

# Birth Mothers who Lose Successive Infants and Children to Public Care

What is the scale of the problem?  
How can we help?

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# Introduction

- Anecdotal concern about birth mothers who are **repeat clients** of the family court
- **Human and economic costs**
- **But what is the size of the problem and how might we help?**



# First National Feasibility Study

## Data and Method:

- Cafcass collects electronic data on all public law proceedings in England (**100% sample**, n= 46,094 birth mothers)
- **De-identified** (anonymised) data delivers very large samples – but no risk of individual identification
- Electronic records can be **restructured** to estimate prevalence of recurrent care proceedings and distribution by local authority and court area

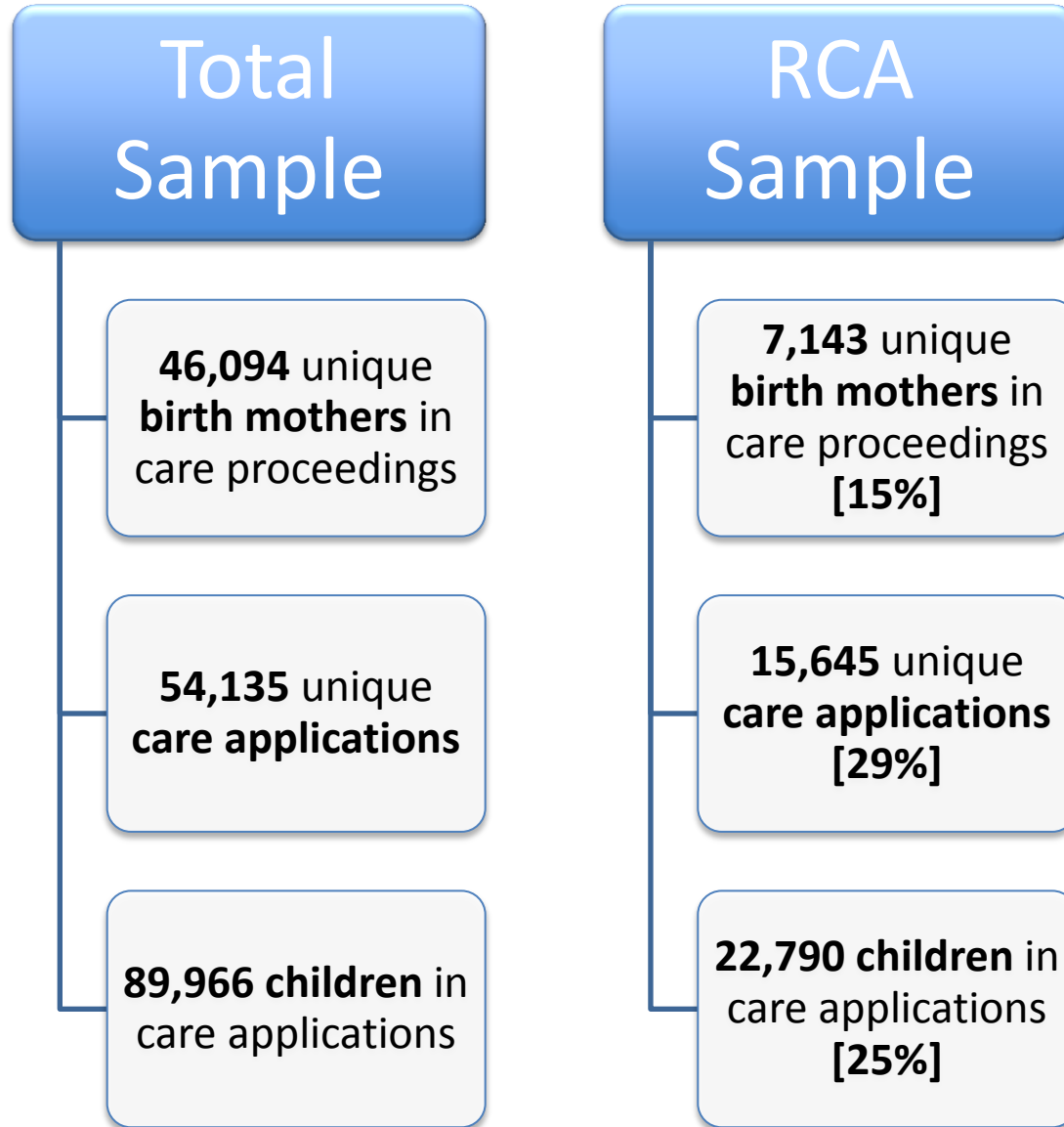
# Observational Window (limitation)

