

Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study

The artist is a young person who grew up in care.

"The banner shows many pathways through the care system with a carer or caseworker acting as a guide, ultimately leading to independence for every young person. Whether we live with family or strangers, study, work, or just try our best, the paths we choose and are guided through in our youth are what we use to prepare ourselves for the happiest adulthood we can achieve" Billy Black

A profile of foster care and kinship care in New South Wales
Institute for Open Adoption Studies
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Acknowledgement



We acknowledge Aboriginal nations as the first people of Australia and pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

We remember the Stolen Generations – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children forcibly removed from their families, communities and culture under past government practices.

Outline



- Kinship care: why is this important and relevance to the key research aims of POCLS
- National and international evidence
- Principal areas of analysis
- Principal findings
- Study contact details

Areas of focus



- What are the backgrounds and characteristics of the children and young people in kinship care vs other placements?
- What is the physical health, socio-emotional and cognitive/ learning development of children and young people in kinship care vs. other types of care?
- What are the characteristics of kinship placements and how do these compare with foster care?

Kinship Care



- Under-researched area in Australia; most studies have been on foster care
- AIHW (2014): 41% of children in foster care vs. 49% in relative/ kinship care (over 50% in NSW)
- The system is heavily reliant on this form of care
- Are any observed differences in outcomes between kinship and non-kinship care due to characteristics of the placement or differences in the children who are in the two types of care arrangement?
- Maintaining the wellbeing of kinship carers is very important

National and International Findings



There are a number of consistent findings and key themes in this area which can be examined in POCLS

Theme 1: Vulnerability of Kinship Carers

- Often found to be single, older, lower SES, financially vulnerable
- High proportion of grandparents
- Often have poorer health / more health needs
- Limited training; difficulties in dealing with complex needs

National and International Findings



Theme 2: Services and Supports

- Research emphasises the level of training received by kinship carers vs. foster carers;
- Complexities associated with financial support and recognition of role;
- Entitlement to services;
- Formalisation of biological relationship may influence how relatives conceptualise their role as carers

National and International Findings



Theme 3: Relationships

- Relative care may cause conflict/ challenges because of relationship with biological parents
- Family contact may be more difficult or easier depending on circumstances
- Evidence suggests greater stability in relative care, but slower reunification rates

The focus of Wave 1 analyses



This first set of cross-sectional analyses based on Wave 1 data will examine **3** key areas:

(1) The characteristics of kinship carers vs. foster carers

(2) The characteristics of children placed into kinship vs. foster care

(3) The nature of relationships in kinship vs. foster care

Characteristics of carers 1



Demographics:

- Age; Gender; biological relationship; Aboriginal status; financial wellbeing; employment; education level; household composition

Carer wellbeing:

- Satisfaction with caring; K10 scores; health status

Parenting:

- Parenting experience; ability to deal with complex behaviour; parenting style (warm, hostile)

Characteristics of carers 2



- Neighbourhood Quality:
- Quality of amenities
- Social connections
- Sense of safety and trust

Characteristics of children



Do kinship carers look after similar kinds of children as compared to foster carers?

Important from a policy and research perspective (child characteristics and carer type may be confounded)

Child demographics: Age; Aboriginal status

Child adjustment: How settled in placement

Child's needs: Disability status; health status and conditions; internalising and externalising behaviours (CBCL, BITSEA); psychological wellbeing; cognitive functioning (WISC; PPVT)

Relationships and contact



- **Relationship with carer:** What is the quality of the child-carer relationship in kinship vs. foster care?
- **Family relationships:** What is the nature and frequency of contact with other family members in kinship vs. foster care?
- **Policy relevance:** If kinship care is associated with slower reunification does this necessarily mean a loss of contact with biological families?

Comparison Groups



In these analyses, 3 groups were compared: foster carers; grandparents and other relatives.

