

Growing up in Adoptive and Special Guardianship Families
Longitudinal study funded by the Department for Education
(2024-2028)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/family-route-longitudinal-study>



Answering
tomorrow's
challenges
today





Family Routes

The study was designed to explore the needs, experiences, and outcomes of care experienced young people (aged 12–25) in permanent placements.

Linked administrative datasets (led by the Rees Centre), online surveys (Ipsos and Rees Centre), and Interviews (Ecorys)

Today a) stability of adoption and special guardianship orders, and b) children in long-term foster care and educational outcomes



Permanence for children in care

All looked after children should have a permanence plan in place by the second review (four months after entering care).

The objective of planning for permanence is to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond and give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging...

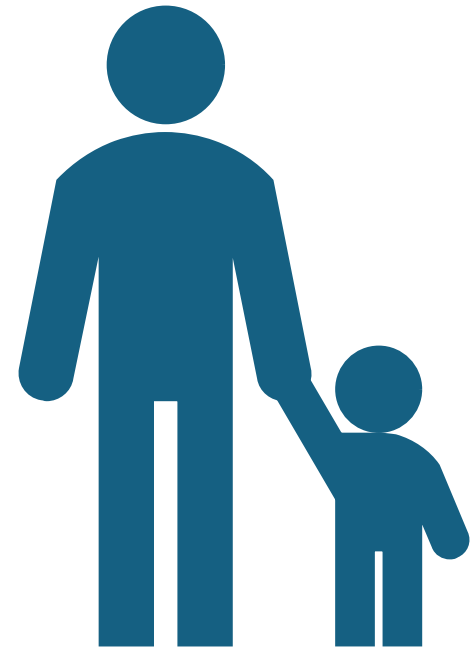
Different types of permanence- reunification, kinship, child arrangement orders

adoption, special guardianship, long-term fostering

Stability

What was the stability of adoption and special guardianship orders?

What were the trajectories and outcomes for children who left care on a permanence order (adoption and special guardianship order) but later returned to care?



Social Care Data	2004/5 – 2013/14	2015/16- 2018/19	2019/20-2022-23
Episodes (reason for entry & leaving, placements, dates)	√	√	√
Outcomes age 5-17 yrs (SDQ, substance misuse, convictions)	n/r	√	√
Care Leavers aged 16 years+	n/r	√	√
Education data	2004/5 – 2013/14	2015/16- 2018/19	2019/20-2022-23
School Census (Pupil)	√	√	√
Key Stage 2 (age 10/11)	√	n/r	n/r
Key Stage 4 (age 15/16)	n/r	√	n/r
Alternative provision, including pupil referral units	n/r	√	n/r
Key Stage 5 (age 16-18)	n/r	√	√
Exclusions	√	√	n/r
Absences	√	√	n/r
Individualised Learner Records	n/r	√	√
National Client Caseload Information System (age 16 years+)	n/r	√	√
Young Person’s Matched Administrative Dataset (YPMAD)	n/r	n/r	√
Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA)	n/r	n/r	√

Disruption: Defined in this study as a return to care



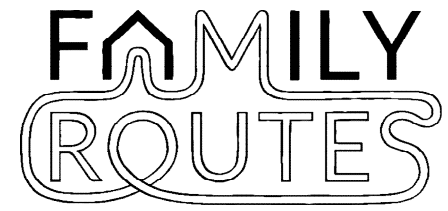
Sample all adoptions n=68,100 and SGOs n=40,080

Disruptions identified in several different administrative datasets

- a) From 2015, LAs have been required to record the child's previous permanence arrangement if they start to be looked after
- b) care leaver dataset
- c) looked after data

Data inconsistencies: 1,570 children recorded as having a previous adoption/SG order, but with no record of leaving care on these orders (probable reasons: order made outside England, private SGOs, ROs/CAOs confused with SGOs, data entry errors). Excluded from analysis

The children



	Adopted n=68,100 (1999-2023)	Special guardianship n= 40,080 (2006-2023)
Females	49%	50%
White children	78%	80%
Black Caribbean/African	2%	5%