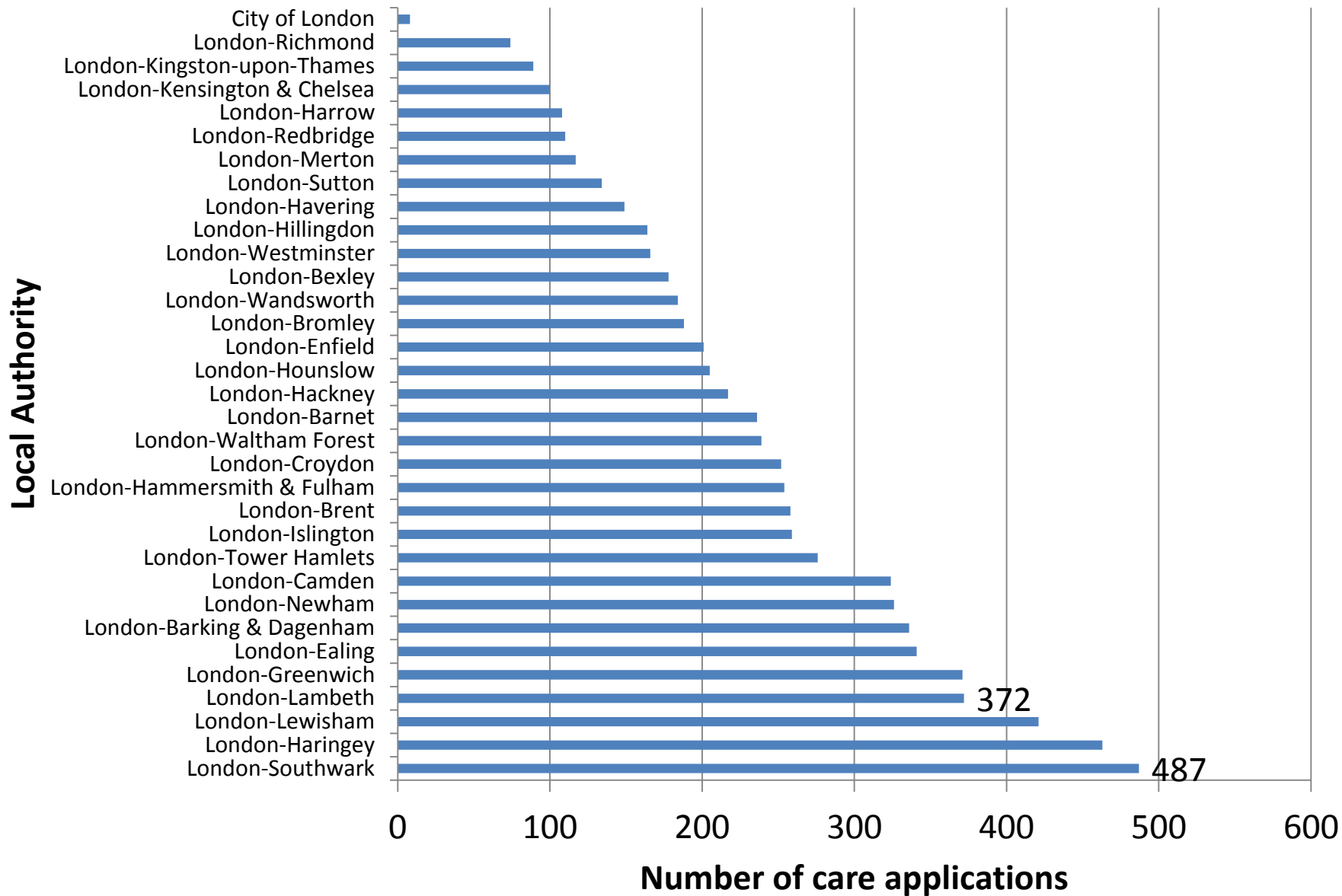
- **Reliable data held electronically only available between 2007-2013 (7 calendar years)**
- **This window is sufficient to capture recurrence because repeat episodes follow in short succession**
- **But: will underestimate total number of cases, hence only allows statements of 'at least' .....**

# Identifying the Recurrent Sample

- **Step 1:** establish the number of care applications in **cases completed** between 2007-2013
- **Step 2:** identify **female respondents** who are **mothers**
- **Step 3:** eliminate cases that do not include a mother and a child
- **Step 4:** calculate the number of applications per mother
- **Step 5:** Divide the sample into **recurrent and non-recurrent cases**