Carer 1 demographics



	Foster care N (%) (n = 470)	Grandparents N (%) (n = 247)	Other relatives N (%) (n = 155)	Total N (%) (n = 872)
Gender (F)	432 (91.9)	227 (91.9)	139 (89.7)	798 (91.5)
CALD	58 (12.3)	40 (16.2)	20 (12.9)	118 (13.5)
<u>Age group</u>				
18-40 years	141 (32.3)	5 (2.1)	73 (47.7)	219 (26.5)
41-50	185 (42.2)	67 (28.6)	44 (28.8)	296 (35.9)
51-60	87 (19.9)	101 (43.2)	32 (20.9)	220 (26.7)
61+	25 (5.7)	61 (26.1)	4 (2.6)	90 (10.9)
Aboriginal carer	70 (14.9)	33 (13.3)	52 (33.5)	155 (17.3)

Carer 1 demographics (cont)



	Foster care N (%) (n =470)	Grandparents N (%) (n = 247)	Other relatives N (%) (n = 155)	Total N (%) (n = 872)
<u>Marital status</u>				
Single / Never married	5 (1.9)	3 (3.1)	0 (0.0)	8 (1.9)
Married/ defacto	253 (96.6)	95 (96.9)	64 (100.0)	412 (97.2)
Widowed	1 (0.4)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.2)
Separated/ Divorced	3 (1.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (0.7)
<u>Highest education</u>				
Year 11 or less	139 (29.5)	115 (46.6)	53 (34.1)	307 (35.2)
Diploma	183 (38.9)	79 (32.0)	56 (36.1)	318 (36.4)
University degree	81 (17.3)	17 (6.8)	19 (12.3)	117 (13.5)
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
<u>Mean (SD) age</u>	45.9 (11.6)	55.5 (9.7)	41.5 (10.8)	47.8 (12.1)
<u>No own children raised</u>	2.10 (1.76)	3.59 (1.65)	2.41 (1.62)	2.57 (1.82)

Carer employment status



	Foster care <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 470)	Grandparents <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 247)	Other relatives <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 155)	Total <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 872)
<u>Carer employment</u>				
<u>Carer 1: Employment</u>				
Paid work	179 (38.1)	75 (30.3)	64 (41.3)	318 (36.5)
Unpaid work ^a	13 (2.8)	5 (2.0)	4 (2.5)	22 (2.5)
No job	277 (58.9)	166 (67.2)	87 (56.1)	530 (60.8)
<u>Carer 2: Employment</u>				
Paid work	399 (79.6)	114 (60.0)	89 (73.6)	602 (69.0)
Unpaid work	4 (0.8)	4 (2.1)	0 (0.0)	8 (0.9)
No job	97 (19.4)	72 (37.9)	34 (28.3)	203 (23.3)

Carer financial wellbeing



	Foster care <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 470)	Grandparents <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 247)	Other relatives <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 155)	Total <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 872)
<u>Ability to raise \$2000</u>				
Easily	284 (60.4)	125 (50.6)	64 (41.3)	473 (54.2)
With sacrifices	106 (22.6)	52 (21.1)	51 (32.9)	209 (24.0)
Drastic measures	30 (6.4)	20 (8.1)	7 (4.5)	57 (6.1)
Could not do it	42 (8.9)	44 (17.8)	31 (20.0)	117 (13.4)
<u>Financial position</u>				
Comfortable or Very comfortable	391 (83.2)	182 (73.7)	113 (72.9)	686 (78.7)
Just getting by	76 (16.2)	61 (24.7)	39 (25.2)	176 (20.2)
Poor/Very poor	1 (0.2)	3 (1.2)	3 (1.9)	7 (0.8)

Household structure



- Grandparents generally had fewer people in the household
- Relative carers were less likely to report that their home was suitable for extra children
- Foster carers were more likely to have larger houses with more rooms
- ‘Other relatives’ appeared to have the most precarious housing arrangements (48% were renting); 39% had mortgages; only around 10% were full owner occupiers.



