

Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study: Outcomes of Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care

How Children who Exit Out-of-Home Care to Guardianship Orders are Faring: Socio-emotional Wellbeing



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Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study: Outcomes of Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care in NSW

Research Report No. 24-2

How Children who Exit Out-of-Home Care
to Guardianship Orders are Faring:
Socio-emotional Wellbeing

Published by

New South Wales Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ)
Family and Community Services Insights Analysis and Research (FACSIAR)
320 Liverpool Road
Ashfield NSW 2131

Phone + 61 2 9716 2222

July 2021

ISBN: 978-0-6485156-9-2

Recommended citation Asif, N. and Zhou, A. (2021). How Children who Exit Out-of-Home Care to Guardianship Orders are Faring: Socio-Emotional Wellbeing. Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study: Outcomes of Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care. Research Report Number 24-2. Sydney. NSW Department of Communities and Justice.

Disclaimer

DCJ funds and leads the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study. The analyses reported in this publication are those of the authors and should not be attributed to any data custodians. The authors are grateful for the reviewers' comments.

About the information in this report

All the analyses presented in this report are based on the Wave 2-4 unweighted data collected in face-to-face interviews with children, young people and caregivers; and DCJ administrative data.

Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study Clearinghouse

All study publications including research reports, technical reports and briefs can be found on the study webpage www.facs.nsw.gov.au/resources/research/pathways-of-care

Study design by NSW Department of Communities and Justice Insights, Analysis and Research; Australian Institute of Family Studies; Sax Institute, Professor Judy Cashmore, University of Sydney; Professor Paul Delfabbro, University of Adelaide; Professor Ilan Katz, University of NSW; Dr Fred Wulczyn, Chapin Hall Center for Children University of Chicago..

Study data collection by I-view Social Research.

Advisors Expert advice and support has been provided by the CREATE Foundation; Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec); My Forever Family NSW; and program areas.

Acknowledgements We wish to extend our thanks to all the children, young people and caregivers who participated in interviews; childcare teachers, school teachers and caseworkers who participated in on-line survey interviews; and the data custodians in the relevant NSW and Commonwealth government departments. Ms Sammy Verma grew up in care and played a key role in the production of the study video for children and stakeholders. Ms Billy Black also grew up in care and designed the study artwork. Ms Sammy Verma and Mr Samuel Eyeson-Annan both did the voiceover for the audio computer-assisted self-interview (ACASI) for the child/young person interview.

Ethics approval by The University of NSW Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number HC10335 & HC16542); Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW Ethics Committee (approval number 766/10); NSW Department of Education and Communities State Education Research Approval Process (SERAP, approval number 2012250); NSW Population & Health Services Research Ethics Committee (Ref: HREC/14/CIPHS/74 Cancer Institute NSW: 2014/12/570).



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Preface

The Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study (POCLS) is funded and managed by the New South Wales Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ). It is the first large-scale prospective longitudinal study of children and young people in out-of-home care (OOHC) in Australia. Information on safety, permanency and wellbeing is being collected from various sources. The child developmental domains of interest are physical health, socio-emotional wellbeing and cognitive/learning ability.

The overall aim of this study is to collect detailed information about the life course development of children who enter OOHC for the first time and the factors that influence their development. The POCLS objectives are to:

- Describe the characteristics, child protection history, development and wellbeing of children and young people at the time they enter OOHC for the first time.
- Describe the services, interventions and pathways for children and young people in OOHC, post restoration, post adoption and on leaving care at 18 years.
- Describe children's and young people's experiences while growing up in OOHC, post restoration, post adoption and on leaving care at 18 years.
- Understand the factors that influence the outcomes for children and young people who grow up in OOHC, are restored home, are adopted or leave care at 18 years.
- Inform policy and practice to strengthen the OOHC service system in NSW to improve the outcomes for children and young people in OOHC.

The POCLS is the first study to link data on children's child protection backgrounds, OOHC placements, health, education and offending held by multiple government agencies; and match it to first-hand accounts from children, caregivers, caseworkers and teachers. The POCLS database will allow researchers to track children's trajectories and experiences from birth.

The population cohort is a census of all children and young people who entered OOHC over an 18 month period for the first time in NSW between May 2010 and October 2011 (n=4,126). A subset of those children and young people who went on to receive final Children's Court care and protection orders by 30 April 2013 (2,828) were eligible to participate in the study. For more information about the study please visit the study webpage www.facs.nsw.gov.au/resources/research/pathways-of-care.

The POCLS acknowledges and honours Aboriginal people as our First Peoples of NSW and is committed to working with DCJ's Aboriginal Strategy, Coordination and Evaluation,

and Ngaramanala (Aboriginal Knowledge Program), to ensure that Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities are supported and empowered to improve their life outcomes. The POCLS data asset will be used to improve how services and supports are designed and delivered in partnership with Aboriginal people and communities.

DCJ recognises the importance of Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Governance of all data related to Aboriginal Australians. The NSW Data Strategy (April 2021) includes the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Governance and provides provisions in regard to:

- Ensuring that our approach to data projects assesses the privacy, security and ethical impacts across the data lifecycle.
Ensuring the controls are proportionate to the risks and that we consider community expectations and Indigenous Data Sovereignty.
- Guaranteeing a culture of trust between data providers and recipients, including Aboriginal people, through consistent and safe data sharing practices and effective data governance and stewardship

Ngaramanala will be working with the Aboriginal Community of NSW in 2022 to co-create an Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Governance policy for DCJ including a position on reporting disaggregated data. The POCLS will continue to collaborate with Aboriginal Peoples and will apply the policy principles once developed.

In the interim, this publication contains data tables that provide direct comparisons between the POCLS Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cohorts. Interpretation of the data should consider the factors associated with the over-representation of Aboriginal children in child protection and OOHC including the legacy of past policies of forced removal and the intergenerational effects of previous forced separations from family and culture. This erosion of community and familial capacity over time needs to be considered in any reform efforts as it continues to have a profoundly adverse effect on child development. The implications for policy and practice should highlight strengths, develop Aboriginal-led solutions and ensure that better outcomes are achieved for Aboriginal people.

The POCLS is subject to ethics approval, including from the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of NSW.

1 Executive Summary

This report is one of four analyses that were undertaken to examine the outcomes of children and young people (hereafter children) who exit out-of-home care (OOHC) to guardianship orders. This series of analysis focuses on '*transitioned guardians*', that is OOHC relative/kinship carers allocated full parental responsibility for a child who were automatically transitioned to guardianship orders when the legislative amendment was proclaimed in October 2014. Further analysis using subsequent waves of data collection will provide information on the longer term outcomes of children, and for children exiting from a variety of OOHC legal orders and placement types to guardianship orders, to inform policy and practice.

The four analyses examining how children who exit OOHC to guardianship orders are faring focus on:

- An overview of the POCLS cohort
- Socio-emotional wellbeing
- Cognitive learning ability
- Relational permanence.¹

This report focuses on short- to medium-term socio-emotional outcomes of children who experienced OOHC. For the comparative analysis, the sample included 142 POCLS children from the transitioned guardians cohort and 291 children who remained in OOHC in relative/kinship care². The children's socio-emotional wellbeing was measured using the Child Behaviour Check list (CBCL) at three data points (Waves 2, 3 and 4³). Further analysis on this policy area will be undertaken when more waves of the POCLS data are available.

This report aims to answer the following research questions:

¹ Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study: Outcomes of Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care. Research Report Numbers 24-1, 24-2, 24-3 and 24-4.

² Children of carers who might have become guardians after October 2014 (i.e., the 'new guardians'), and children placed in foster care or intensive therapeutic care in OOHC were not included in this analysis. See the methodology section for more detail.

³ Wave 2 (April 2013-March 2015), Wave 3 (October 2014-July 2016)) and Wave 4 (May 2017-November 2018)

- What are the factors associated with children exiting OOHC through guardianship orders?
- How do children on guardianship orders fare socio-emotionally compared to those who remained in relative/kinship placement in OOHC?

1.1 Key findings

Factors associated with being transitioned to guardianship orders:

- Children with less Externalising Problem behaviours, such as aggressive behaviours, rule-breaking etc., were more likely to exit
- Children with a history of parental neglect prior to entry to OOHC were less likely to exit
- Children with a distressed carer (medium level) were more likely to exit.

Socio-emotional wellbeing for children on guardianship orders:


- There were no significant differences in children's socio-emotional outcomes post-guardianship between children who were on guardianship orders and those who remained in relative/kinship care after controlling for pre-existing group differences (in socio-emotional wellbeing and other factors) and pre-test measurement error. This finding was true for the CBCL Total Problem behaviours, both Externalising and Internalising Problem behaviours, and over time (i.e., Wave 3 and Wave 4).

Overall, the findings on the factors that influence exit to guardianship are consistent with previous research. With regards to post-guardianship outcomes, this study demonstrates that children on guardianship orders had similar socio-emotional outcomes (at least in the short- to medium- term) to the children who remained in relative/kinship placements in OOHC.

1.2 Implications for policy and practice

As the first exploratory analysis to examine the socio-emotional wellbeing of the children who exited OOHC to guardianship orders since the legislative amendments were proclaimed in October 2014, this analysis provides some insights on how the children in the first group to be transitioned - '*transitioned guardians*' – are faring. Further analysis using subsequent waves of data collection will provide information on the longer term outcomes of children, and for children exiting from a variety of OOHC legal orders and placement types, to inform policy and practice.

The report provides evidence to support guardianship orders as a permanency option (as opposed to those who stayed in kinship/relative placements) by demonstrating that it is possible to achieve at least the same results in socio-emotional outcomes for



guardianship children without the ongoing intervention of the state's statutory child protection system in the lives of families.

The findings point to the need for ongoing support for children who were removed from their parents due to neglect and children with high levels of socio-emotional problems to reduce the likelihood of long-term stay in OOHC and increase the chance of a permanent exit. In particular, carers and children need additional support for managing complex and challenging behaviours found in children who have experienced neglect.

2 Introduction

In recent years, permanency planning for children and young people⁴ in OOHC has been a major focus of the child protection system in New South Wales (NSW). In general, permanency planning is undertaken to achieve legal, relational and psychological permanency for a child through restoration, guardianship or adoption. Despite an increasing focus on the attainment of permanency, long-term placement in OOHC remains a reality for many children unable to be restored to or live with their own families, guardians or adoptive parents. It is noteworthy that for some children, long-term OOHC is the preferred placement option due to the ongoing therapeutic and casework support required to address the significant impact of trauma on their lives (Parenting Research Centre & the University of Melbourne 2013; Osborne et al. 2008).

Evidence suggests that children in OOHC who have experienced neglect and maltreatment are likely to have poorer outcomes on a range of developmental indicators than the general population (Gypen et al. 2017; Berger et al. 2009; Fernandez 2008; Fernandez 2009; Walsh et al. 2018). A key aim of permanency planning is to ensure better outcomes for these children by establishing the best possible stable care situation, conducive to their positive development (Goemans et al. 2016). To facilitate this, the child protection system needs to know more about factors affecting outcomes for children as they exit OOHC to permanency (Rolock 2015; Rolock et al. 2018). It is also equally important to know what factors increase the risk for a long-term stay in OOHC and poor development outcomes.

There is also a general understanding that legal permanency facilitates relational permanency. One of the key challenges for the OOHC system is to maintain placement stability, which provides a stable foundation for children in OOHC to acquire and develop permanent family relationships. Placement instability not only re-sets the clock for acquiring permanent relationships, it also reduces the likelihood of children becoming closely attached to subsequent carers (especially for older children and adolescents). On the other hand, unstable relationships or a lack of permanence in the relationships between children and carers might in turn lead to placement and/or relationship breakdown. A recent survey and audit of permanent orders in the United Kingdom found remarkably low disruptions to both special guardianship arrangements (i.e., relative/kinship permanent guardianship) and adoptions of children from care (Selwyn,

⁴ The term 'children and young people' is used interchangeably with 'children' throughout this report, unless otherwise specified.

Wijedasa, & Meakings, 2014). Although the study showed that children adopted from care have comparable levels of behavioural and relational difficulties to children in foster care, disruptions occurred at a much lower rate for adopted children than for those in foster care placements. Therefore, permanency planning aims to provide a “permanent caregiving” environment to the children by providing legal certainty to the dyadic relationships between children and their carers, and to foster the permanence of those relationships.

In 2014, the NSW government amended the Children and Young Person (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW) (the Care Act) to provide greater permanency for children and young people in OOHC. This legislative reform introduced the requirement for practitioners to prioritise consideration of guardianship for children unable to return to their own families, where guardianship could best meet a child’s needs. Seven years on, little is known about how the children on guardianship orders are faring.