# Prevalence 2007-2013





**Local Authority**



**Percentage of applications linked to recurrent mothers**



# National Average, Nottingham & Hot Spots

Average recurrence rate (care proceedings) = 29%

➤ **Nottingham City 36%**

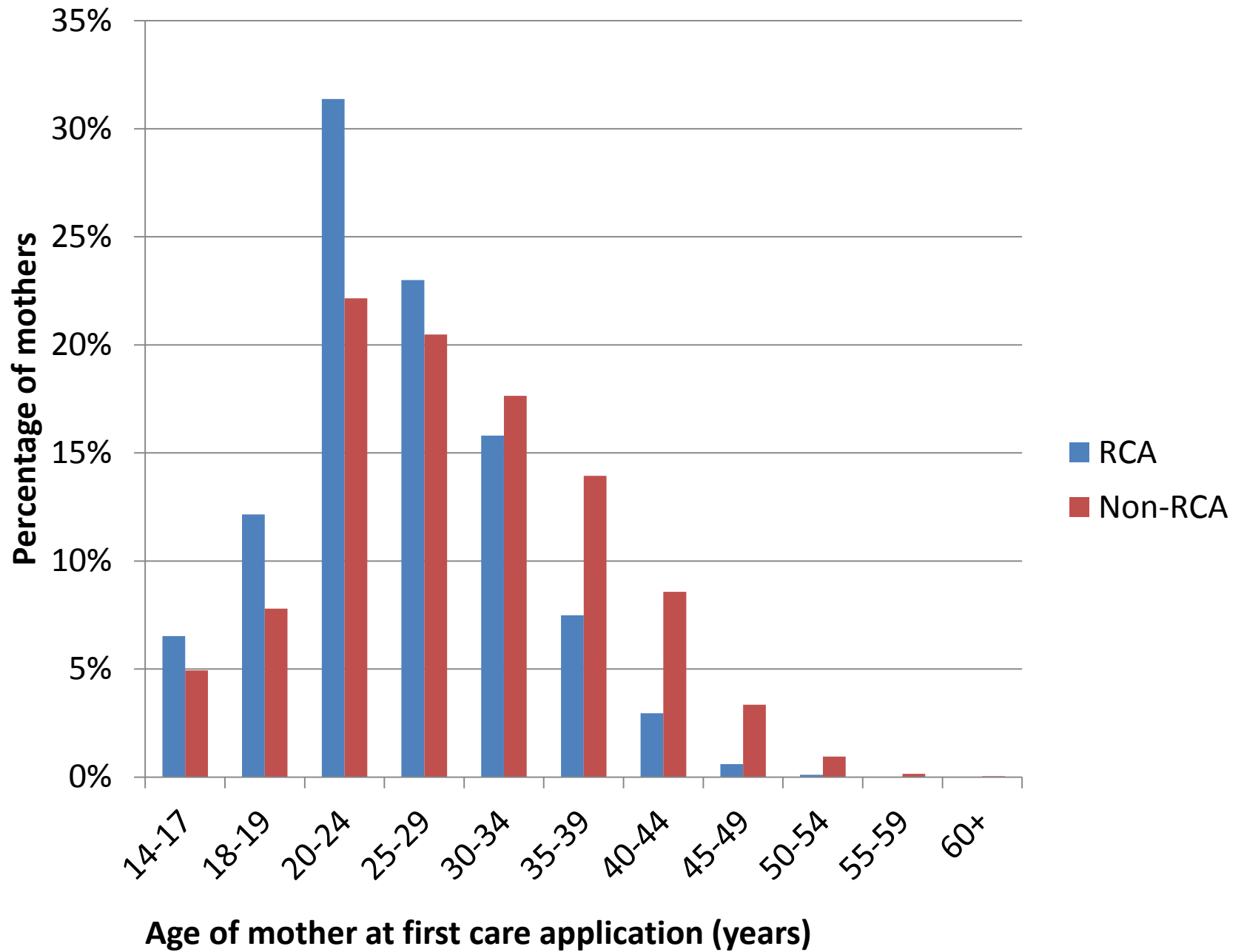
➤ Nottinghamshire 29%

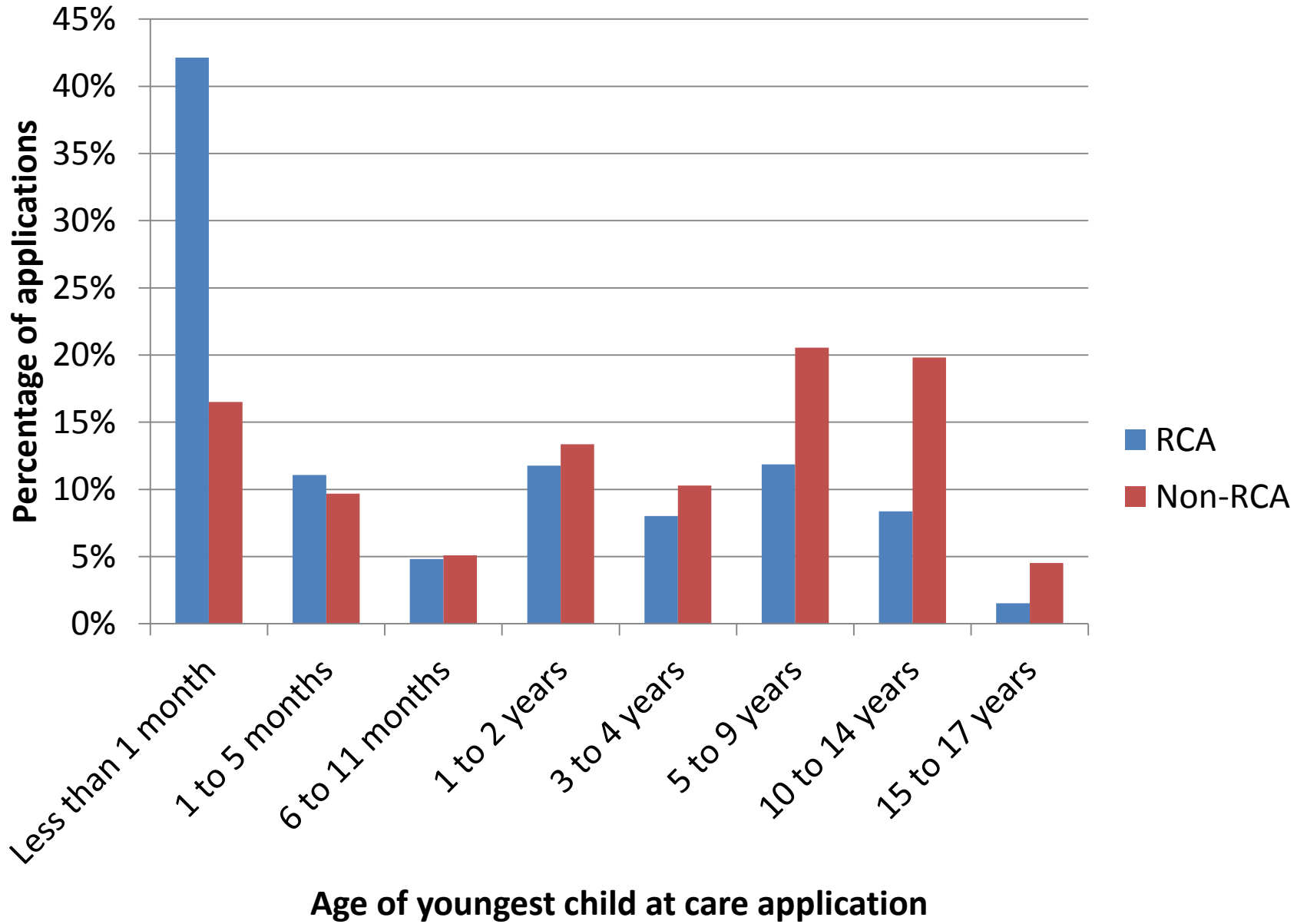
❖ Leeds: 37%

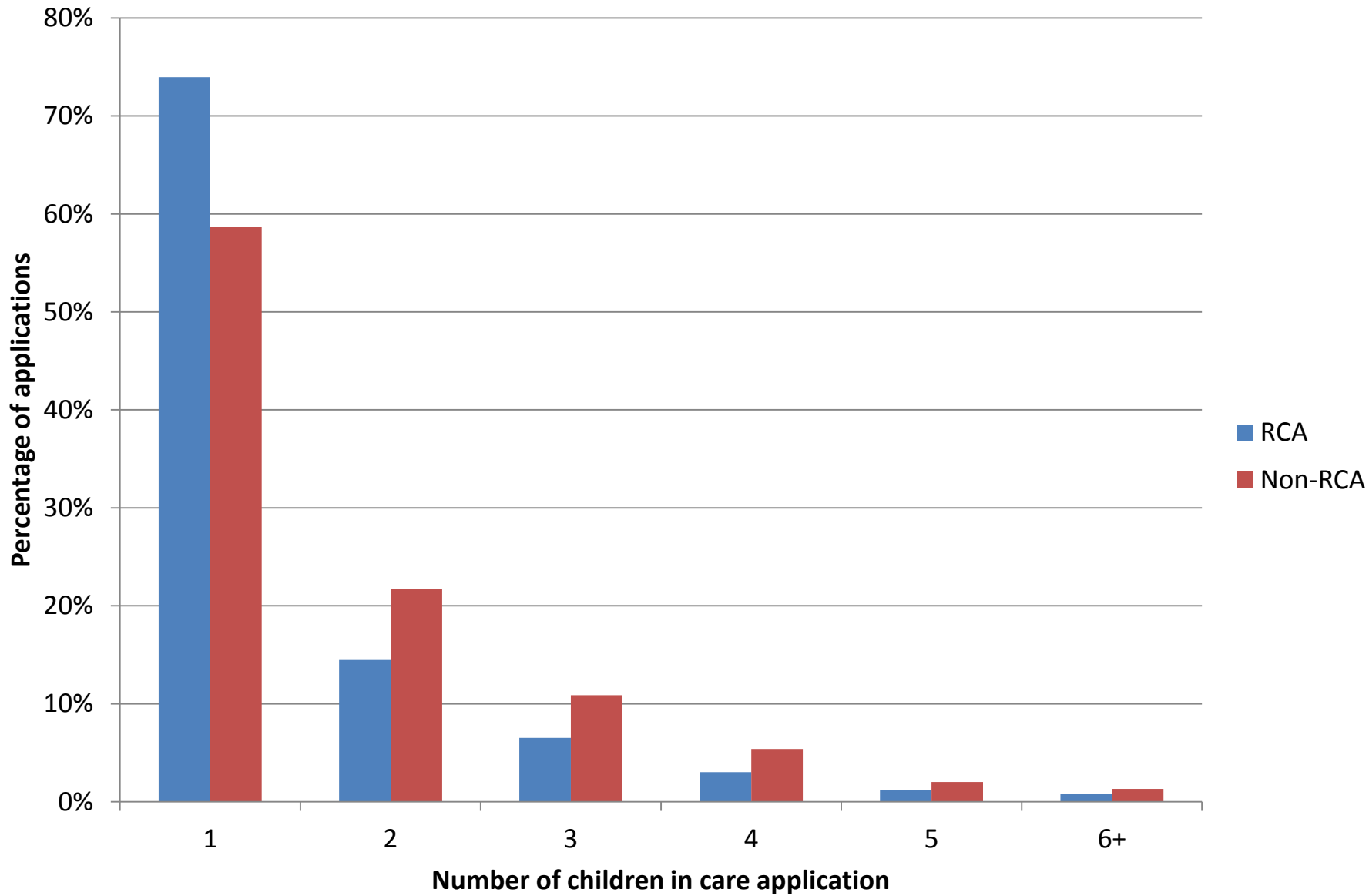