The care experience before the order

Adopted

Special
Guardianship

More than three foster placements before the order

17%

8%

Over 4 when left care on an order

23%

45%

Had one carer

11%

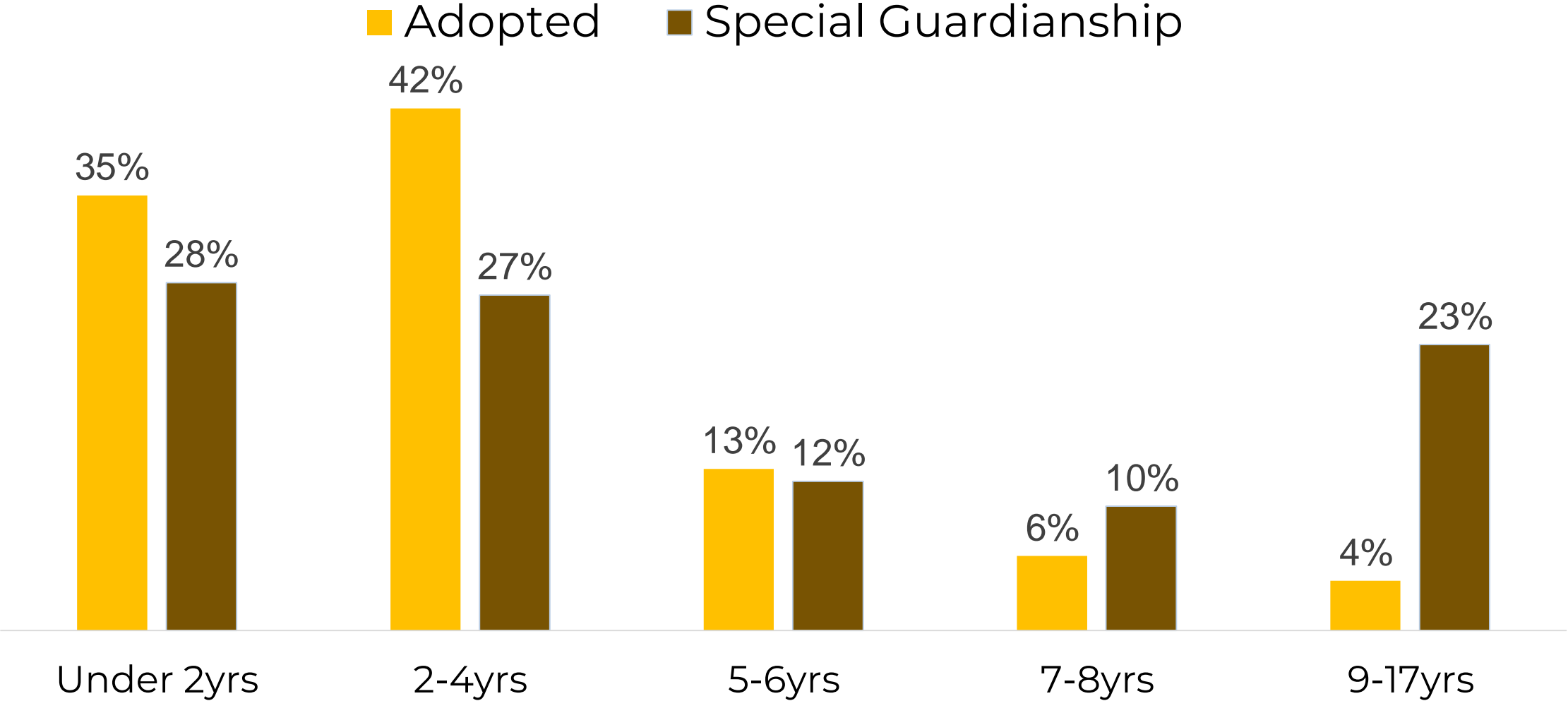
52%

Left care within 2 years of entering

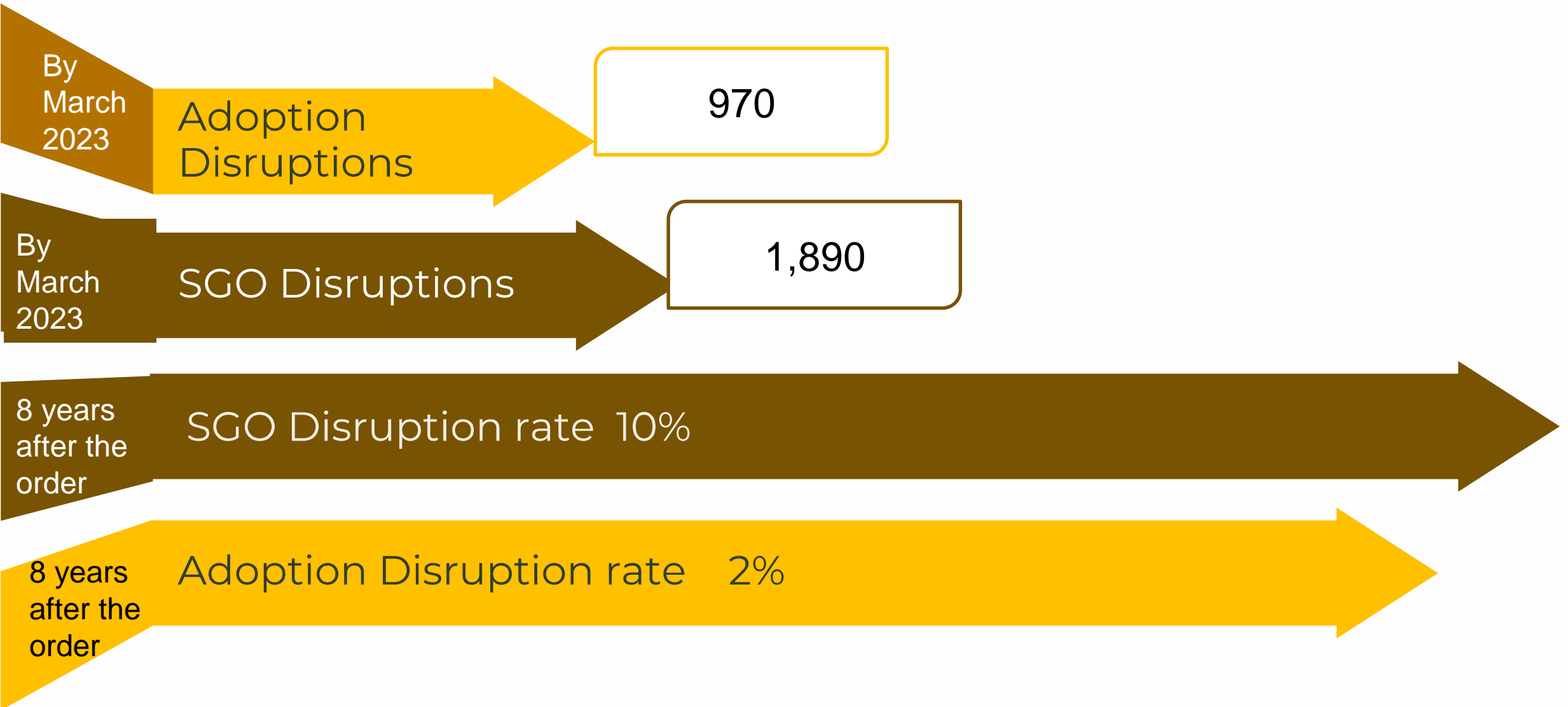