The purpose of this report is to present research that addresses this knowledge gap by examining the relationship between guardianship orders and children’s socio-emotional wellbeing. The research used data from the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study (POCLS) with a particular focus on short- to medium-term (three to four year) socio-emotional outcomes for children who exited OOHC on guardianship orders.

This report aims to answer the following research questions:

- What are the factors associated with children exiting OOHC through guardianship orders?
- How do children on guardianship orders fare socio-emotionally compared to those who remained in relative/kinship placement⁵ in OOHC?

A better understanding of the outcomes for these children on guardianship orders could help us to understand: firstly, the impact of guardianship orders on children’s socio-emotional wellbeing; secondly, whether their outcomes explain the risk of post-permanency discontinuity (e.g., as evidence suggests that children with high levels of socio-emotional problems are at high risk of such discontinuity⁶ (Rolock 2015; Testa et al.

⁵ Children placed in foster care or intensive therapeutic care in OOHC were not the focus of this analysis. See the methodology section for more detail.

⁶ The term post-permanency discontinuity is used to describe the circumstances under which children who have exited OOHC through permanency (restoration, guardianship, and adoption) leave their permanent home prematurely before they reach legal adulthood (Rolock 2015). Not all post-permanency discontinuity results in re-entry into OOHC.

2015)); and finally, whether post-permanency support and services are required to ensure the wellbeing of these children who have experienced OOHC. If children who have exited OOHC on guardianship orders are found to have similar or better socio-emotional outcomes than children who have remained in OOHC, evidence would be available to support guardianship orders as a preferred permanency option.

This report is in line with one of the NSW Department of Communities and Justice's (DCJ) strategic objectives to improve long-term outcomes for vulnerable children and young people through the Permanency Support Program (PSP)⁷. The PSP seeks to improve the child protection system by reducing entries to OOHC by keeping families together where possible and providing permanency through guardianship and open adoption. This report is also in line with one of the five priorities for the child protection system announced by the NSW Premier in July 2019; that is, to increase permanency for children in OOHC with a target of doubling the number of children in safe and permanent homes by 2023⁸. As guardianship is one of the permanency outcomes within the scope of this priority, the findings will begin to inform policy and practice on the effectiveness of guardianship orders, complementing existing evidence demonstrating the importance of emotional security through permanency for children's wellbeing.

⁷ For more information on Permanency Support Program (PSP), visit <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/families/permanency-support-program>

⁸ For more information on this Premier's priority, visit <https://www.nsw.gov.au/premiers-priorities/increasing-permanency-for-children-out-of-home-care>

3 Policy context and current practice in NSW

Statutory child protection in Australia is the responsibility of State and Territory governments. The main purpose of child protection agencies is to ensure safety, permanency and the wellbeing of children who are a risk of significant harm and policies and practices are under continual development across the jurisdictions.

On 29 October 2014, the NSW government Children and Young Person (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW) (the Care Act) legislative amendments were proclaimed as part of the Safe Home for Life reforms. This introduced guardianship orders by enacting the Permanent Placement Principles (PPP)⁹ as s.10a of the Act. The aim of the reforms was to improve the child protection system in NSW by reducing the number of children at risk of significant harm and to provide clear alternatives for those children who cannot live safely at home. Furthermore, the goal was to provide greater permanence to children and, in turn, reduce the negative impact of long-term OOHC on child development and attachment that results from placement instability (Tarren-Sweeney 2016).

The amendments to the Care Act introduced new legal orders and established guidance on placement in the following preferred order: family preservation, restoration, guardianship orders, (open) adoption (for non-Aboriginal children) and long-term parental responsibility order to the Minister. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the preferred order of placement is restoration/preservation, guardianship, parental responsibility to the Minister and then adoption. The PPPs operate within the context of the Care Act, including its principles of safety, wellbeing, cultural considerations. The PPPs are consistent with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles (ATSICPP)¹⁰.

The PPPs prioritise guardianship orders for those children who are unable to remain with their family ('preservation') or return to their own families ('restoration') because they cannot live safely at home. Under guardianship orders, full parental responsibility for a child for whom there is 'no realistic possibility of restoration' is placed with a relative, kin

⁹ For more information on Permanent Placement Principles (PPP), visit <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/families/permanency-support-program/paths>

¹⁰ The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles (ATSICPP) were developed in response to the trauma experienced by individuals, families and communities from government policies that involved the widespread removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families. https://intranet.facs.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/431807/LAG-Resources-Understanding-and-applying-the-Aboriginal-Torres-Strait-Islander-Child-Placement-Principles.pdf

or other suitable person until the child is 18 years of age. In general, a guardian is responsible for making decisions about the child's health and education, managing family contact, ensuring that the child's emotional, social, cultural and spiritual needs are met and providing a safe, nurturing, stable and secure environment.

On the day the legislative amendments were proclaimed, relative/kinship carers who had an order from the Children's Court giving them full parental responsibility for a child were transitioned automatically to guardianship orders and are known as the 'transitioned guardians'.¹¹ Carers who received guardianship orders after that date are usually referred to as 'new guardians'.

Since proclamation, the number of children who have exited OOHC in NSW through guardianship orders has steadily increased from 2,418 children in 2014-15¹² to 3,267 by June 2020¹³. During 2018-19, 350 new guardianship orders were arranged and 419 guardianship orders were arranged in 2019-2020¹⁴. A further increase in guardianship orders is likely in the coming years aligning with the Premier's priorities to increase permanency for children in OOHC. It has become increasingly important to know how children who exit OOHC to guardianship orders are faring, and how they are faring in comparison to children who have remained in OOHC.

¹¹ Parental Responsibility to Relative (PRR) Orders that were eligible to transition to guardianship were those orders made under s.79(1)(a)(iii) of the Care Act before 29 October 2014 where:

- The order allocated all aspects of parental responsibility for a child or young person at a place other than the usual home of the child or young person to a relative or kin of the child or young person.
- The allocation of parental responsibility was until the child or young person turned 18 years of age.

Parental Responsibility Orders that are NOT eligible to transition are:

- PR to Minister, S79(1)(b), with all or any aspects to relative under S81
- Orders made under the Family Law Act (in the Family Court, the Supreme Court or Federal Magistrates Court)
- Earlier Custody Orders under s.72Y of the 1987 Act
- Shared PR, where the Minister has any aspect under s.79(1)(a)(iii)
- Shared PR between a relative and parent s.79(1)(a)(ii) or s.79(1)(a)(iii)
- Sole PR to another person (not a relative) under s.149 or s.79(1)(a)(iii)

¹² NSW DCJ Annual Report 2015-2016. Volume 1- Performance and Activities report.
<https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/download?file=341608>

¹³ ChildStory – CIW Annual data

¹⁴ ChildStory – CIW Annual data

In NSW, carers of children in statutory or supported OOHC receive an allowance based on the assessed individual needs and the age of the child, case management and support. Guardians do not receive the same level of support:¹⁵

- ‘Transitioned guardian’s’ continue to receive an allowance paid at the same indexed rate as they received prior to transitioning to guardianship and contingency support in a broad range of areas.¹⁶
- ‘New guardians’ receive an allowance paid at the same rate as DCJ’s Statutory or Supported Care Allowance but they have limited access to additional support payments. Additional support payments must be agreed upon by DCJ and the guardians before a guardianship order is granted. Once a guardianship order has been made the guardian cannot request additional financial support. Financial support is available to ‘new guardians’ in the following areas only: education, childcare, medical and dental, professional therapy, cultural support planning to maintain identity and culture and life story planning to record details about a child’s history and personal development.


The NSW peak Aboriginal OOHC agency, Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec) advocate for continued access to practical and caseworker support for Aboriginal children on guardianship orders. According to AbSec, a large cohort of Aboriginal children on guardianship orders may require ongoing support across a range of domains to thrive and to heal from previous maltreatment and the impact of removal¹⁷. Annually, DCJ sends a letter to all guardians to confirm they are still caring for the child. DCJ does not routinely collect data on children on guardianship orders or their guardians.

DCJ’s objective to improving the long-term outcomes of children in OOHC coupled with the Premier’s priority to increase permanency for children in OOHC provides an opportunity to drive practice and performance to achieve better outcomes for children. As

¹⁵ For more information on guardianship allowance, support services etc., please refer to ‘Guardianship Financial Guidelines, February 2020’ at <https://facs-web.squiz.cloud/data/assets/file/0004/314590/Becoming-a-guardian.pdf>

¹⁶ Guardianship support for ‘transitioned guardians’ may include: maintaining identity and culture, relative/kin carer assessment, long-term establishment costs, teenage Education Payment (TEP), out of guidelines payment, respite/support workers, travel (excluding holidays), back payment (<13 weeks.), professional reports, professional therapy, clothing and footwear, therapeutic camps, removal/storage, contact costs, legal costs, childcare, education and medical/dental.

¹⁷ More information on AbSec’s advocacy for an effective model of support provision for Aboriginal children on guardianship orders can be found at <https://www.absec.org.au/guardianship.html>



such, it is important to have an evidence-informed understanding of the key factors that contribute to successful permanency planning. As the use of guardianship orders is a critical but relatively new component of the PSP, the POCLS will provide valuable new insights on the impact of this permanency model to inform future policy and practice.

4 Background

Several studies have examined factors that are associated with children exiting OOHC through permanency. These factors can be summarised under four broad categories:

1. Child characteristics: age, cultural background, gender, health/mental health, disability status.
2. Carer characteristics: birth family structure, economic status, carer alcohol and substance use, carer mental health.
3. Placement characteristics: reason for removal (e.g., maltreatment history), placement with siblings, extent of contact with the birth family for the child, placement stability.
4. System/service factors: public vs private sector service delivery, caseworker characteristics (e.g. qualifications, attitudes), support from agencies and collaboration between the agency, birth family and caregivers. (Akin et al. 2015; Akin 2011; Connell 2006; Courtney & Hook 2012; Carnochan et al. 2013a, 2013b; Harris & Courtney 2003; MacDonald et al. 2007; Park & Ryan 2009).

With regard to exiting OOHC to guardianship in particular, Akin and colleagues (2011) found that the strongest predictors of whether or not a child was more likely to exit OOHC to guardianship than the comparison groups were: age of entry to OOHC, disability status, initial placement type and whether the child had run away from OOHC. Children who were aged between 14 and 17 years, who did not have a disability, who were initially placed with a relative or kin, and who had not run away while in OOHC were more likely to exit via guardianship than the comparison groups.

Previous research has acknowledged the importance of considering children's emotional and behavioural problems as factors influencing different permanency outcomes (Leathers et al. 2010). Lansverk and colleagues (1996) found that children with socio-emotional problems were 50% less likely to be reunited with their birth family. It remains unclear, however, the extent to which behavioural problems predict the likelihood of children exiting OOHC to guardianship orders, as research in this area is limited. One particular study looked at competing risk factors for different OOHC permanency pathways and found that children with emotional and behavioural problems were less likely exit to guardianship (Macdonald et al. 2007). Given this gap in the literature and the growing understanding of the influence of socio-emotional and behavioural problems on permanency pathways, this warrants further examination.

Studies which examined outcomes for children in permanency arrangements also identified certain child, family and service factors associated with particular outcomes (Rolock et al. 2018). A systematic review of the literature on outcomes for children who

received permanent arrangements indicates that older children were more likely to exhibit challenging behaviour and that children with a history of physical and sexual abuse were at a higher risk for adjustments difficulties (White 2016).

According to Rolock and colleagues (2018), a key challenge for child welfare agencies now is how to ensure the wellbeing of children in OOHC and those who exit OOHC to a permanency arrangement. Evidence to inform an appropriate response is limited (White 2016). This may partly be attributable to the assumption that children who exit OOHC to a permanent arrangement have access to support from their permanent family (i.e. birth family, guardian or adopted family) and usually fare well as adults by virtue of attaining legal permanence (Rolock et al.2018). Yet, such an assumption is not based on strong evidence.

Research in the broader context of children who have received OOHC permanency arrangements points to the child factors affecting outcomes. Testa and colleagues (2015) examined the factors influencing post-permanency discontinuity for children who exit OOHC to adoption or guardianship. This study found child behavioural problems had a negative impact on post-permanency continuity. A study by Barth and colleagues (2008) had similar findings in that children who re-entered OOHC after being restored to their birth parents had higher levels of socio-emotional problems. Other studies have also found emotional and behavioural difficulties in adolescents are a risk factor for post-permanency discontinuity (Brodzinsky & Smith 2019; Neil et al. 2020; Parolini et al. 2018). With regard to the guardianship arrangements, evidence from the UK suggests that children on guardianship orders are less likely to re-enter OOHC compared to children exiting to restoration or adoption (Mc Grath-Lone et al. 2017).