❖ Birmingham: 35%

❖ Blackpool: 37%

❖ Portsmouth 38%







# Median Length of Intervals Between Care Applications (days)

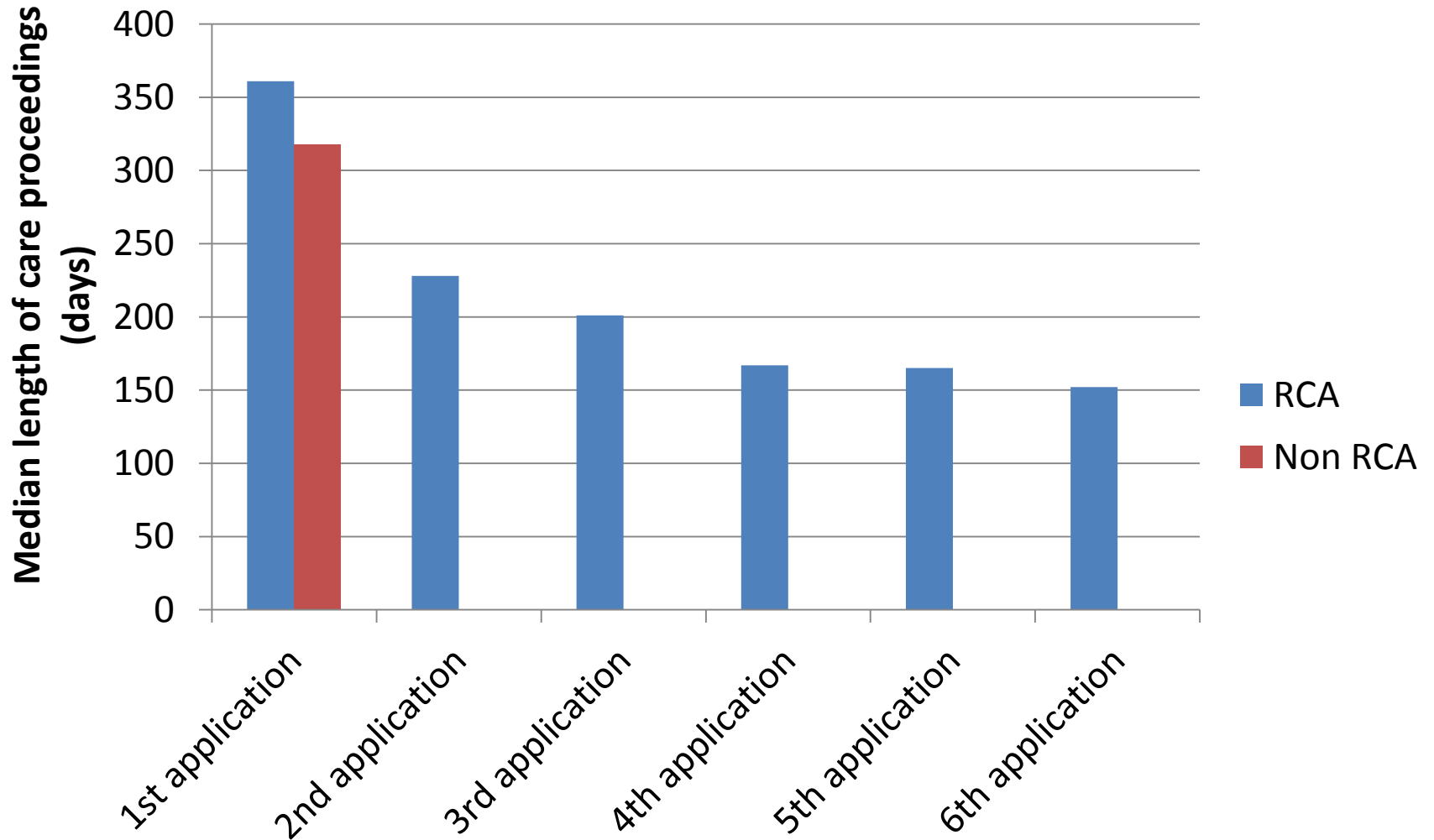
Number of Applications	2+	3+	4+	5+	6+
Number of Mothers	7143	1189	178	24	5
1st Interval	526	416	414	344	274
2nd Interval		500	450	457	349
3rd Interval			480	480	483
4th Interval				456	574
5th Interval					449