Health status of Carer

	Foster care <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 470)	Grandparents <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 247)	Other relatives <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 155)	Total <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 872)
<u>Health (last month)</u>				
Good to excellent	431 (91.8)	210 (85.0)	134 (86.4)	775 (88.9)
Fair	31 (6.6)	31 (12.6)	14 (9.0)	76 (8.7)
Poor/Very poor	8 (1.7)	6 (2.4)	7 (4.5)	21 (2.4)
<u>Carer 1</u>				
<u>Health condition¹</u>	31 (6.6)	25 (10.1)	14 (9.0)	70 (8.0)
Yes	439 (93.4)	222 (89.9)	141 (91.0)	802 (92.0)
No				
<u>Carer 1</u>				
<u>Medical condition²</u>	120 (25.5)	93 (37.7)	39 (25.2)	242 (28.9)
Yes	350 (74.5)	154 (62.3)	116 (74.8)	620 (71.1)
No				

Health status of Carer (cont)



	Foster care <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 470)	Grandparents <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 247)	Other relatives <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 155)	Total <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 872)
<u>Kessler classification</u>				
Low distress	392 (84.5)	169 (69.3)	110 (74.3)	671 (78.4)
Moderate distress	57 (12.3)	53 (21.7)	26 (17.6)	136 (15.9)
High distress	13 (2.8)	18 (7.4)	6 (4.1)	37 (4.3)
Very high distress	2 (0.4)	4 (1.6)	6 (4.1)	12 (1.4)
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
Mean Kessler score	13.0 (3.43)	14.4 (5.27)	14.2 (5.59)	13.6 (4.48)

Neighbourhood variables



	Foster care <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> = 470)	Grandparents <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> = 247)	Other relatives <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> = 155)	Total <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> = 872)
Close knit neighbourhood	2.33 (1.00)	2.42 (1.01)	2.43 (.95)	2.37 (1.02)
People help one another	2.15 (.86)	2.28 (.87)	2.28 (.93)	2.28 (.93)
Don't get along	3.92 (.76)	3.77 (.79)	3.88 (.76)	3.87 (.77)
People can be trusted	2.13 (.80)	2.29 (.78)	2.33 (.85)	2.21 (.81)
Good place to raise children	1.39 (.64)	1.62 (.88)	1.58 (.85)	1.43 (.76)
Social Cohesion and Trust	8.63 (2.83)	9.12 (2.70)	8.97 (2.70)	8.97 (2.70)

Foster carers more consistently gave better ratings for their neighbourhoods

Parenting variables



- POCLS included some measures of emotional responsiveness and the warmth of relationships
- Grandparents were more likely to tell the child how happy he or she made them and to feel close when the child is upset.
- Other relatives were less likely to report being able to get close to the child compared with the other groups.
- Grandparents reported a warmer and less hostile parenting style than the other two groups

Dealing with complex behaviour



POCLS included a measure of the extent which carers felt confident in being able to deal with complex behaviour. Grandparents were generally more confident.

	Foster care <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> = 661)	Grandparents <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> = 383)	Other relatives <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> = 215)	Total <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> = 1259)
Efficacy score	8.5 (12.90)	11.3 (12.16)	8.9 (12.68)	9.4 (12.70)