Literature also shows that carers and families who receive insufficient support from welfare agencies may experience difficulties related to or contributing to post-permanency discontinuity (Rolock et al. 2018). Provision of support to families and carers with children with challenging behaviours may enable carers to better understand and support these children and stabilise the permanency placement (Testa et al. 2015; Rolock et al. 2018).

A search for Australian literature revealed no studies that examined the socio-emotional outcomes of children after exiting OOHC to guardianship. Only one Australian study was found that addressed an associated outcome, academic performance. The study investigated the academic performance of children on guardianship orders across multiple jurisdictions. The study was piloted in two stages in 2007 and 2011 and consistently found that children on guardianship or custody orders (statutory care) were not meeting the national benchmarks for reading and numeracy, and that outcomes for Aboriginal children within this group were significantly lower than the national benchmarks (Hunter et al. 2007; 2011).

4.1 Summary

There is limited international literature examining children's socio-emotional wellbeing and the long-term success of permanency arrangements for children exiting OOHC. New research is needed to better understand how children on guardianship orders are faring in terms of socio-emotional wellbeing. New evidence is needed to inform practice in NSW on pathways to permanency decision making, planning and programs to reduce the risk of post-permanency discontinuity and children re-entering OOHC.

5 Methods

5.1 Data source

The POCLS is the first large-scale prospective longitudinal study of children and young people in OOHC in Australia. The POCLS follows a cohort of children who entered OOHC for the first time in NSW between May 2010 and October 2011 (n=4,126). A subset of those children who went on to receive final Children's Court care and protection orders by 30 April 2013 (n=2,828) were eligible to participate in the interview component of the study. To date, five waves of data collection have been undertaken at 18-24 month intervals. Wave 5 was completed in December 2020.

The POCLS provides an opportunity to examine the association between guardianship orders and children's outcomes as the legislative change in 2014 occurred after the Wave 1 interviews (between 9 June 2011 and August 2013) and before the Wave 3 interviews (October 2014 and July 2016). The number of the POCLS children who were on guardianship orders at the time of Waves 2, 3 and 4 interviews were 12, 162 and 159 respectively. A total of 142 of these children were from the 'transitioned guardians' cohort, that is, they left OOHC on 29 October 2014 (right before the commencement of Wave 3); these children form the guardianship orders group for this analysis¹⁸.

The analysis for this report used unweighted data from Waves 2, 3 and 4 of the POCLS interviews as well as DCJ administrative data on child protection records (e.g. the number and type of Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH) reports) and OOHC placement records (e.g. type and duration) up to 30 June 2016.¹⁹ The interview data consists of responses by the child and carer to a range of questions and standardised psychometric tests.²⁰

¹⁸ Two other children also exited to guardianship orders on 29th October 2019 but did not have a guardianship order at the time of the Wave 3 interview. That is probably because for them, the Wave 3 interview took place before the 29th October 2014.

¹⁹ At the time of analysis, updated administrative data (30 June 2018) was not available to match the Wave 4 interview data.

²⁰ The measures are standardised meaning they can be used to show how a cohort of children compare with peers in the general population and also how individuals are developing. It is important to take cultural considerations into account when using standardised measures with children from minority cultures. The standardised measures used in the POCLS were selected in 2010 at which time measures of child development had not been tested for validity with Aboriginal children in Australia.

5.2 Study design: the quasi-experimental non-equivalent groups design

This project used the quasi-experimental research design: particularly, the non-equivalent groups design to examine the socio-emotional wellbeing of children who exited OOHC to guardianship orders (treatment/intervention group) and children who remained in OOHC in relative/kinship care placements (control/comparison group).

The non-equivalent groups design requires a pre-test and post-test outcome for the treatment and control groups. As children were not randomly assigned to either of the groups, there is a potential of non-equivalence between the groups. Previous studies examining differences in permanency outcomes between children in relative/kinship care and non-relative/kinship care demonstrated that there are pre-existing group differences and/or selection biases (Koh & Testa 2008). The two groups may also vary systematically in the types and severity of maltreatment and other characteristics (Berger et al. 2009). Therefore, the possibility of pre-existing differences between the control and treatment group cannot be ruled out and needs to be controlled or adjusted for in the analysis of post-guardianship outcomes.

In the present study, the effect of guardianship orders is considered as the ‘intervention or treatment effect’. Given the availability of data over multiple time points, socio-emotional outcomes were measured before treatment at baseline, that is, Wave 2 (pre-test) and after the treatment in two subsequent time points, that is, Wave 3 and Wave 4 (post-test). A summary of the design is provided in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: The non-equivalent groups design

Treatment group	O_{w2}	G	O_{w3}	O_{w4}
Control group	O_{w2}		O_{w3}	O_{w4}

Note: ‘G’ represents ‘the provision of guardianship orders’ while O represents outcome measures. The subscripts indicate which wave the outcome measure was taken, e.g., O_{w2} is the outcome measure at the time of the POCLS Wave 2 interview.

Table 2: The control and treatment groups in the non-equivalent groups design

Sample	Children placed in relative/kinship care at Wave 2
Intervention/treatment	Provision of guardianship orders on 29 October 2014
Control group	Children who did not exit OOHC and remained in relative/kinship care
Treatment group	Children who exited OOHC on guardianship orders after Wave 2 and before Wave 3 ('transitioned guardians')
Pre-test outcome	Socio-emotional wellbeing at Wave 2
Post-test outcome	Socio-emotional wellbeing at Wave 3 and Wave 4

As discussed earlier, the non-equivalent groups design includes a pre-test outcome, which allows us to measure the pre-existing differences between the groups on the outcome variable and, therefore, addresses the issue of selection biases (or selection threat to internal validity) mentioned above. This design also includes two post-tests, which are the two observations taken on the outcome variable after the provision of guardianship orders.

5.3 Measures and variables

5.3.1 Measure of the child's socio-emotional wellbeing - the Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL):

The child's socio-emotional development outcomes were measured using the Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL). The CBCL is a questionnaire used to assess behavioural and emotional problems in children and adolescents. In the POCLS, versions validated and normed for use with children 18 months to 5 years of age (CBCL/1½-5) and 6-18 years (CBCL/6-18) of age were used. The CBCL/1½-5 years contains 100 items and the CBCL/6-18 contains 120 problem items. All items are rated on a scale from 0 = not true, 1 = somewhat or sometimes true and 2 = very true or often true.

In the POCLS, the CBCL was completed by the carers of children aged 3 to 18 years (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001) from Wave 1.²¹ The CBCL measures child problem behaviours²² and yields two principal composite indices: 'Internalising' and 'Externalising'. 'Internalising' includes scales for 'anxious-depressed', 'withdrawn-depressed' and 'somatic complaints' syndromes. For the CBCL/1½-5 years, 'Internalising' also includes the 'withdrawn' syndrome. 'Externalising' captures problems relating to external behaviours including scales for 'aggressive behaviour' and 'rule-breaking' for CBCL/6-18 years and 'attention problems' for CBCL/1½-5 years. The CBCL Total Problems Score is the sum of all items including 'Internalising', 'Externalising' and 'Other' problems (for e.g. sleep problems, eating problems, thumbsucking etc.).

The CBCL scores can be presented in a raw score format; as standardised t-scores or by classifying children as falling into 'clinical', 'borderline' and 'normal' ranges. Children's scores in the 'borderline' range indicate a need for ongoing monitoring and support while those in the 'clinical' range indicate a need for professional assessment and professional support. The standardised t-scores for all three scales (Internalising, Externalising, and Total Problems) are used in the analyses presented in this report.

5.3.2 Variables and measures in the analysis:

The following dependent and independent variables and measures were considered in the analysis.

- demographics (age at entry to OOHC, gender, Aboriginal status, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) status)
- child's disability status²³

²¹ The CBCL has been tested in a range of diverse cultures but clinical cut-offs may not be uniform across all cultures (Crijnen et al, 1997). The measure may not be sensitive to the influence that cultural norms may have on reporting child behaviours and parents' problem ratings. This should be considered when interpreting the data.

²² We acknowledge that the term 'problem' is not child-centric language, but we have retained the language originally used by the authors who developed the CBCL scale.

²³ This information is collected either when a report is made via the DCJ Helpline or when the caseworker conducts a field visit to undertake assessment. Disability status could be 'point in time' or 'permanent'. The assessment of disability status may be made by a professional or informally by the caseworker.

- child protection history (number and types of ROSH reports prior to entry to care²⁴)
- placement characteristics (placed with siblings, DCJ Districts²⁵)
- carer characteristics (age, gender, cultural background, disability, marital status, income, education)
- carer satisfaction in their caring role²⁶
- carer psychological distress was assessed using the Kessler-10 (K-10). Scores were categorised as low, moderate and high.
- children's socio-emotional wellbeing at Wave 2 using CBCL categories i.e. pre-test measure (referred to as baseline outcome hereafter)
- children's socio-emotional well-being at Wave 3 using CBCL
- children's socio-emotional well-being at Wave 4 using CBCL

5.4 Sample selection

A total of 501 children were in a relative/kinship care placement in Wave 2²⁷. The vast majority of these children were also in a relative/kinship care placement in Wave 1 (n=462, 92.2% of 501), while a further 30 children participated in Wave 2 for the first time.

²⁴ Type of ROSH reports prior to entering care – a binary variable (Y/N) was created to reflect the type of reports including physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, psychological abuse, psychological harm, domestic violence, carer serious mental health, carer emotional state, carer drug alcohol abuse, carer other issue, risk behaviour of the child/young person and prenatal issues.

²⁵ Districts were categorised as; 1. South Eastern, Northern & Sydney Districts, 2. South Western Sydney District, 3. Western Sydney and Nepean Blue Mountains Districts, 4. Illawarra Shoalhaven & Southern NSW Districts, 5. Mid North Coast & Northern NSW Districts 6. Murrumbidgee, Far West & Western Districts, 7. Hunter New England and Central Coast Districts 8. Statewide services.

²⁶ A binary variable (Y/N) was created for each question including: being able to reach caseworkers when needed; assistance provided by caseworkers; working relationship with other agencies related to the child (early childhood education, counsellors, etc.); adequacy of information about the child; and opportunities to meet other foster or kinship families.

²⁷ Of the 598 children in relative/kinship care at Wave 1, 462 (77.3%) remained in relative/kinship care in Wave 2, 6 restored, 6 transitioned to guardianship, 12 moved to foster care, 1 placed in residential care and the remaining (n=111, 18.6%) children and their carers did not participate in the Wave 2 interview or aged out at 18 years and not eligible to participate.

From this initial sample (n=501), 68 children were excluded as they did not participate in Waves 3 or 4. Data were complete for a total of 433 children in relative/kinship care in Wave 2 for the analysis for this project.

Of the 433 children from Wave 2, 291 children (67.2%) remained in relative/kinship care at Wave 3 and 142 children (32.8%) had exited on guardianship orders. Out of the 291 children who remained in relative/kinship care, 21 did not participate in the Wave 3 interview and 14 changed carer households between Wave 2 and Wave 3. As for Wave 4, 51 children did not participate in the Wave 4 interview and 31 changed households between Wave 3 and Wave 4.

All of the 142 children who exited in Wave 3 were from the 'transitioned guardians' cohort. All of them participated in Wave 3 with only one child moving households between Wave 2 and Wave 3. As for Wave 4, 17 children did not participate in Wave 4 and three changed households between Wave 3 and Wave 4.

5.5 Analysis

The objective of the first part of the analysis was to address the first research question; that is, to examine factors that are associated with children's exit from OOHC to guardianship orders. Both descriptive and bivariate analyses were conducted to assess the differences between the control and treatment group across the child and carer factors identified in Section 4.3.2 above. Chi-square tests were used for categorical variables and independent t-tests for continuous variables.

The variables that were found to be significant ($\alpha = .05$) in the bivariate analysis were considered for inclusion in the binary logistic regression to predict the likelihood of a child exiting OOHC to a guardianship order, given that the outcome variable for this analysis was a binary variable indicating that the child has exited OOHC to guardianship order or not (i.e. remained in relative/kinship placement in OOHC).