# Typical Cases

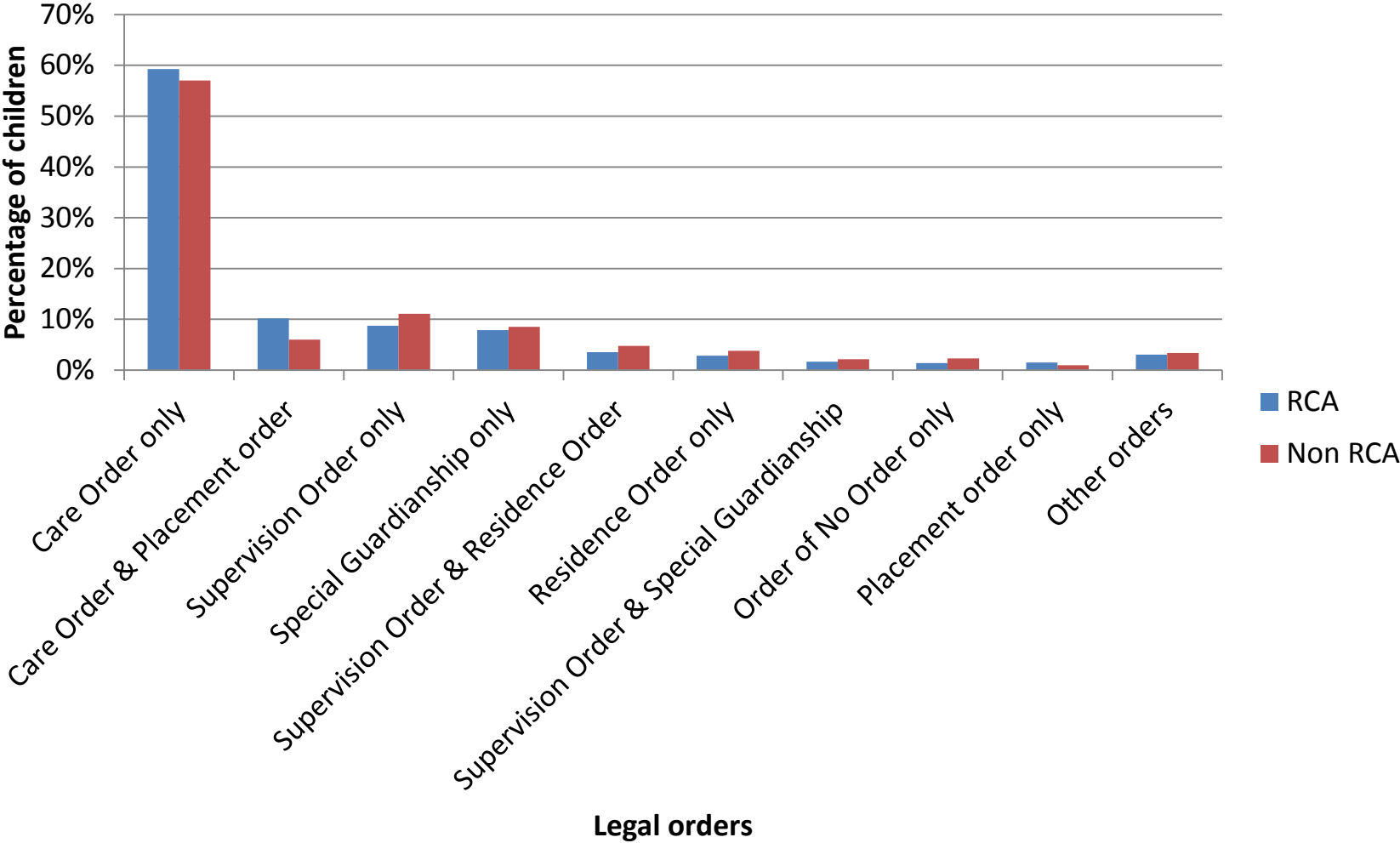
- Young woman (50% aged less than 24 years – high percentage of teenagers at first application compared to national picture)
- Pregnant in swift succession and commonly subject to repeat proceedings that concern a single infant



# Median Length of Care Proceedings (days)



# Legal Outcomes of Care Proceedings





# Implications

Where a negative cycle of recurrent care proceedings **remains unchecked, prognosis for recovering parenting capacity is poor because:**

- Intervals between LA care applications are typically short
- Care proceedings **get shorter over time**
- Many recurrent applications concern infants subject to a care application within 12 months after birth

Although 50% of mothers are aged between 14 and 24 at first application, which ought to give mothers significant time to mature – the national pattern is of a ‘decreasing opportunity’ for change once a mother is caught in this cycle.

# Research Going Forward

- Fathers!
- Number of methodological challenges to 'capturing fathers'
- What are the most pressing questions?

# The Research Going Forward

Full statistical analysis of the national dataset (to include the 2014 cases) Survival Analysis

Geo-coding to establish national distribution of recurrent proceedings/local authority and court area