Children in different placement types



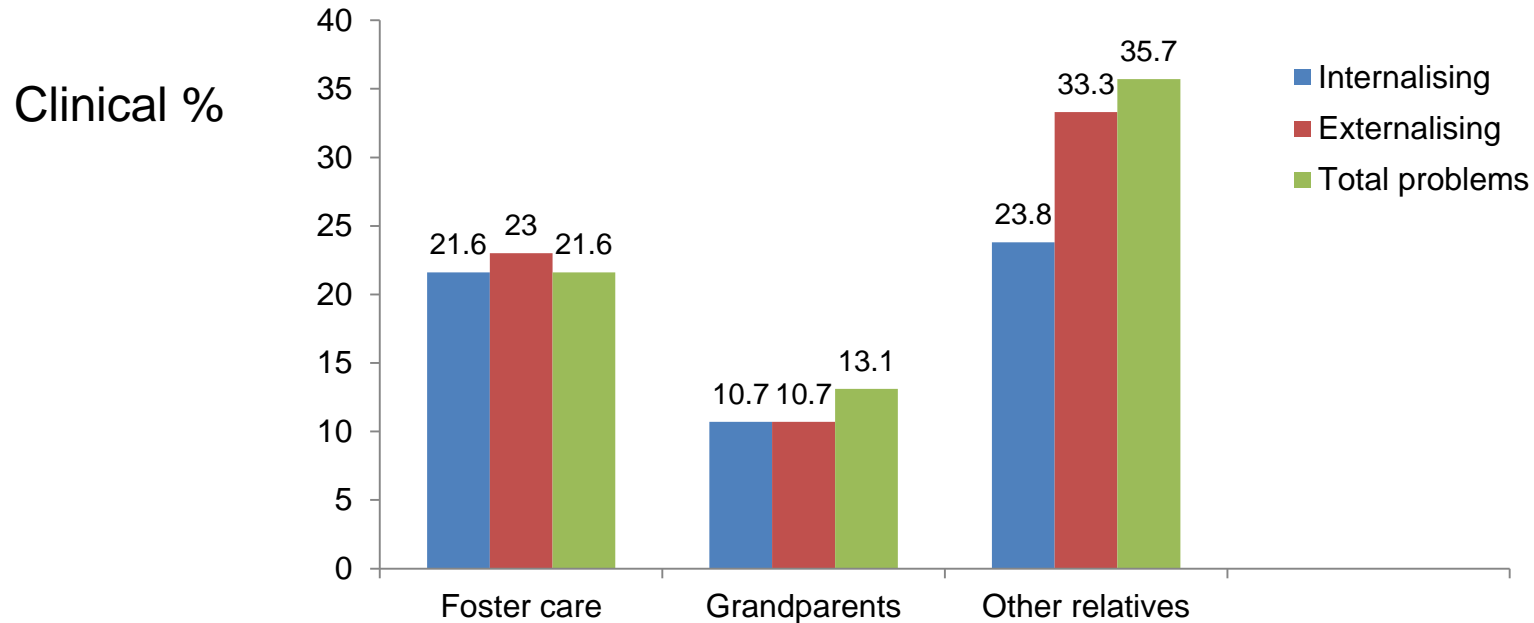
	Foster care <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 661)	Grandparents <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 383)	Other relatives <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 215)	Total <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 1259)
<u>Gender</u>				
Boys	333 (50.4)	186 (48.6)	103 (47.9)	622 (49.4)
Girls	328 (49.6)	197 (51.4)	112 (52.1)	637 (50.6)
<u>Ethnicity</u>				
European Australian	328 (49.6)	200 (52.2)	95 (44.2)	623 (49.5)
Aboriginal	257 (38.9)	116 (30.3)	91 (42.3)	464 (36.9)
CALD	56 (8.5)	38 (9.9)	16 (7.4)	110 (8.7)
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
Age (months)	56.3 (46.9)	62.9 (46.0)	65.9 (53.9)	60.0 (48.0)

Children in FC are younger; Children with other relatives more likely to be Aboriginal