The second part of the analysis was to address the second research question; that is, how the children on guardianship orders are faring on their socio-emotional wellbeing using the non-equivalent groups design; which, as mentioned above, include the pre-test and post-test outcomes for both the control and treatment groups. Multiple regression models were conducted to compare the post transition to guardianship CBCL scores between the groups. The dependent variable was children's socio-emotional outcomes after the guardianship orders, that is, CBCL scores in Wave 3 and Wave 4 (post-test measure). The independent variables include the group variable (control versus treatment), the adjusted CBCL scores in Wave 2 and factors that were found to be significantly associated with exit to guardianship from the first part of the analysis. The CBCL scores in Wave 2 were adjusted or corrected by measurement error (using both

Cronbach's alpha and the test-retest reliability for the CBCL)²⁸. The purpose was to control or adjust for any pre-existing differences in the outcome and in any other factors between the two groups. All analyses were conducted with IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0.

²⁸ This is to correct for the potential bias resulting from pretest measurement error and group non-equivalence. The formula for the adjustment is: $X_{adj} = \bar{X} + r(X - \bar{X})$, where X_{adj} = *adjusted pretest score*; \bar{X} = *mean of original pretest scores of either the control or treatment group*; r = *reliability* .

Two sets of adjusted pre-test scores for the CBCL scales were generated using both the Cronbach's alpha (upper bound estimate of reliability) and test-retest reliability (lower bound estimate of reliability). This is to ensure that if a significant effect of the treatment (guardianship orders) is found using both estimates, we may conclude that the result is not biased by the pre-test measurement error. Please see more details on <https://conjointly.com/kb/nonequivalent-groups-analysis/>.

6 Results

6.1 Sample characteristics

Table 3 reports the descriptive statistics for child characteristics, placement characteristics and the child protection history of the sample (n=433). Descriptive statistics for other independent variables, including carer characteristics and carer satisfaction, are reported in Table 4.

Table 3 shows that more than half (52.7%) of the children were male, 40.0% were identified as Aboriginal and 14.8% were from a CALD background. Over half (53.6%) of children entered OOHC before they were three years old. The mean age of children at entry to OOHC was 3.04 years (SD=3.30). The mean number of ROSH reports prior to entry to OOHC was 8.50 (SD= 7.82). Around three-quarters of children (73.4%) were subject to ROSH reports for physical abuse, followed by 70.7% for carer drug and alcohol abuse. One in every five children had a ROSH report for prenatal issues.

Around two-thirds (67.2%) of children had been placed with at least one sibling. For this sample, the highest percentage of children were in Hunter New England & Central Coast district (30.7%), followed by Western Sydney & Nepean Blue Mountain district (13.6%).

Table 3: Child characteristics including demographics, child protection history and placement characteristics for the sample (n=433)

Child characteristics and child protection history	n	%		Mean	SD	Range
Demographics	433					
Gender						
Male	228	52.7				
Female	205	47.3				
Aboriginality						
Aboriginal	173	40				
Non-Aboriginal	260	60				
Cultural background						
CALD	64	14.8				
Non-CALD	369	85.2				
Age at entry to OOHC				3.04	3.30	0-14
Less than 3 years	232	53.6				
3 to 6 years	123	28.4				
7 to 14 years	78	18.0				
Disability						
Yes	63	14.5				
No	370	85.5				
Child protection history						
Number of ROSH reports prior to entry	433			8.50	7.82	1-44
ROSH reported issues prior to entry involving (Yes/No)						
Physical abuse	318	73.4				
Sexual abuse	51	11.8				
Neglect	242	55.9				
Psychological	68	15.7				
Risk of psychological harm	222	51.3				
Domestic violence	278	64.2				
Carer mental health	117	27.0				
Carer emotional state	242	60.0				
Carer drug and alcohol	306	70.7				
Carers other issues	110	25.4				
CYP risk behaviours	48	11.1				
Prenatal	90	20.8				
Placement characteristics						
Co-placement with siblings						
No siblings	142	32.8				
At least one sibling	291	67.2				
DCJ Districts						
Hunter New England & Central Coast	133	30.7				

Murrumbidgee, Far West & Western NSW	46	10.6				
Illawarra Shoalhaven & Southern NSW	43	9.9				
Mid North Coast & Northern NSW	49	11.3				
Western Sydney & Nepean Blue Mountain	59	13.6				
South Eastern, Northern & Sydney	39	9.0				
South Western Sydney	58	13.4				
Statewide services	6	1.4				

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics of relative/kinship carer characteristics. The overwhelming majority of carers were female (91.5%). Nearly one-fifth of carers were Aboriginal (18.0%) and 13.3% were from a CALD background. The age group with the highest percentage of caregivers (37.2%) was 51-60 years. Around 2 in 5 carers were married and 17.1% had a disability. The majority of carers (69.5%) reported having low levels of distress. Nearly half of the carers had a high school qualification or lower (47.9%) and 37.9% had an annual income between \$40,000 and \$80,000. With regard to carer satisfaction, the majority were satisfied with foster parenting and with their working relationship with other agencies (around 90%). A summary of the CBCL Externalising, Internalising and Total Problems behaviour scores for the sample can be found in Appendix 13.2.

Table 4: Characteristics of the relative/kinship carers including demographics, carer stress and satisfaction

Carer characteristics	n	%	Mean	SD	Range
Gender	431				
Male	35	8.1			
Female	396	91.5			
Cultural background	389				
Aboriginal	70	18.0			
CALD	52	13.3			
Other Australian	267	68.6			
Carer age	415				
Less than 40 year	52	12.0			
41 to 50 years	110	25.4			
51 to 60 years	161	37.2			
More than 60 years	92	21.1			
Carer marital status	320				
Married	178	41.1			
Never married	14	3.2			
De-facto	53	12.2			
others	75	17.3			
Carer disability	432				
Yes	74	17.1			
No	358	82.7			
Carer stress level K-10	431		14.44	5.33	10-42
Low	301	69.5			
Moderate	87	20.1			
High	43	9.9			
Carer annual income	383				
Less than \$40,000	115	26.6			
\$40,000 to \$80,000	164	37.9			
More than \$80,000	104	24.0			
Carer education	432				
High school or less	207	47.9			
University education	52	12.0			
Other post school qualification	173	40.0			
Carer satisfaction					
Satisfied with foster parenting	404	93.3			
Satisfied with being able to reach caseworker	297	68.6			
Satisfied with assistance from case workers	270	62.4			
Satisfied with working relationship with other agencies	387	89.4			
Satisfied with having enough information about the child	318	73.4			
Satisfied with opportunities to meet other families	232	53.6			

6.2 Bivariate analysis results

A series of chi-square tests were conducted to assess the differences in child, placement and carer related factors between the control and treatment groups. Table 5 reports the proportion of children from both groups in terms of all covariates and the chi-square test results. It also reports the mean number of ROSH reports prior to entry to OOHC for both groups and differences between them using an independent t-test.

There were no significant differences between the two groups in terms of the child's gender, Aboriginality, CALD status and age of entry to OOHC. Among the guardianship group, 9.2% of children had a disability compared to 17.2% of children from the OOHC relative/kinship care group. This difference was statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($\chi^2=4.95$, $p=0.02$).

There were no significant differences between the two groups of children in the mean number of ROSH reports prior to entry, but significant differences were found in the type of ROSH report. Children who remained in relative/kinship care were significantly more likely to have received a ROSH report involving neglect ($\chi^2=14.44$, $p=0.00$), psychological issues ($\chi^2=5.54$, $p=0.02$), and the risk of psychological harm ($\chi^2=13.29$, $p=0.00$) compared to the children who exited OOHC to guardianship orders. The differences in placement with siblings and placement location (DCJ district) were not significant between the groups.

There were no significant differences between the groups for carer's gender, cultural background, and age or disability status. A significant difference was found between the two groups in carer distress ($\chi^2=12.65$, $p=0.00$). Carers of children on guardianship orders were less likely to experience high levels of distress (4.2%) compared to OOHC relative/kinship carers (12.8%). A higher proportion of children whose carers (27.5%) experienced a moderate level of distress in Wave 2 exited OOHC to guardianship compared to the control group (16.6%) while the proportions experiencing low levels were similar. This finding needs to be interpreted with caution due to small sample sizes involved ($n=43$ in the category of 'high', with 6 only for the treatment group). No significant differences were found between the two groups in carers' marital status, income, education and any of the carer satisfaction categories. It is noteworthy that there were more similarities than dissimilarities between the carers of the two groups of children, which could be due to the fact that they were all relative/kinship carers.

Table 5: Comparison between children on guardianship orders and children who remained in OOHC relative/kinship care (bivariate analysis results)

Child characteristics	Relative/Kinship care		Guardianship		Chi-square (df)	Sig (P)
	n	%	n	%		
Demographics						
Gender						
Male	162	55.7	66	46.5	3.23 (1)	0.07
Female	129	44.3	76	53.5		
Aboriginality						
Aboriginal	116	39.9	57	40.1	0.00 (1)	0.95
Non-Aboriginal	175	60.1	85	59.9		
Cultural background						
CALD	43	14.8	21	14.8	0.00 (1)	0.99
Non-CALD	248	85.2	121	85.2		
Age at entry to OOHC ²⁹					2.14 (3)	0.54
Less than 3 years	153	52.6	79	55.6		
3 to 6 years	88	30.2	35	24.6		
7 to 11 years	47	16.2	25	17.6		
12 to 17 years	np	np	np	np		
Disability (Yes/No)	50	17.2	13	9.2	4.95 (1)	0.02*
Child protection history						
Number of ROSH reports prior to entry	Mean= 8.9 SD= 7.7	Mean=7.5, SD= 8.0	t=1.79	0.07		
ROSH reported issues prior to entry (Yes/No)						
Physical abuse	221	75.9	97	68.3	2.85 (1)	0.09
Sexual abuse	34	11.7	17	12.0	0.00 (1)	0.93
Neglect	213	73.2	78	54.9	14.44(1)	0.00*
Psychological	54	18.6	14	9.9	5.45 (1)	0.02*
Risk of psychological harm	167	57.4	55	38.7	13.29(1)	0.00*
Domestic violence	191	65.6	87	61.3	0.79 (1)	0.37
Carer mental health	81	27.8	36	25.4	0.29 (1)	0.58
Carer emotional state	74	31.2	67	35.3	0.77 (1)	0.37
Carer drug and alcohol	202	69.4	104	73.2	0.67 (1)	0.41
Carers other issues	77	26.5	33	23.2	0.52 (1)	0.47

²⁹ Supplementary analysis on age at the time of exit to guardianship showed that 64.8% (n=92) of children exited when they were 3-7 years of age; 28.2% (n=40) exited between 8-12 years of age and 7.0% (n=10) exited when they were between 13-17 years of age.

Child characteristics cont.	Relative/Kinship care		Guardianship		Chi-square (df)	Sig (P)
	n	%	n	%		
Child risk behaviours	29	10.0	19	13.4	1.12 (1)	0.28
Prenatal	60	20.6	30	21.1	0.01 (1)	0.9
Placement characteristics						
Co-placement with siblings at wave						
No siblings	98	33.7	44	31.0	0.31 (1)	0.57
At least one sibling	193	66.3	98	69.0		
DCJ District						
Hunter New England & Central Coast	93	32.6	40	28.2	7.96 (6)	0.24
Murrumbidgee, Far West & Western NSW	35	12.3	11	7.7		
Illawarra Shoalhaven & Southern NSW	27	9.5	16	11.3		
Mid North Coast & Northern NSW	35	12.3	14	9.9		
Western Sydney & Nepean Blue Mountain	38	13.3	21	14.8		
South Eastern, Northern & Sydney	26	9.1	13	9.2		
South Western Sydney	31	10.9	27	19.0		
Carer characteristics						
Gender						
Male	21	7.2	14	9.9	1.84 (1)	0.39
Female	268	92.1	128	90.1		
Cultural background ³⁰						
Aboriginal	52	20.2	18	13.6	3.77 (2)	0.15
CALD	30	11.7	22	16.7		
Other Australian	175	68.1	92	69.7		
Carer age						
Less than 40 years	39	13.9	13	9.6	2.76 (3)	0.432
41 to 50 years	76	27.1	34	25.2		
51 to 60 years	102	36.4	59	43.7		
More than 60 years	63	22.5	29	21.5		
Carer disability (Yes/No)	56	19.3	18	12.7	2.95 (1)	0.08
Carer marital status					2.05 (3)	0.561
Married	115	53.7	63	59.4		
Not/never married	8	3.7	6	5.7		

³⁰ Supplementary analysis shows that, of all the Aboriginal children in the sample (n=173), 44.4% of them in relative/kinship placements had a carer with an Aboriginal background. This is compared to 32.7% of the Aboriginal children from the guardianship group. There was no significant difference in the “cultural concordance” of the Aboriginal child/carer dyads between the two groups ($\chi^2=2.08$, $df = 1$, $p=0.15$). Please note that a total of 10 Aboriginal children were excluded as their carer’s cultural background was ‘unspecified’.