52%

75%

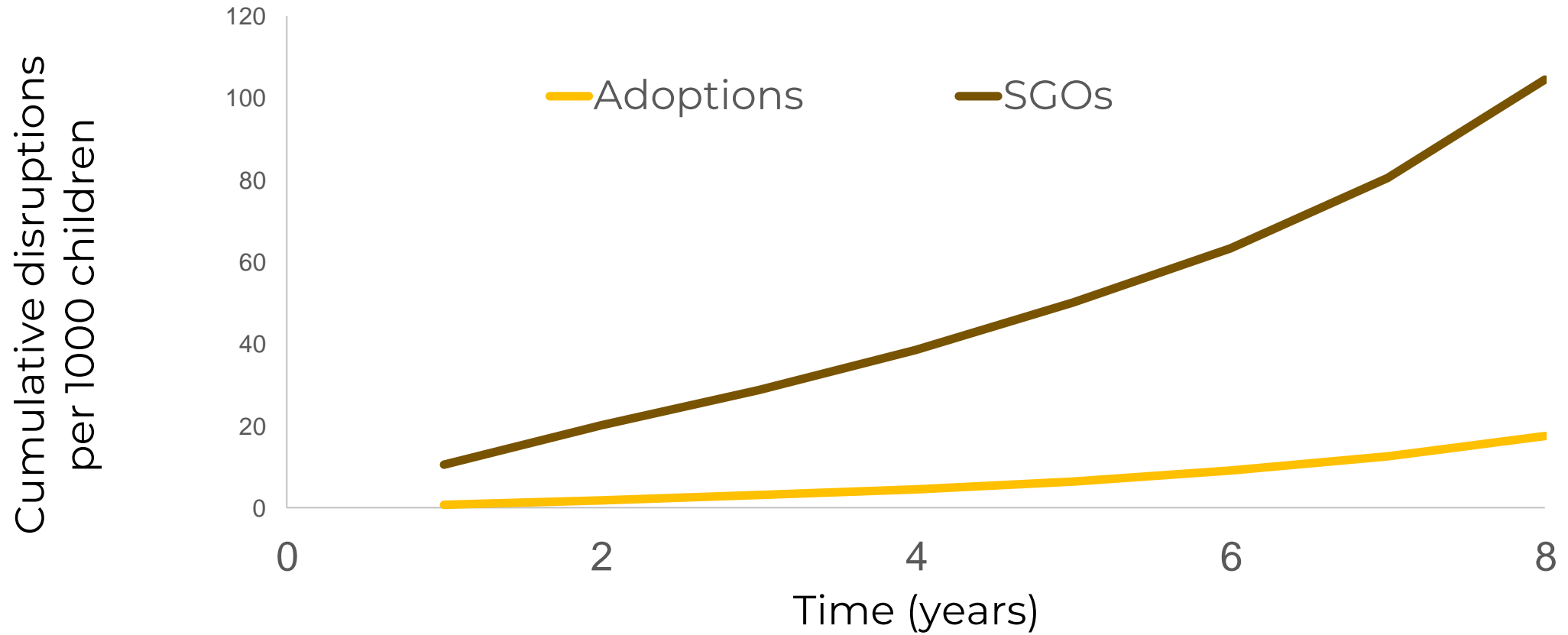
The child's age when they left care for adoption or special guardianship (2004-2022)



