scottish Government on the total cohort of 1,355 children in all 32 local authorities who started to be looked after away from home in 2012-13 aged five and under. Pathways and timescales to permanence were tracked between 2012-2016 using this administrative data. For a sub-group of 433 children, information on histories, progress and outcomes 3-4 years after they became looked after was gathered from surveys of adoptive parents, foster and kinship carers, and social workers.

Results/conclusion

This paper will discuss key findings from the study, in relation to those who became looked after soon after birth. Nearly half of those looked after away from home were under one year old when removed from parents, including 250 (18%) less than seven days old. These younger children were more likely to be looked after on an emergency basis, less likely to be placed with kinship carers, and more likely to have been adopted 3-4 years later, than those looked after when older. The complementary use of survey and administrative data is important. Evidence from the surveys of carers and social workers enhances our understanding of the circumstances around removal (in-

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