Child characteristics cont.	Relative/Kinship care		Guardianship		Chi-square (df)	Sig (P)
	n	%	n	%		
De-facto	38	17.8	15	14.2		
others	53	24.8	22	20.8		
Carer education					2.52 (2)	0.283
High school or less	143	49.3	64	45.1		
University education	38	13.1	14	9.9		
Other non-university education	109	37.6	64	45.1		
Carer stress level K 10 at Wave 2						
Low	204	70.6	97	68.3	12.65(2)	0.00*
Moderate	48	16.6	39	27.5		
High	37	12.8	6	4.2		
Carer annual income						
Less than \$40,000	76	29.6	39	31.0	0.61 (2)	0.73
\$40,000 to \$80,000	108	42.0	56	44.4		
More than \$80,000	73	28.4	31	24.6		
Carer satisfaction						
Satisfied with foster parenting	269	93.1	135	95.7	1.18 (1)	0.27
Satisfied with being able to reach caseworker	215	74.9	82	66.1	3.33 (1)	0.06
Satisfied with assistance from case workers	195	67.9	75	61	1.85 (1)	0.17
Satisfied with working relationship with other agencies	264	93.0	123	93.2	0.00 (1)	0.93

Table 6 presents results from independent t-tests between the control and treatment groups on the baseline socio-emotional outcome, that is, the CBCL scores at Wave 2. The results show that children on guardianship orders, on average, exhibited a lower level of Externalising Problems prior to exit from OOHC compared to the control group. This difference was statistically significant ($t=2.75$, $p=.00$). Similarly, children on guardianship orders showed significantly lower mean scores on Total Problem Behaviour compared to the children who remained in OOHC relative/kinship care ($t=2.53$, $p=.01$).

Table 6: CBCL scores between the children on guardianship orders and those remained in OOHC relative/kinship care (independent t-test results for baseline)

CBCL Scores at Wave 2	Relative/kinship care		Guardianship		t	Sig (P)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Externalising Problems	51.33	13.78	47.51	13.02	2.75	0.00*
Internalising Problems	47.86	12.07	46.51	10.51	1.14	0.25
Total Problems Behaviour	49.90	13.54	46.43	13.06	2.53	0.01*

6.3 Factors associated with children exiting OOHC to guardianship orders

In order to assess the factors associated with children exiting OOHC to guardianship, a binary logistic regression analysis was conducted. The variables that were found significant in the bivariate analysis were considered for the regression model as independent variables. These were: ROSH report prior to entry for neglect, psychological issues, risk of psychological harm; child’s disability; carer distress (K10 cut off variable with three categories low, moderate, high); baseline Externalising and Total Problems scores. To avoid multicollinearity³¹, Total Behaviour Problems and ROSH reports for risk of psychological harm were not included as these variables were highly correlated with Externalising Problems score and ROSH reports for psychological issues, respectively. The variables that are statistically significant in the final model were ROSH reported issues for neglect, carer distress (K-10) and baseline Externalising Problems³².

Table 7 presents the results for the final regression model³³. After controlling for other variables, children’s Externalising Problems scores were found to be negatively

³¹ Multicollinearity refers to a situation in which two or more independent variables in a regression model are highly correlated.

³² Correlation matrix showed that the correlations between Independent variables were very low (0.03 to 0.21) and hence the model met the assumption of collinearity.

³³ Overall the model explained only 5.8 per cent of the variation in the exit from OOHC to guardianship ($R^2=0.058$).

associated with the likelihood of exiting OOHC to guardianship. With each additional increase in Externalising Problems score, the likelihood of exiting through guardianship decreases ($\beta=0.98$, $CI=0.964-0.997$). Children who had a history of ROSH reports for neglect prior to entry to OOHC were less likely to exit to guardianship compared to children who had not received a ROSH report for neglect ($\beta=0.47$, $CI=0.304-0.725$). Children whose carer had a medium level of distress were more likely to exit through guardianship compared to those with a low level of distress ($\beta= 2.07$, $CI= 1.239-3.452$)³⁴. In simple terms, this implies that for guardianship orders, children with

- more Externalising Problem behaviours were less likely to exit OOHC.
- a child protection history of neglect prior to entry to OOHC were less likely to exit OOHC compared to children who did not receive this type of ROSH report.
- a distressed carer (medium level) were more likely to exit.

Table 7: Regression model for exit from OOHC to guardianship (n=433)

Factors	Unstandardized coefficient B	Exp (B)	Sig	95% CI
ROSH Reported issue for neglect (Yes/No)	-0.76	0.47	0.00*	0.30-0.72
Externalising Problem behaviours score	-0.02	0.98	0.02*	0.96-0.99
Carer distress (K-10) (low)				
Medium	0.727	2.07	0.00*	1.24-3.45
High	-0.64	0.53	0.18	0.21-1.34

Note: $-2 \text{ Log L} 514.567^a$, -2 Log L for null model 531.959, Nagelkere R^2 0.09, Nagelkere R^2 for null model 0.05, $R^2 = \frac{\text{Model chi-square}}{\text{Original}-2LL} = \frac{31.769}{546.336} = 0.058$

6.4 Patterns of pre-and post-guardianship socio-emotional outcomes

Figures 1 to 3 below show the pre-and-post-test mean CBCL scores between the OOHC relative/kinship carer and guardianship groups. Both the CBCL Total Problems and Externalising Problems scales followed a similar pattern. The mean scores for both the treatment and control groups increased from pre (i.e., Wave 2)-to-post-test (i.e., both Wave 3 and 4) at similar rates. There was a pre-test difference of 3 to 4 points between

³⁴As discussed earlier, this finding needs to be interpreted with caution due to small sample sizes involved (n=43 in the category of 'high' for K10, with 6 only for the guardianship group).

the two groups, with a lower mean score for the guardianship group. The post-test differences remained unchanged. The proportions of children in the CBCL borderline and clinical ranges between the two groups show a similar pattern³⁵.

The CBCL Internalising Problem scale followed a different pattern, in which the mean score increased from baseline to Wave 3 and then dropped in Wave 4. There was a pre-test difference of 1 point only and a slightly larger two points post-test difference (in both Wave 3 and Wave 4)³⁶. The bivariate distributions of the pre- and post-treatment scores are presented in Appendix 13.3.

³⁵ The proportions increased over time for the two groups. For example, the proportions of the borderline and clinical range of the CBCL Externalising Problems scale are 24.7% in Wave 2, 31.5% in Wave 3 and 34.6% in Wave 4 for the relative/kinship group and 19.3% in Wave 2, 20.4% in Wave 3 and 24.8% in Wave 4 for the guardianship group, respectively.

³⁶ Consistent with the finding on the factors associated with exits to guardianship orders, the patterns observed in the data suggest that it seems unlikely that selection threats might be operating. First, it seems unlikely the scores are subject to a selection-maturation threat. One might argue that the two groups may already be maturing at different rates due to the difference at pre-test. However, the post-test scores help rule that possibility out. This is because if the two groups were maturing at different rates, we would expect to see that the control (i.e., relative/kinship) group would continue to be maturing at a faster rate, which would result in a steeper slope for the relative/kinship group and a larger difference in the post-test scores between the two groups. It also seems unlikely that a selection-history threat existed. If the two groups, due to their initial differences, reacted differently to some historical event, we might expect that the relative/kinship group would have scored much higher or lower than it currently has. The possibility of a selection-regression threat can also be ruled out for much the same reasoning as above. If there was an upwards regression to the mean from pre to post, we would expect that regression to be greater for the guardianship group because they had the lower pre-test score.

Figure 1: Pre- and post-guardianship mean CBCL Total Problems scores

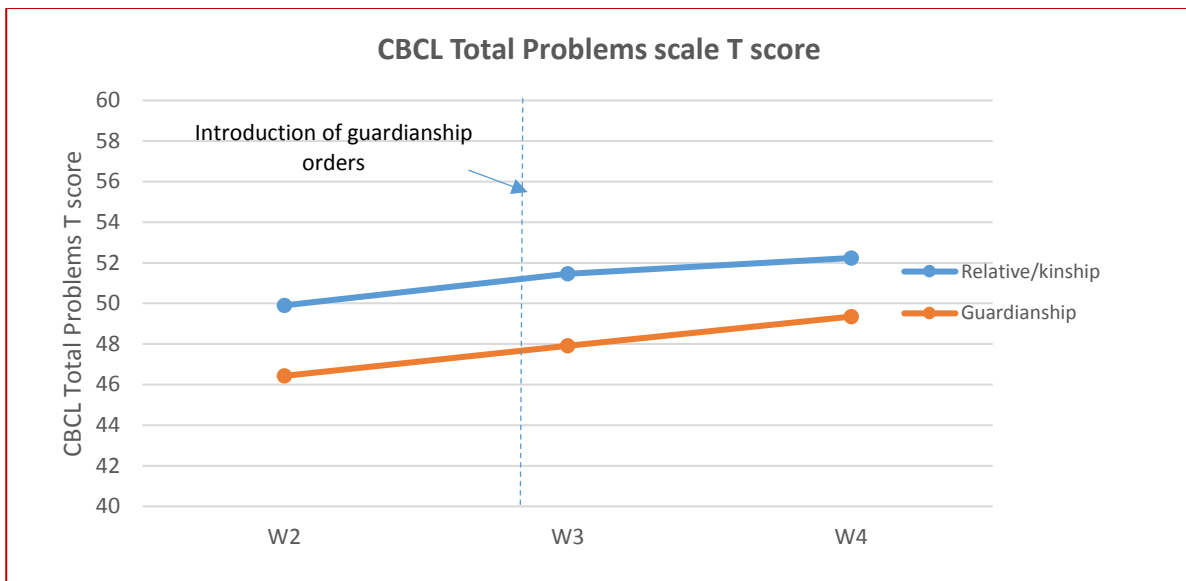


Figure 2: Pre- and post-guardianship mean CBCL Internalising Problems scores

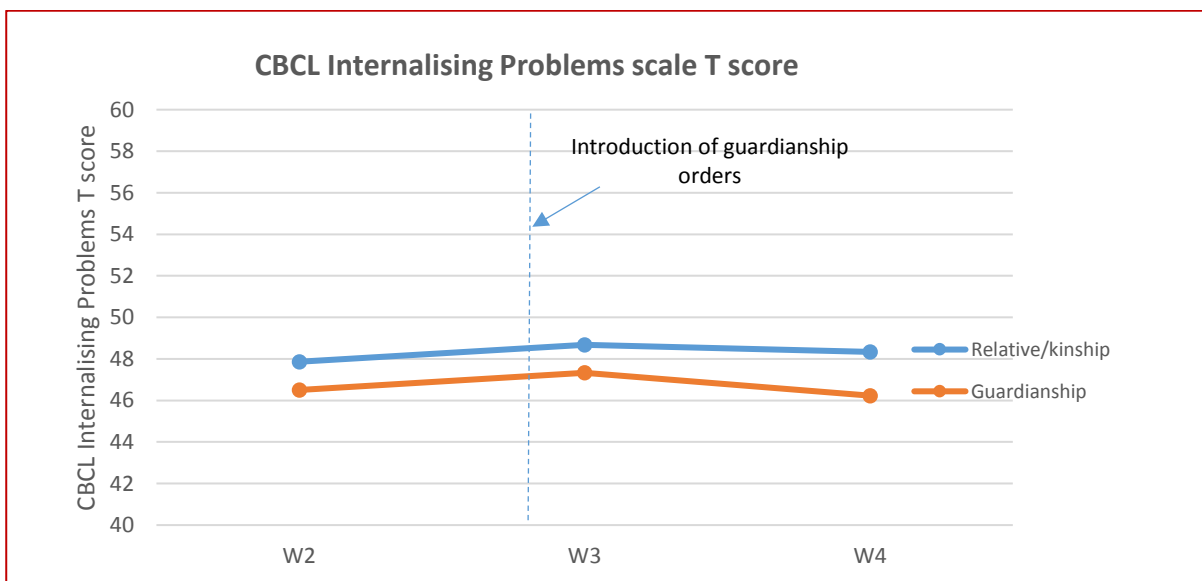
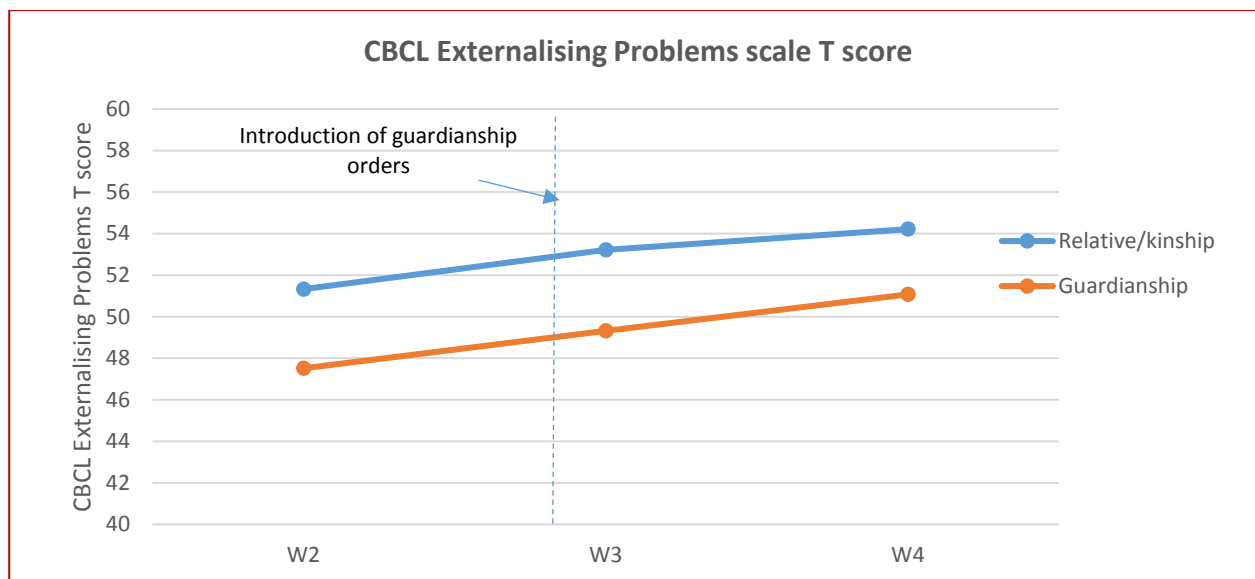