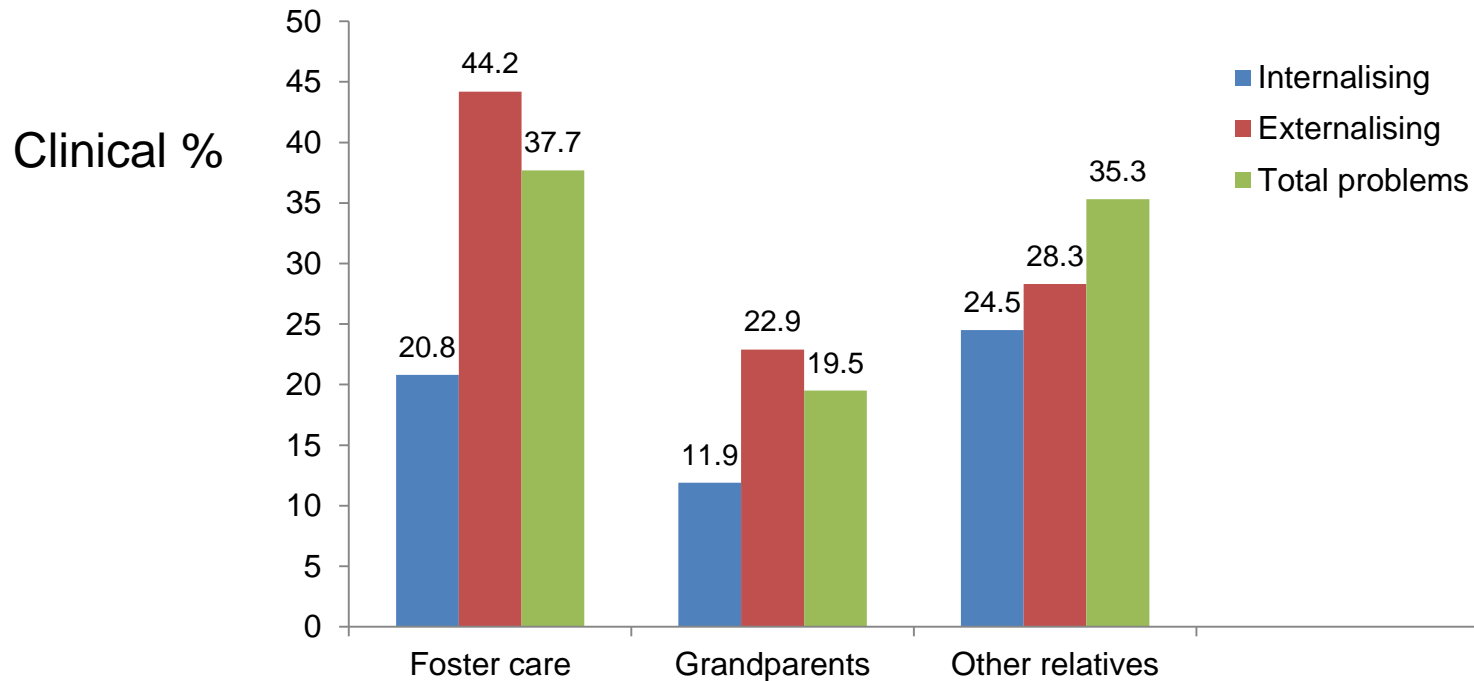
Child development/ wellbeing

CBCCL comparisons (age 3-5)



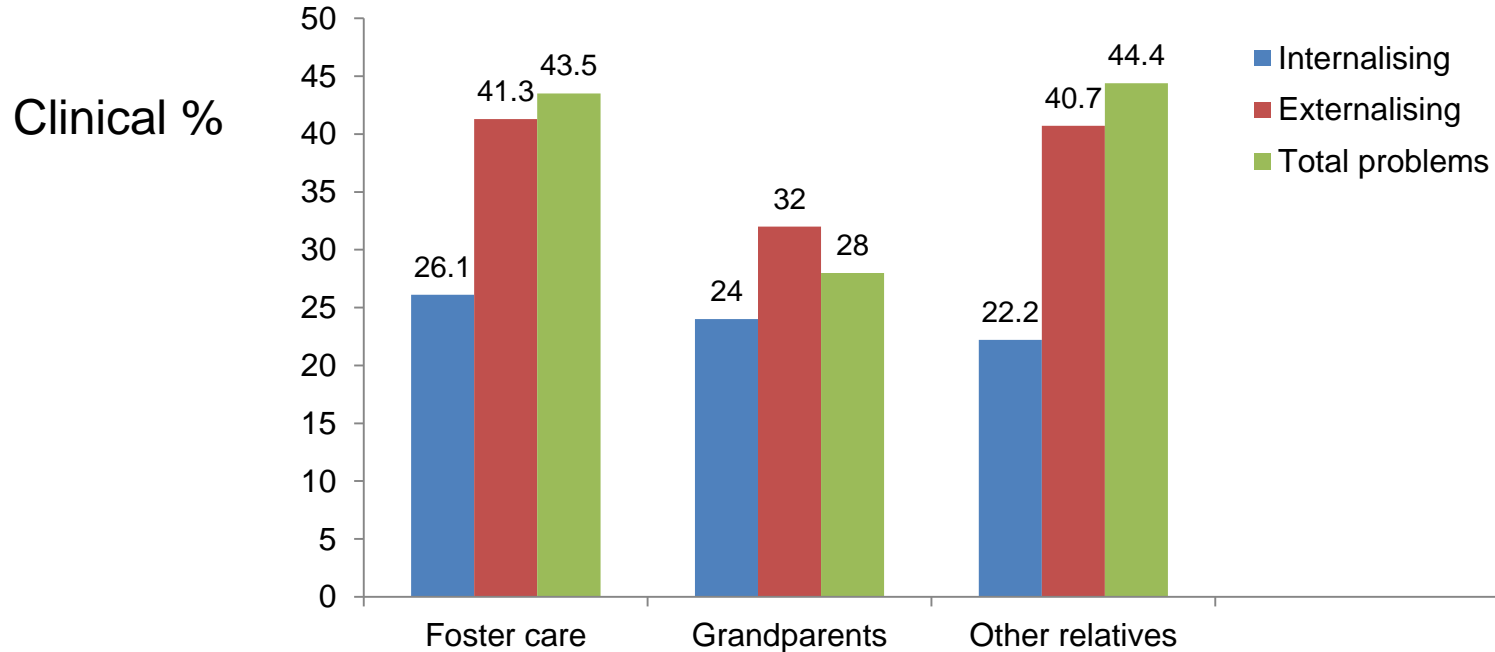
Clinical problems lowest in grandparent group