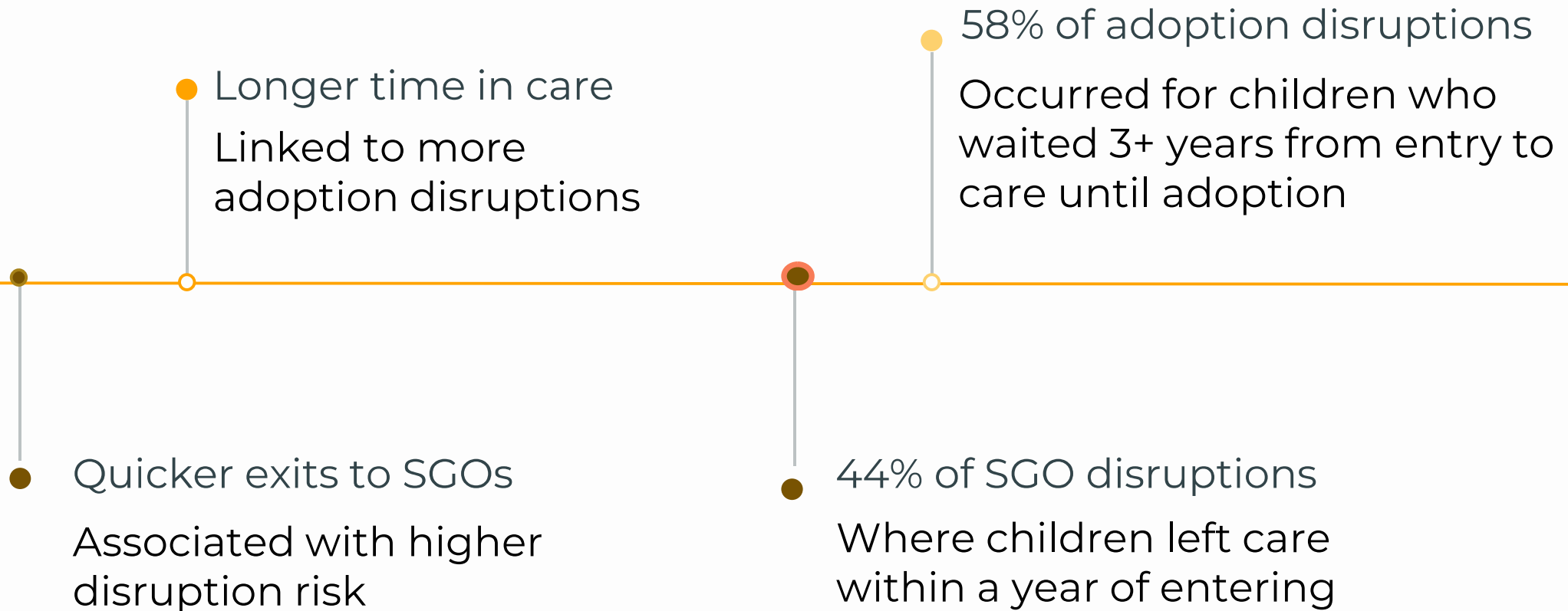
Adoption and SGO Disruptions



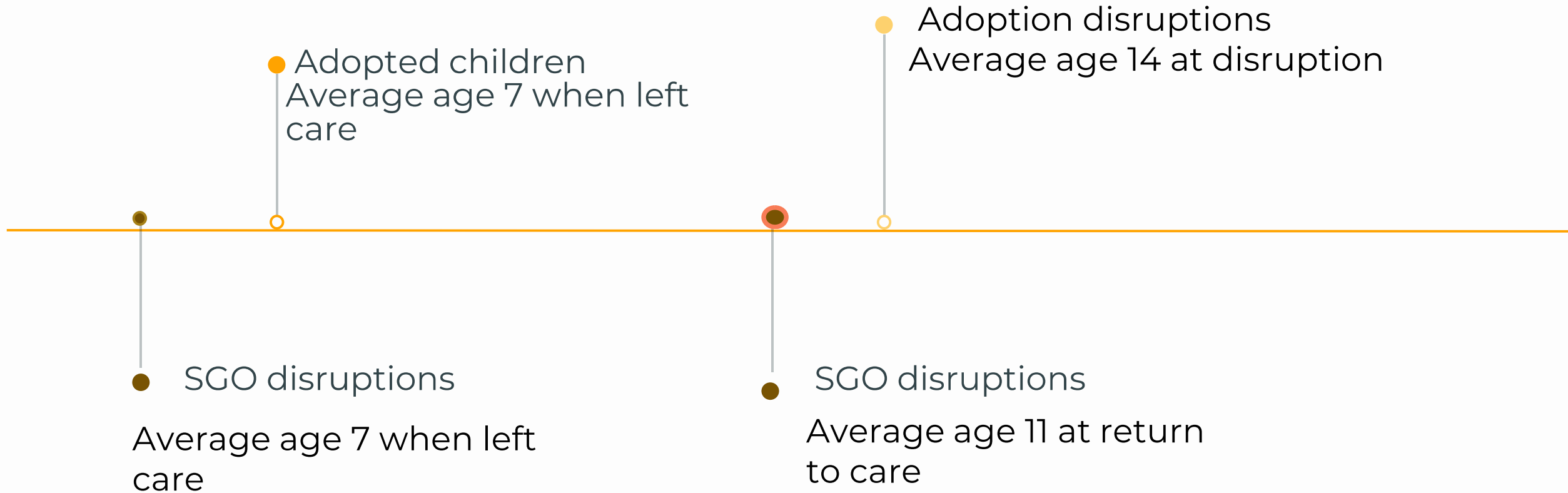
Comparison of the rate of disruption for SGOs and adoption orders (2006-2023)