Figure 3: Pre- and post-guardianship mean CBCL Externalising Problems scores



6.5 Comparison of post-guardianship socio-emotional outcomes

As a final step in the analysis, we estimated the difference between groups on their post-test CBCL scores after adjusting for differences in the pre-test scores and other factors that are significantly associated with group memberships. For example, in the final multiple regression model for the CBCL Total Problems scores, the dependent variable is the Total Problems scores in either Wave 3 or Wave 4 and the independent variables are the baseline Total Problems scores adjusted by either Cronbach's alpha or test-retest reliability, an indicator variable to identify group membership, an indicator variable for whether there was a ROSH report involving neglect prior to entry to OOHC, and the pre-guardianship K-10 cut-off variable with three categories (low, moderate and high). Only the models with pre-guardianship CBCL scores adjusted by Cronbach's alpha are presented here. The models adjusted by test-retest reliability are presented in Appendix 13.4. Both methods provide consistent results³⁷.

The final multiple regression models for Total Problems, Internalising Problems and Externalising Problems scales are presented in Tables 8, 9 and 10. A positive (unstandardised) coefficient in these tables shows a positive relationship between the

³⁷ Tests to confirm if the data met the assumption of collinearity (Tolerance, VIF) indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern for any of the models.

independent variable and the dependent variable, whereas a negative coefficient represents a negative relationship.

Tables 8, 9 and 10 show that there is no significant difference in the socio-emotional outcomes between children who were on guardianship orders and those who remained in OOHC relative/kinship care. This finding is consistent across outcomes (i.e., CBCL Total Problems, Externalising and Internalising Problems) and time (i.e., Wave 3 and 4). This suggests that there is no group effect, and children exiting OOHC to guardianship did no better or worse socio-emotionally after 3 to 4 years on a guardianship order than children who remained in OOHC relative/kinship care.

For example, as shown in Table 8, children who exited OOHC on guardianship orders were estimated to score 0.67 points lower (95% confidence interval ranges between - 2.56 and 1.21) on the CBCL Total Problems scale scores in Wave 3 than those who remained in OOHC relative/kinship care after controlling for the effects of other covariates in the model. However, the difference is not statically significant. Table 8 also shows that the post-guardianship CBCL Total Problems scale scores are positively associated with their corresponding pre-guardianship scores, which is expected. Furthermore, as can be seen from Table 8, the post-treatment CBCL Total Problems scores are higher in Wave 3 for children whose carer exhibited a high level of stress at baseline (i.e., Wave 2). However, the association became insignificant by Wave 4. Findings in Tables 9 and 10 can be interpreted in the same way as above.

Table 8: Multiple regression models of post-guardianship CBCL Total Problems scores (**Cronbach's alpha**)

Variables	Wave 3			Wave 4		
	Unstandardised coefficient B	95% CI	Sig.	Unstandardised coefficient B	95% CI	Sig.
Adjusted Wave 2 CBCL Total Problems scores	0.80	0.73-0.87	0.00*	0.73	0.64-0.82	0.00*
Group (guardianship vs relative/kinship)	-0.67	-2.56-1.21	0.48	0.83	-1.43-3.08	0.47
ROSH report involving neglect (Yes/No)	-1.44	-3.34-0.47	0.13	-0.89	-3.09-1.32	0.43
K-10 cut-off (low)						
K-10 cut-off (moderate)	1.07	-1.16- 3.29	0.34	-0.46	-3.09-2.18	0.73
K-10 cut-off (high)	5.56	-1.16- 3.29	0.00*	2.48	-1.84-6.80	0.26

Note: For Wave 3 model: n=412, $R^2=0.60$, adjusted $R^2=0.600$; for Wave 4 model: n=365, $R^2=0.48$, adjusted $R^2=0.47$; the Wave 2 (pre-guardianship) CBCL Total Problems score was adjusted for measurement error using Cronbach's alpha.

Table 9: Multiple regression models of post-guardianship CBCL Externalising Problems scores (**Cronbach's alpha**)

Variables	Wave 3			Wave 4		
	Unstandardised coefficient B	95% CI	Sig.	Unstandardised coefficient B	95% CI	Sig.
Adjusted Wave 2 CBCL Externalising Problems scores	0.78	0.70-0.85	0.00*	0.65	0.57-0.70	0.00*
Group (guardianship vs relative/kinship)	-0.76	-2.69-1.17	0.44	-0.08	2.12-2.27	0.95
ROSH report involving neglect (Yes/No)	-0.83	-2.78 -1.12	0.40	-1.80	-3.95-0.35	0.10
K10 cut-off (low)						
K10 cut-off (moderate)	1.98	-0.29-4.25	0.09	-0.06	-2.62-2.45	0.96
K10 cut-off (high)	4.53	1.45-7.63	0.00*	1.79	-2.38-5.99	0.39

Note: For Wave 3 model: n=412, $R^2= 0.59$, adjusted $R^2= 0.56$; for Wave 4 model: n=365, $R^2= 0.42$, adjusted $R^2= 0.42$, the Wave 2 (pre-guardianship) CBCL Externalising Problems score was adjusted for measurement error using Cronbach's alpha.

Table 10: Multiple regression models of post-guardianship CBCL Internalising Problems scores (**Cronbach's alpha**)

Variables	Wave 3			Wave 4		
	Unstandardised coefficient B	95% CI	Sig.	Unstandardised coefficient B	95% CI	Sig.
Adjusted Wave 2 CBCL Internalising Problems scores	0.75	0.65-0.82	0.00*	0.58	0.49-0.68	0.00*
Group (guardianship vs relative/kinship)	-0.67	-2.46-1.12	0.46	-0.47	-2.55-1.61	0.66
ROSH report involving neglect (Yes/No)	-3.56	-5.38- -1.74	0.00*	-0.27	-2.33-1.79	0.79
K10 cut-off (low)						
K10 cut-off (moderate)	1.36	-0.77-3.49	0.21	-0.04	-2.49-2.42	0.98
K10 cut-off (high)	7.82	4.92-10.72	0.00*	6.80	2.82-10.78	0.00*

Note: For Wave 3 model: n=409, R²= 0.52, adjusted R²= 0.51; for Wave 4 model: n=36, R²= 0.35, adjusted R²= 0.34, the Wave 2 (pre-guardianship) CBCL Internalising Problems score was adjusted for measurement error using Cronbach's alpha.

7 Discussion

The broad purpose of this report was to explore the factors associated with children's exit from OOHC to guardianship; and how children are faring in guardianship focusing on their socio-emotional wellbeing. The aim was to inform policy and practice by answering the question of whether children who exit OOHC to permanency via guardianship orders have better, worse or equivalent socio-emotional wellbeing outcomes to those who do not.

What are the factors associated with children exiting OOHC through guardianship orders?

Overall, the findings of this analysis align with previous research on the factors that influence exit to permanency via guardianship. The finding that the children with pre-entry ROSH reports involving neglect are less likely to exit to guardianship (Carnochan et al. 2013b; Connell et al. 2005) suggests that children who have ROSH reports for neglect may have complex needs and may be more challenging to secure permanency through guardianship orders compared to children who did not have this type of ROSH report. Additional and ongoing support may be required to address the needs of these children to reduce their likelihood of a long-term OOHC relative/kinship placement (Connell et al. 2005).

With regard to carer distress levels, a moderate level of distress was found to be significantly associated with exit to guardianship. Given that any level of carer distress above low may have an impact on the wellbeing of the carer and the child, this finding suggests that relative/kinship carers transitioned to guardianship may need monitoring and additional support. Further analysis with more waves of data may show if carer distress or support needs are short-term or ongoing after they take up a guardianship role.

One important contribution of this analysis emerged from the findings regarding socio-emotional wellbeing of children prior to exit to guardianship. After controlling for other variables, the CBCL Externalising Problems score was found to be significantly negatively associated with exit to guardianship. This finding is consistent with the literature (Leather et al. 2010; Macdonald et al. 2007; Connell et al. 2005) and suggests that permanency outcomes might be influenced by children's socio-emotional wellbeing. It also supports existing evidence that agencies are more likely to pursue guardianship orders for children who pose low levels of socio-emotional challenges (Carnochan et al. 2013 b; de Bolger et al. 2017). This finding can help practitioners to identify children with high needs for socio-emotional and behavioural issues and find appropriate support networks for their carers to enable children to exit OOHC to guardianship. As discussed earlier, baseline socio-emotional outcomes have rarely been examined in predicting exit

to guardianship, and the inclusion of this data as an independent variable makes this research a valuable contribution to the literature.

How do children on guardianship orders fare socio-emotionally compared to those who remained in relative/kinship placement in OOHC?

Overall, the findings of this analysis showed that there were no significant group differences in children's socio-emotional outcomes post-guardianship after controlling for pre-existing group differences (in socio-emotional wellbeing and other factors) and pre-test measurement error. This finding was true across socio-emotional outcomes (i.e., CBCL Externalising, Internalising and Total Problems) and time (i.e., Wave 3 and Wave 4). It provides evidence that guardianship did not contribute to either improved or deteriorated socio-emotional outcomes for these children, at least in the short- to medium-term.

The finding that children who exited OOHC to guardianship orders are faring equally well to children who remained in OOHC may be due to a stable care experience with their relative/kinship carers. Both groups of children were placed in the care of a relative or a member of their kinship network – whether in OOHC or under a guardianship order. Care by relatives or kin is a protective factor for socio-emotional wellbeing (Berger et al. 2009; Delfabbro 2018; Lansverk et al.; Rubin et al. 2008).

As noted earlier in the report, the guardianship cohort for this analysis was the transitioned guardians who continued to receive contingency payments and other post-guardianship support services for which the 'new guardians' are not eligible. The availability of additional support to this cohort may have also contributed to this outcome.

Another important finding is that baseline CBCL Internalising, Externalising and Total Problems scores were positively associated with later waves of corresponding socio-emotional wellbeing outcomes. This is an important finding as it indicates that children who had socio-emotional and behavioural problems are at risk of having continuing problems that can escalate in severity in adolescence and later life (Fernandez 2009). This finding reinforces DCJ's policy in supporting families early on who are experiencing or at risk of vulnerability in terms of socio-emotional and behavioural problems.