CBCCL comparisons (age 6-11)



Clinical problems lowest in grandparent group

CBCCL comparisons (age 12-17)



Conduct disorder lower in grandparent care

National % CBCL clinical cases



	6-12 years	13-17 years
Internalising	13.3	16.4
Externalising	12.7	19.6
Total	14.1	18.9

From Sawyer et al. (2007), Medical Journal of Australia.
National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (2001).

Cognitive Functioning



	Foster care <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> = 304)	Grandparents <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> = 211)	Other relatives <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> = 108)	Total <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> = 623)
PPVT	90.0 (13.81)	93.9 (13.25)	89.9 (12.23)	91.3 (13.47)
WISC	7.66 (3.07)	8.65 (2.74)	8.40 (2.70)	8.14 (2.92)

Although the effect was small, children with grandparents had slightly higher scores on the Peabody Vocab Test and on the WISC (general intelligence)



Relationships

Quality of relationship with carer



	Foster care <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> = 661)	Grandparents <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> = 383)	Other relatives <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> = 215)	Total <i>M (SD)</i> (<i>n</i> = 1259)
How settled is the child	1.17 (0.46)	1.16 (0.43)	1.25 (0.57)	1.18 (0.47)
How well do they know the child	1.18 (0.41)	1.09 (0.33)	1.20 (0.45)	1.16 (0.40)
How well is child going	1.31 (0.53)	1.28 (0.51)	1.36 (0.61)	1.31 (0.54)
Quality of relationship with child	1.25 (0.47)	1.13 (0.36)	1.30 (0.52)	1.30 (0.52)

Grandparents reported knowing the child better and having a better relationship than the other two groups.

Good relationship with other family members



	Foster care <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 661)	Grandparents <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 383)	Other relatives <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 215)	Total <i>N</i> (%) (<i>n</i> = 1259)
Mother	183 (27.7)	183 (47.8)	78 (36.3)	444 (35.3)
Father	110 (16.6)	144 (37.6)	40 (18.6)	294 (23.4)
Siblings	299 (45.2)	211 (55.1)	103 (47.9)	613 (48.7)

Children with grandparents were more likely to have good relationships with other family members

Overall level of family contact



- Children living with grandparents were more likely to have contact with both their mother and father as well as with other siblings
- Face-to-face unsupervised contact and overnight stays were more common for children living with grandparents

Summary and conclusions



- There are clear differences in the characteristics of different carer groups
- Not all kinship/ relative carers are the same
- Grand-parents tend to be most vulnerable groups with respect to their health, financial situation and health
- Children placed with grandparents tend to score better on measures of socio-emotive wellbeing and have better relationships with their carers and families
- It is unclear whether these differences in the children are due to a selection effect ('better adjusted' children get placed with grandparents) or whether exposure to grandparent care makes a difference

Conclusions (cont)



- The results provide no evidence to suggest that kinship/ relative care is a lesser form of care with respect to child outcomes
- There is evidence, however, that kinship/ relative carers and, in particular, grandparents may benefit from greater support
- There is a need for ongoing longitudinal investigation of the effects of exposure to different forms of care
- There is some confounding of Aboriginal status and the 3 carer groups ('other relatives' are more likely to be Aboriginal)
- More detailed analyses of variables by Aboriginal status are planned
- The findings need to be read in conjunction with the findings from other reports relating to service supports and usage.

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Further Information



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