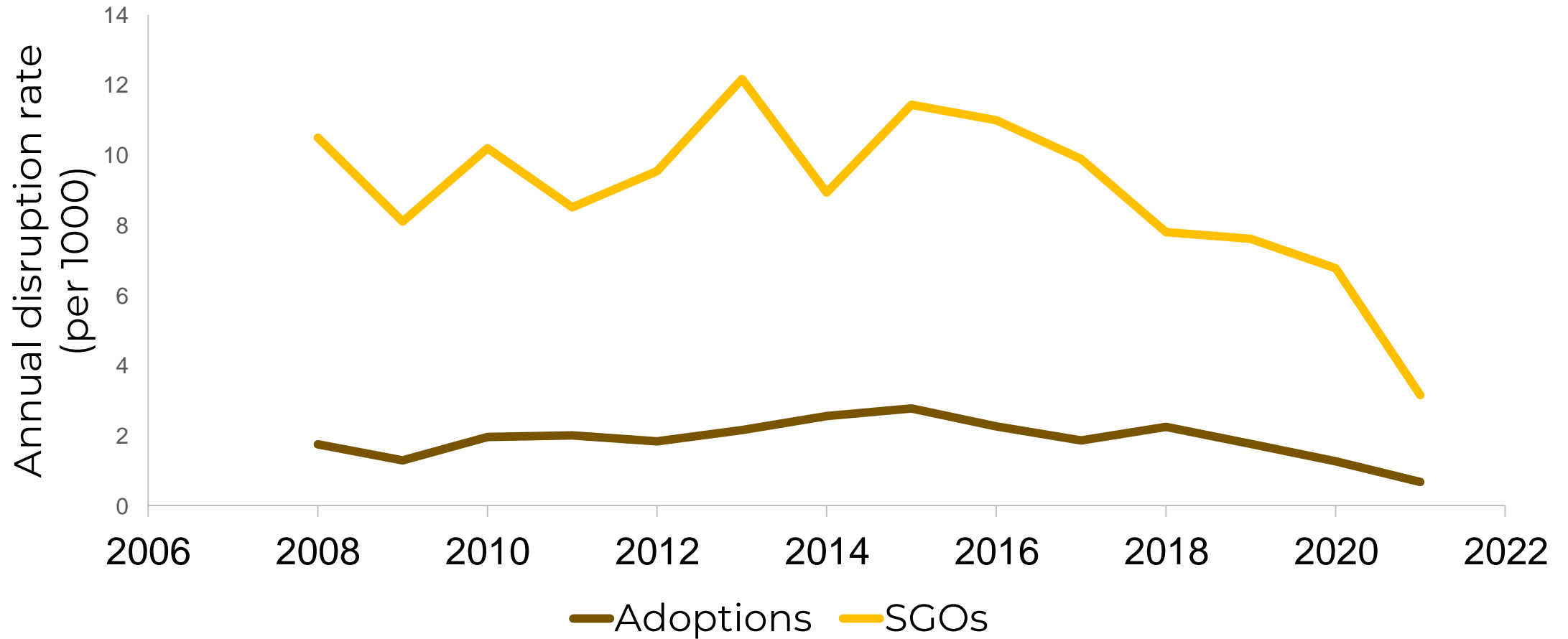
Time in Care and Time to Disruption



Age and Disruption



Evidence that the disruption rate decreased from 2015



Factors Predicting Adoption Disruption



Older age at adoption

Aged 5-10 years 31 x greater risk

Aged 11yrs+ 26 x greater risk of disruption than 0- 4 years



Adolescence

Age currently 11yrs-15 (4 x greater risk)

16-18 (9 x greater risk)
than those aged under 11



Longer time in care and more placements

Length of time in care was more than 2 years compared to those who left care within 2 years

Single parents who adopted older children were less at risk of disruption compared to couples who adopted older children. LGBT+ parents no difference in risk. Black children at slightly elevated risk, but these children were older at entry to care and when placed

Factors Predicting SGO Disruption



Older age when left
care

Compared to those who
left <4yrs:

5 -10yrs 2 x greater risk

11yrs+ 2.1 x greater risk



Current age

Age currently 11yrs: 1.6 x
greater risk

16-18yrs 2.9 x greater
risk



Short time in care

Left within a year

Factors Predicting SGO Disruption



Absent parenting

Higher risk of disruption when the child's reason for first being in care was absent parenting



Relatives

Increased risk of disruption when the SGO had been made to a relative compared with other types of special guardians



Child's ethnicity

Being a Black child increased the risk even after accounting for age at entry to care and age leaving

The higher disruption rate among relative carers and Black SG children raises questions about persistent inequity in support and access to services. These disparities may reflect **systemic barriers** such as limited access to culturally responsive support, lack of trust in services, and insufficient outreach to minority communities **RATHER THAN A CAUSAL EFFECT**