8 Implications for policy and practice

This research has explored factors associated with exit from OOHC to guardianship and how these factors influence children's socio-emotional wellbeing outcomes. As such, this analysis of the POCLS data is useful for researchers, policy-makers and practitioners working to improve children's outcomes in the child protection system.

The findings can help practitioners to identify groups of children and their carers who require additional support or closer monitoring when exiting OOHC. Additionally, the results highlighted the necessity of trauma-informed casework support for children and their carers with a history of neglect.

As the first exploratory study to investigate the socio-emotional wellbeing of the POCLS children who exited OOHC to guardianship right after the legislative reforms ('transitioned' cohort), it provides important insights into how children are faring in this early guardianship cohort.

The study provides evidence that guardianship orders did not have an impact on the short- to medium-term socio-emotional wellbeing of the guardianship children compared to those who remained in relative/kinship placements in OOHC. Although the results do not seem to support the expectation that guardianship orders would provide better outcomes for children, this supports DCJ's current reforms of guardianship being one of five permanency options by demonstrating that it is possible to achieve at least the same results for children without the ongoing intervention of the state's statutory child protection system.

The findings point to the need for ongoing support for children who were removed from their parents due to neglect and children with high levels of socio-emotional problems to reduce the likelihood of long-term stay in OOHC and increase the chance of a permanent exit. In particular, carers and children need additional support for managing complex and challenging behaviours found in children who have experienced neglect.

9 Limitations

The analysis reported here utilised the POCLS data collected over four waves, approximately a 7-8 year period from entering OOHC for the first time. The introduction of guardianship orders in 2014 created an opportunity for a quasi-experimental study design, in which associations between variables of interest pre- and post- the 'intervention' could be examined. As with all research studies, this research is not without its limitations and the results should be interpreted accordingly.

First, the findings of this research may not be generalisable to all children in OOHC and/or who transition to permanency. Two possible reasons for this can be advanced. One is that the POCLS children entered OOHC at the same time (an OOHC entry cohort during a particular period of time) and as such the results may not apply to other entry cohorts.

The other reason is that the guardianship cohort used in this sample is not a representative sample of the guardianship population in NSW because of its specific focus on the 'transitioned guardians'. The 'transitioned guardians' are the cohort arising from the early extension of guardianship orders in 2014 and is comprised of relative/kinship carers who, at the time, had full Permanent Responsibility to Relative (PRR). This has excluded foster carers who became guardians after 29 October 2014 i.e. the 'new guardians'. Therefore, the comparative analysis of post-guardianship socio-emotional outcomes presented in this report does not include children with 'new guardians', who were subject to permanency planning, which assessed guardianship as best meeting their needs.

The scope of this report and sample size limited our ability to examine more closely the socio-emotional outcomes of Aboriginal children on guardianship orders. For Aboriginal children, the DCJ's definition of 'kinship carer' includes Aboriginal kinship carers, non-Aboriginal kinship carers and another Aboriginal person such as an Aboriginal general foster carer. This report did not differentiate between these carer types due to small sample sizes involved. For the same reason, the report did not consider cultural connections and cultural maintenance aspect for Aboriginal children in the sample.

Another limitation of this study was the use of indicator variables for some continuous variables which may have reduced power to detect less robust effects. This includes variables such as binary indicators for trauma history (types of ROSH reports) and carer responses.

And lastly, the socio-emotional outcome measure was drawn from the carer reported version of the CBCL and it is likely that different carers might have completed the questionnaire at different waves. This could result in some variability in the results.

10 Recommendations for further research

The findings of the current study on the ‘transitioned guardians’ will provide information to policy makers but more analysis is needed to answer policy questions on guardianship as a permanency pathways for all children in OOHC. The results, however, identified the following areas for future research:

- Repeated analysis with additional waves of POCLS data collections will provide insights on children’s longer term socio-emotional development.
- Aboriginal children in OOHC – how well they fare socio-emotionally in the long-term after they exit on guardianship orders, how well they connect with birth families, communities and culture, and how (and why) these arrangements impact their socio-emotional outcomes?
- Re-entry to OOHC after exiting to guardianship orders and whether there is an association with their socio-emotional wellbeing.³⁸ This will help us to identify how to provide support to sustain guardianship arrangements. This is critical information for policy and practice.
- Whether there is any difference between children from the ‘transitioned cohort’ and later cohorts of children who exit OOHC on guardianship orders in terms of outcomes. If so, the factors that are responsible for this including ongoing support and monitoring need to be determined. From a policy and practice perspective, it is important to understand which factors are associated with, and potentially make a difference to, children’s socio-emotional outcomes.
- Short, medium and long term socio-emotional outcomes of children in other permanency arrangements (e.g. restoration and adoption).
- Factors associated with other permanency options as well as, the reasons those factors influence exits. In particular, the impact of trauma (including the age of a child’s first ROSH report, and the length of time exposed to child abuse or neglect) and how this may impact the likelihood of successful permanency arrangements. This is important, given DCJ’s focus on increasing the number of children who exit OOHC via permanency.

³⁸ Descriptive analysis showed that the mean CBCL Total Problems, Externalising and, Internalising scores for the guardianship cohort remained well below the clinical range (<60) across waves. This may suggest that this group may be less likely to have post-permanency discontinuity. However, additional analysis is required to establish this association.

11 Conclusion

This research expands current knowledge about children on guardianship orders, the factors associated with their exit from OOHC and their post-guardianship socio-emotional outcomes compared to children who remained in relative/kinship care.

One of the major strengths of this research is that it addresses a major conceptual and methodological shortcoming in developmental research for children in OOHC by employing multiple methods of adjusting for pre-existing group differences in socio-emotional wellbeing (Berzin 2010; Koh & Testa 2008) that may have influenced guardianship decisions and post guardianship socio-emotional outcomes.

This report identifies a number of policy implications for child welfare practice. In particular, the findings point to the need for additional support for children in OOHC who received ROSH reports for neglect prior to entry and children with high levels of socio-emotional problems in order to reduce the risk of a long-term stay in OOHC. It also provides evidence that carers with medium to high level of distress may need extra support when taking on the new role as guardians.

This research provides much-needed insights into children's guardianship pathways and their short- to medium-term outcomes, especially for the POCLS children who exited right after the legislative reforms in 2014. Future waves of the POCLS data will be useful in establishing the long-term impact of guardianship orders on children's socio-emotional outcomes.

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13 Appendix

13.1 Variables from the POCLS data set used in the analysis

Child characteristics:

- age at entry (in years) (CAT_AGE_AT_ENTRY_YR), gender (male/female) (KD_ADMIN_STUDYCHILD_SEX), cultural background (Aboriginality (KD_ADMIN_STUDYCHILD_ATSI), CALD (KD_ADMIN_STUDYCHILD_CALD), Other Australian), DCJ District (PL_ADMIN_DISTRICTS), disability (disability_flag)
- sum of the number of ROSH reports prior to entering care (rosh_sum_A),
- type of ROSH reports prior to entering care – a binary variable (Y/N) was created to reflect the type of reports including physical abuse (RI_physical_A), sexual abuse (RI_SEXUAL_A), neglect (RI_NEGLECT_A), psychological abuse (RI_PSYCH_A), psychological harm (RI_RISKPSYCH_A), domestic violence (RI_DV_A), carer serious mental health (RI_CARERMH_A), carer emotional state (RI_CAREREMOT_A), carer drug alcohol (RI_CARERDA_A) carer other issue (RI_CARERO_A), risk behaviour of the child/young person (RI_CYPRIK_A) and prenatal issues (RI_PRENATAL_A).

Placement characteristics:

- Co-placement with siblings (COPLACED_SIBLING)
- District group (PL_ADMIN_DISTRICTS) – The fifteen DCJ districts were categorised into seven larger groups.

Carer characteristics:

- Age (CD_CRR_AGE_W1), income (CD_CRR_FIN_INC), cultural background (CD_CRR_CARER_CULT), carer marital status (CD_ADMIN_CARER_MARITAL), carer disability, carer education (CD_CRR_CARER1_EDUC)
- Carer satisfaction – a binary variable (Y/N) was created for each question including; being able to reach the caseworkers when needed (PC_CRR_ACCESS), assistance from caseworkers (PC_CRR_CW_ASSIST), your working relationship with other agencies related to Study Child (early childhood education, counsellors, etc.) (PC_CRR_OTHAGENCY_RELN), having enough information about Study Child (PC_CRR_SATIS_INFO) and opportunities to meet other foster or kinship families (FS_CRR_SATIS_FAM) Carer psychological distress was assessed using the K10 (CH_CRR_K10CUT). Scores were categorised as low, moderate, high.

Measure for socio-emotional wellbeing

- CBCL (BE_CRR_CBCL_INTSCL_T, BE_CRR_CBCL_EXTSCL_T, BE_CRR_CBCL_PROBSCL_T)

13.1 Socio-emotional outcomes for the sample across waves

Table11: Summary of CBCL scores for the sample (n=433) Wave 2 to Wave 4

CBCL	Wave 2			Wave 3			Wave 4		
	Mean	SD	Range	Mean	SD	Range	Mean	SD	Range
Total Problems	48.7	13.5	24-91	50.2	14.05	24-93	51.2	13.7	24-82
Externalising	50.0	13.6	28-95	51.9	13.73	28-95	53.1	12.7	32-87
Internalising	47.4	11.5	29-85	48.2	12.12	29-83	47.6	11.4	33-81