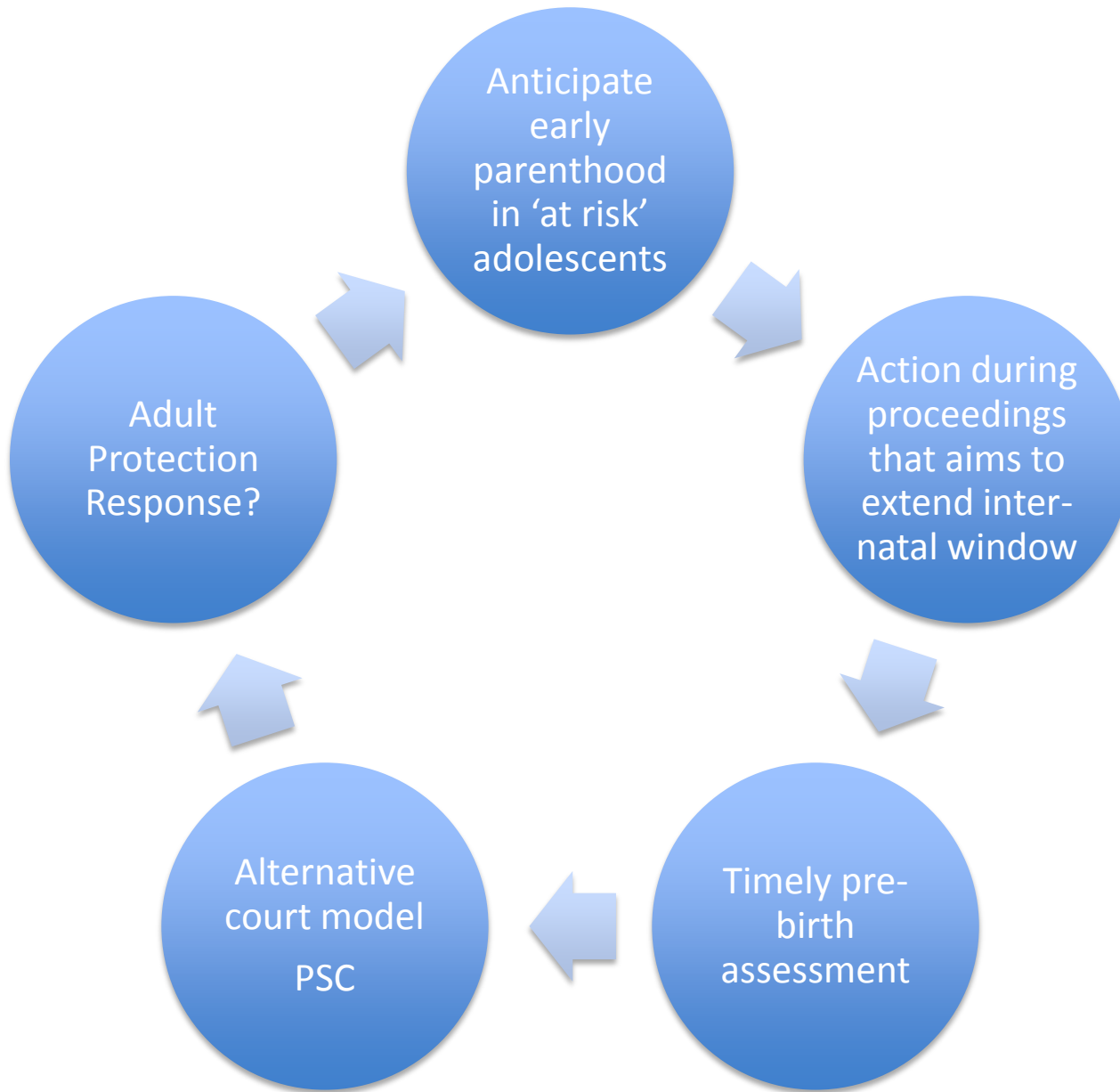
In-depth review of randomly selected represented sample of case files (completed cases 2013-2014)

In-depth interview work with 50+ mothers in five local authority areas

# The Research Going Forward..

Enriching the variables....

- Data linkage exercise with the DfE: can we link birth parent records in CAF/CASS to DfE records (LAC)?
- What are the challenges/opportunities in terms of data linkage across government departments/agenda setting



# Post Removal Support?

- Post adoption support available for parents whose infants have been adopted – but this is a small % of cases
- The majority of infants and children are in long-term foster care
- A significant number of children are in kinship care (but not without problematic dynamics)

# Birth Spacing

- ✓ Improving access to reproductive health care services
- ✓ Better understanding of user failure - contraception
- ✓ Preconception advice
- ✓ Encourage a 3-year window between removal and subsequent pregnancy?

# Acknowledgements and Contact Details

- ✧ The Child and Family Court Advisory Service
- ✧ Nuffield Foundation
- ✧ Dr Bachar Alrouh (Full-time Research Fellow)

**Team members:** Dr Karen Broadhurst and Dr Mark Pilling (University of Manchester), Dr Mike Shaw (TPNHS Trust); Professor Judith Harwin and Dr Bachar Alrouh (Brunel University)

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# Publications

Broadhurst, K., Harwin, Shaw, Alrouh, B. (2014) Family Law:

[http://www.familylaw.co.uk/news\\_and\\_comment/capturing-the-scale-and-pattern-of-recurrent-care-proceedings-initial-observations-from-a-feasibility-study#.VDGQAxZtdn1](http://www.familylaw.co.uk/news_and_comment/capturing-the-scale-and-pattern-of-recurrent-care-proceedings-initial-observations-from-a-feasibility-study#.VDGQAxZtdn1)

Further papers will be made available soon via project website – find link on Karen’s University web-page:

<http://www.nursing.manchester.ac.uk/staff/Karen.Broadhurst>