Concerns Before Disruption

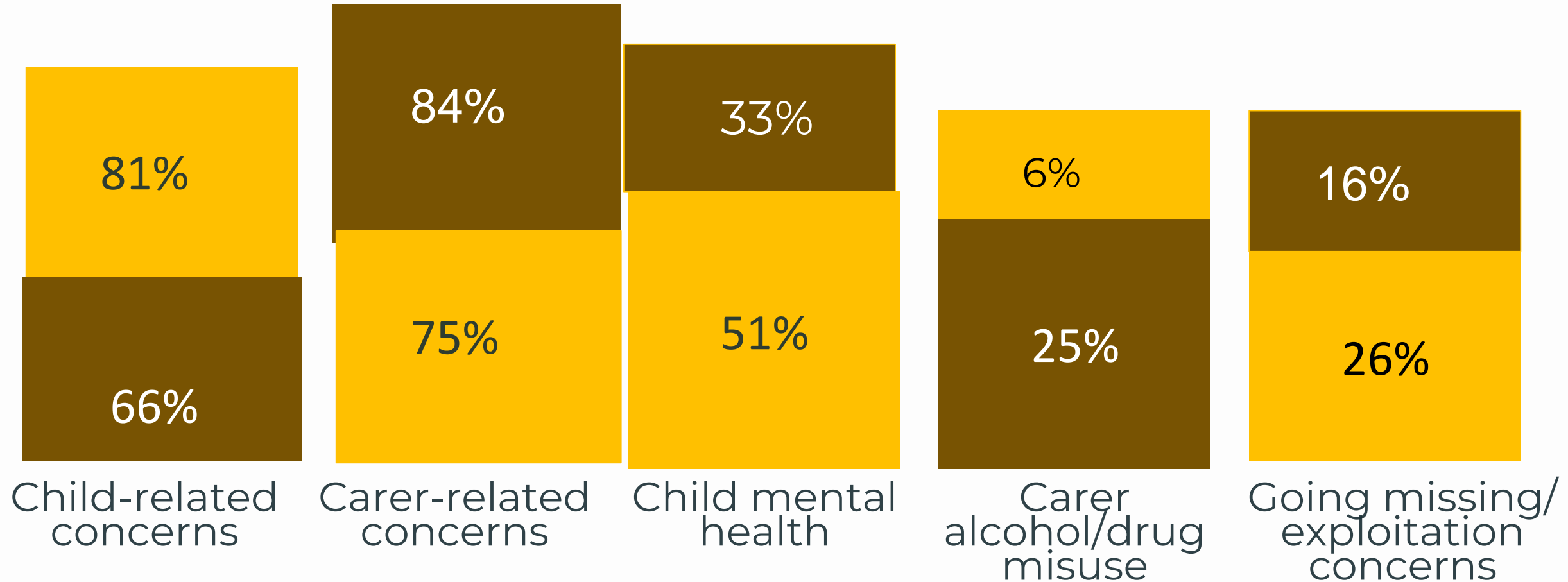
SG



adoption



About half of the children who experienced a disruption had been referred as a Child in Need



Primary reason for return to care

Children in Need code	Adopted	SGO
	%	%
Abuse or neglect	9%	37%
Child's disability	-	8%
Parental illness/disability	-	10%
Family under acute stress	55%	25%
Family dysfunction	18%	8%
Socially unacceptable behaviour	18%	8%
Low income	0	4%

Experiences After Disruption

84% adopted and 65% of the SG young did not leave care again <18

Left to to live with someone with PR

13% adopted (average age 17)

11% SGOs (average age 14)

Placement Changes

Adopted children who experienced a disruption had more changes of placement (1-40) after re-entering care and more frequent use of residential care

Another permanence order for those who returned to care under 11 years

2% adopted and 23% of the SG children

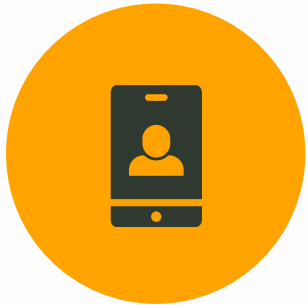
Care leavers

Independent living: 32% (adopted) and 23% (SG),

Staying Put: 10% (adopted) and 8% (SG)

Adult social care residential: 3% (adopted) and 2% (SG)

Key Takeaways



Adoption and SGOs remain a stable permanency option

95% of adopted children and 89% of SGO had not returned to care.



Older children face higher disruption risk

Adoption early permanence and reducing placement moves



Special guardianship orders have higher disruption rates

Issues of Equity



Targeted support is needed

Should a CIN referral be a red flag for adoption support ?

The needs of adopted parents and SG carers and children are different and need different preparation and support