13.2 Comparison of CBCL outcomes pre- and post- guardianship socio-emotional outcomes

Figure 4: CBCL Total Problems scores pre- and post- guardianship

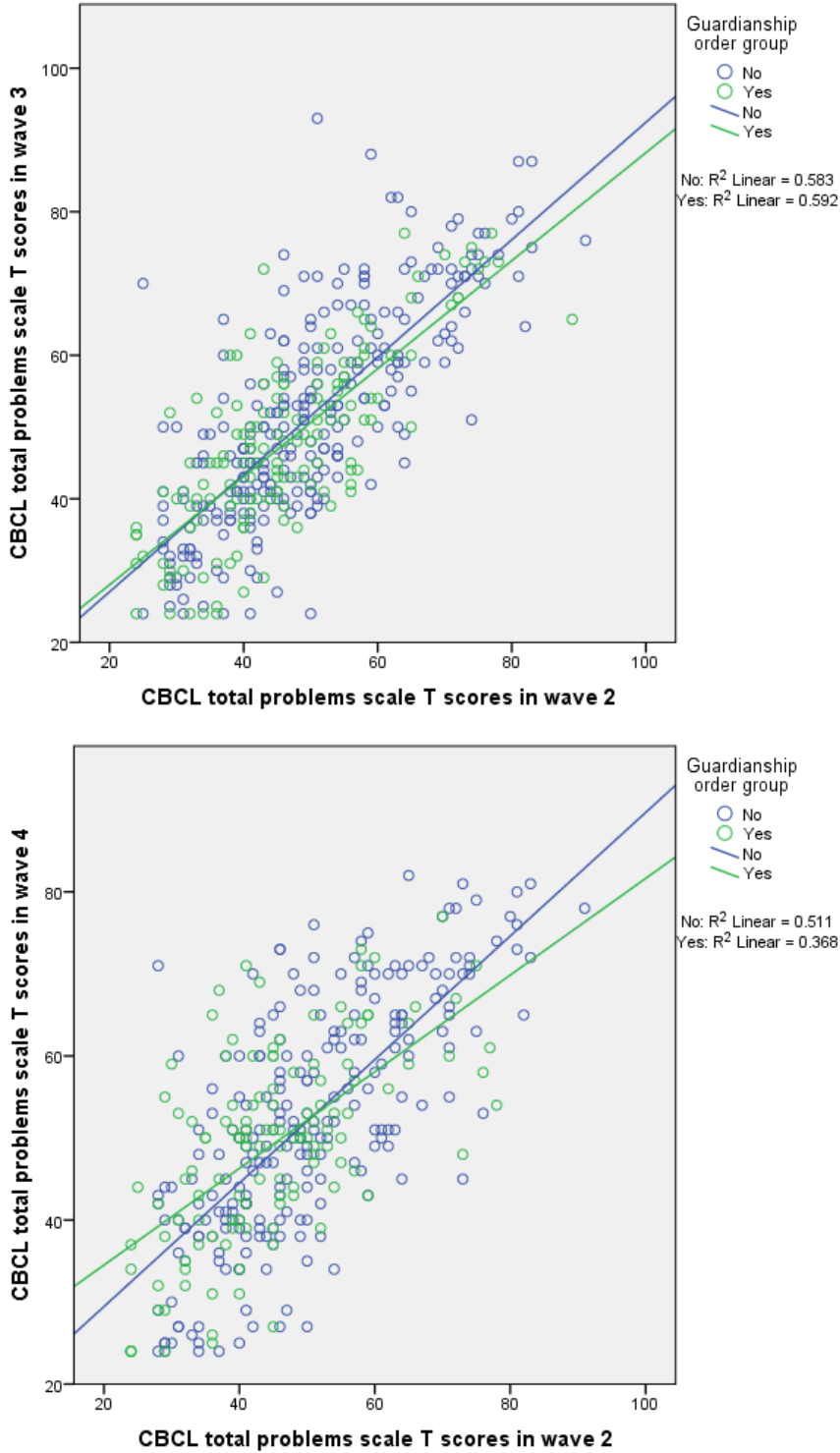


Figure 5: CBCL Internalising Problems scores pre- and post- guardianship

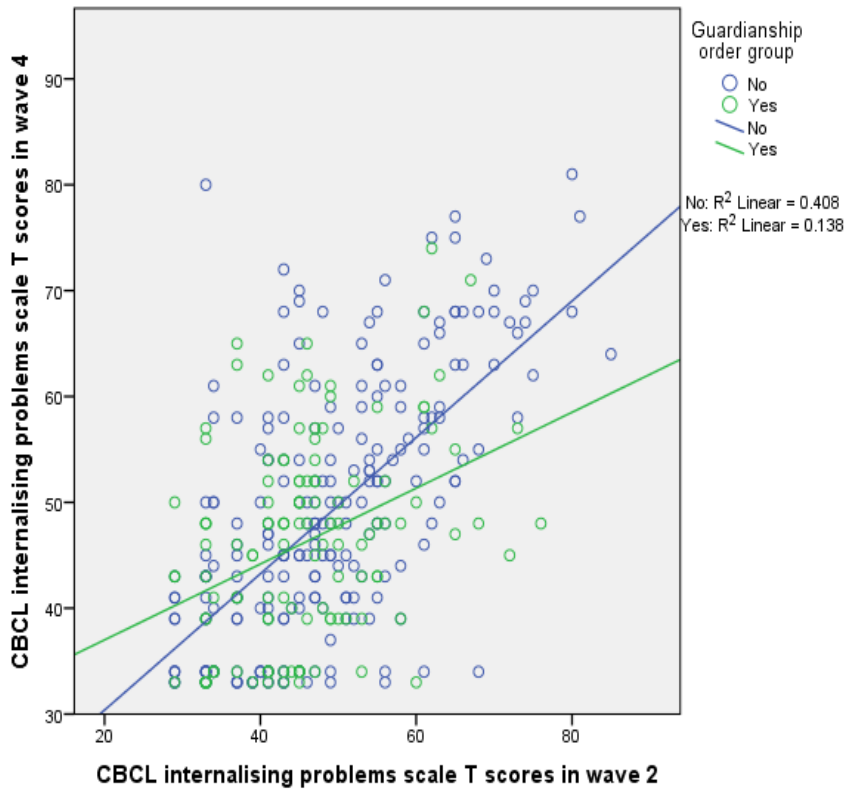
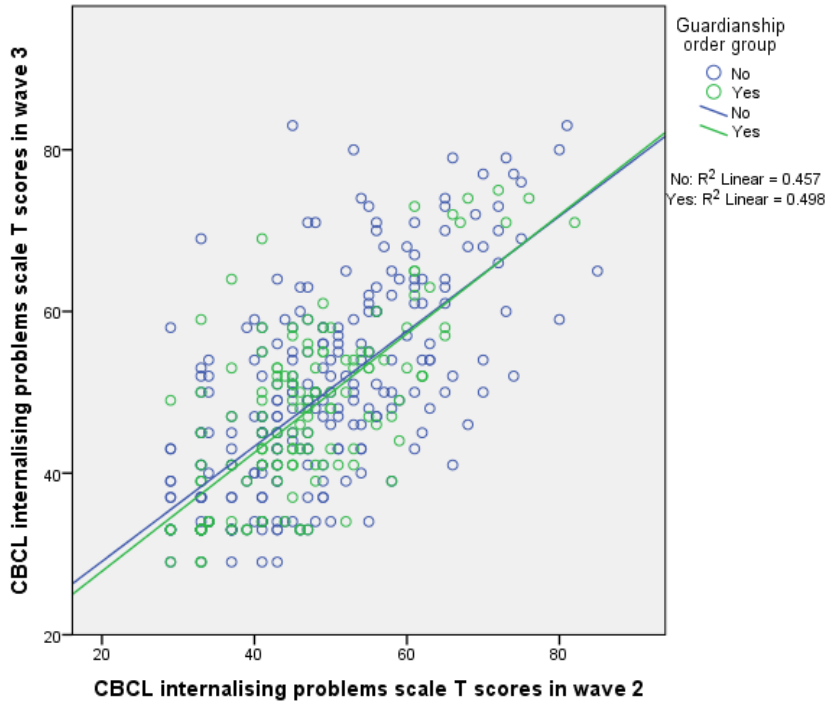
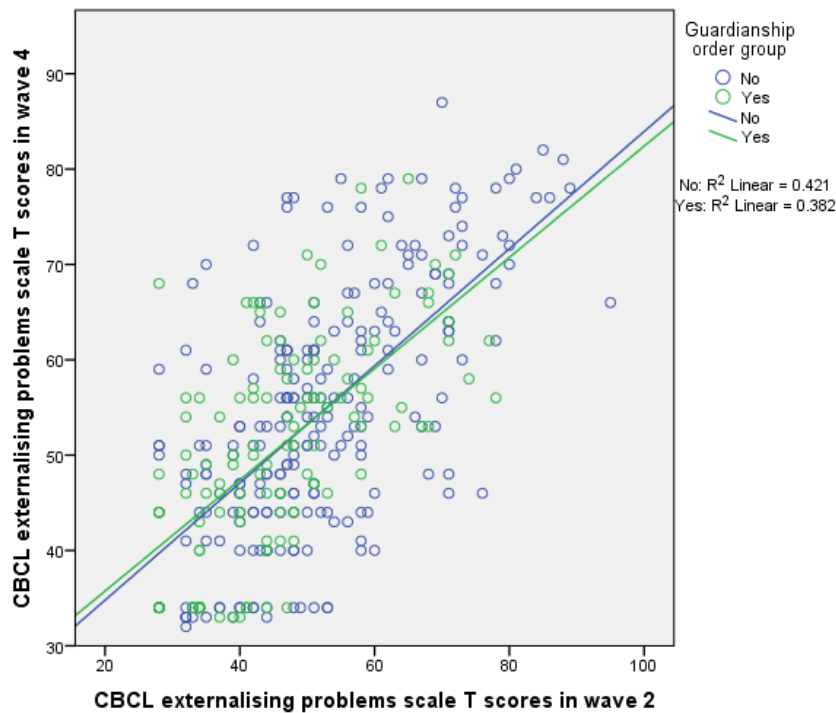
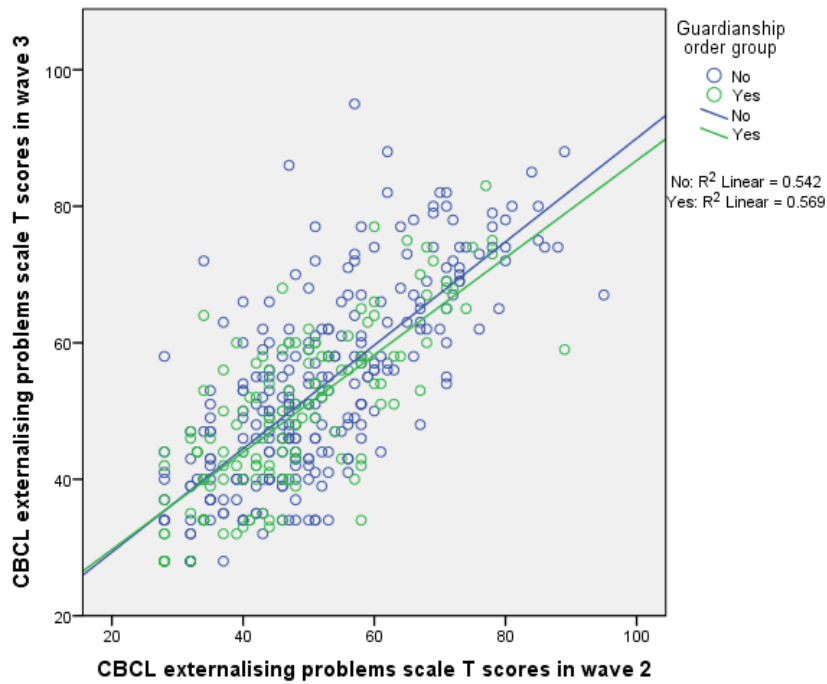


Figure 6: CBCL Externalising Problems scores pre- and post- guardianship



13.3 Multiple regression models of post-guardianship CBCL scores using test-retest reliability

Table 12: Multiple regression models of post-guardianship CBCL Total Problems scale scores (test-retest reliability)

Variables	Wave 3			Wave 4		
	Unstandardised coefficient B	95% CI	Sig.	Unstandardised coefficient B	95% CI	Sig.
Adjusted Wave 2 CBCL Total Problems scores	1.00	0.90-1.09	0.00*	0.91	0.80-1.02	0.00*
Group (guardianship vs kinship)	0.02	-1.87-1.91	0.98	1.46	-0.81-3.73	0.29
ROSH report involving neglect (Yes/No)	-1.44	-3.34-0.47	0.14	-0.88	-3.09-1.32	0.43
K10 cut-off (low)						
K10 cut-off (moderate)	1.07	-1.16-3.30	0.35	-0.46	-3.09-2.18	0.73
K10 cut-off (high)	5.56	2.55-8.62	0.00*	2.48	-1.84-6.79	0.26

Note: For Wave 3 model: n=412, R²=0.60, adjusted R²=0.60; for Wave 4 model: n=365, R²=0.48, adjusted R²=0.47; the Wave 2 (pre-guardianship) CBCL Total Problems score was adjusted for measurement error using test-retest reliability.

Table 13: Multiple regression models of post-guardianship CBCL Externalising Problems scores (test-retest reliability)

Variables	Wave 3			Wave 4		
	Unstandardised coefficient B	95% CI	Sig.	Unstandardised coefficient B	95% CI	Sig.
Adjusted Wave 2 CBCL Externalising Problems scores	1.08	0.98-1.18	0.00*	0.91	-0.79-1.03	0.00*
Group (guardianship vs kinship)	0.41	-1.54-2.36	0.68	1.06	-1.17-3.28	0.35
ROSH report involving neglect (Yes/No)	-0.82	-2.78-1.12	0.40	-1.80	-3.95-0.35	0.10
K10 cut-off (low)						
K10 cut-off (moderate)	1.98	-0.29-4.25	0.09	-0.06	-2.62-2.49	0.96
K10 cut-off (high)	4.54	1.45-7.63	0.00*	1.79	-2.38-5.92	0.39

Note: For Wave 3 model: n=412, $R^2= 0.59$, adjusted $R^2= 0.56$; for Wave 4 model: n=365, $R^2= 0.42$, adjusted $R^2= 0.42$, the Wave 2 (pre-guardianship) CBCL Externalising Problems score was adjusted for measurement error using test-retest reliability.

Table 14: Multiple regression models of post-guardianship CBCL Internalising Problems scores (test-retest reliability)

Variables	Wave 3			Wave 4		
	Unstandardised coefficient B	95% CI	Sig.	Unstandardised coefficient B	95% CI	Sig.
Adjusted Wave 2 CBCL Internalising Problems scores	0.87	0.77-0.97	0.00*	0.69	0.57-0.81	0.00
Group (guardianship vs kinship)	-0.48	-2.28-1.31	0.59	-0.32	-2.41-1.76	0.76
ROSH report involving neglect (Yes/No)	-3.56	-5.37- -1.74	0.00*	-0.27	-2.33-1.78	0.79
K10 cut-off (low)						
K10 cut-off (moderate)	1.36	-0.77-3.49	0.21	-0.04	-2.49-2.42	0.98
K10 cut-off (high)	7.82	4.92-10.72	0.00*	6.80	2.82-10.78	0.00

Note: For Wave 3 model: n=409, R²= 0.52, adjusted R²= 0.51; for Wave 4 model: n=36, R²= 0.35, adjusted R²= 0.34, the Wave 2 (pre-guardianship) CBCL Internalising Problems score was adjusted for measurement error using test retest reliability.

