Understanding the mental health needs of children known to child protections services using linked administrative and self-report data

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Professor, Discipline of Psychiatry and Mental Health,
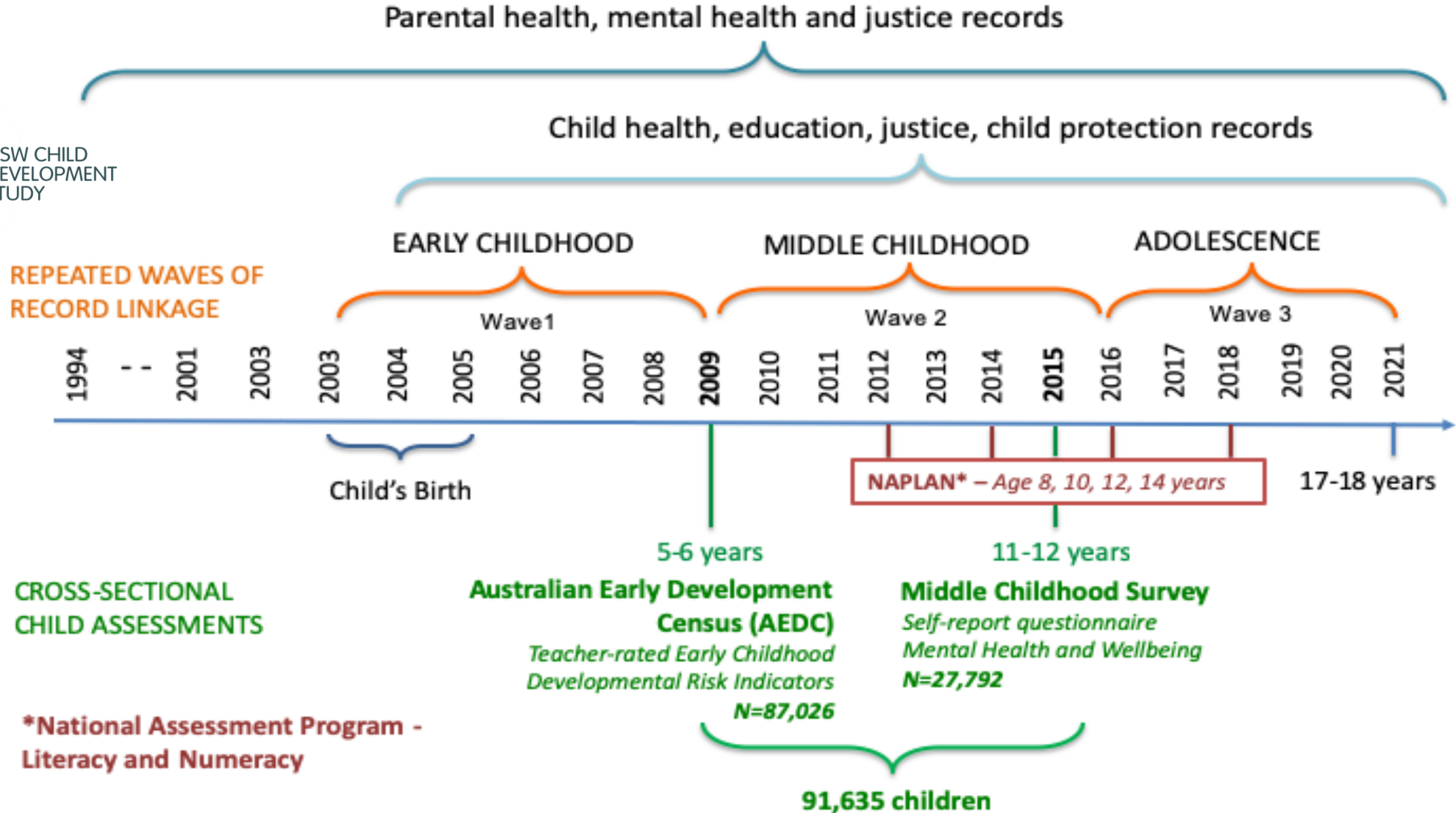UNSW Sydney

Email: melissa.green@unsw.edu.au

The NSW Child Development Study
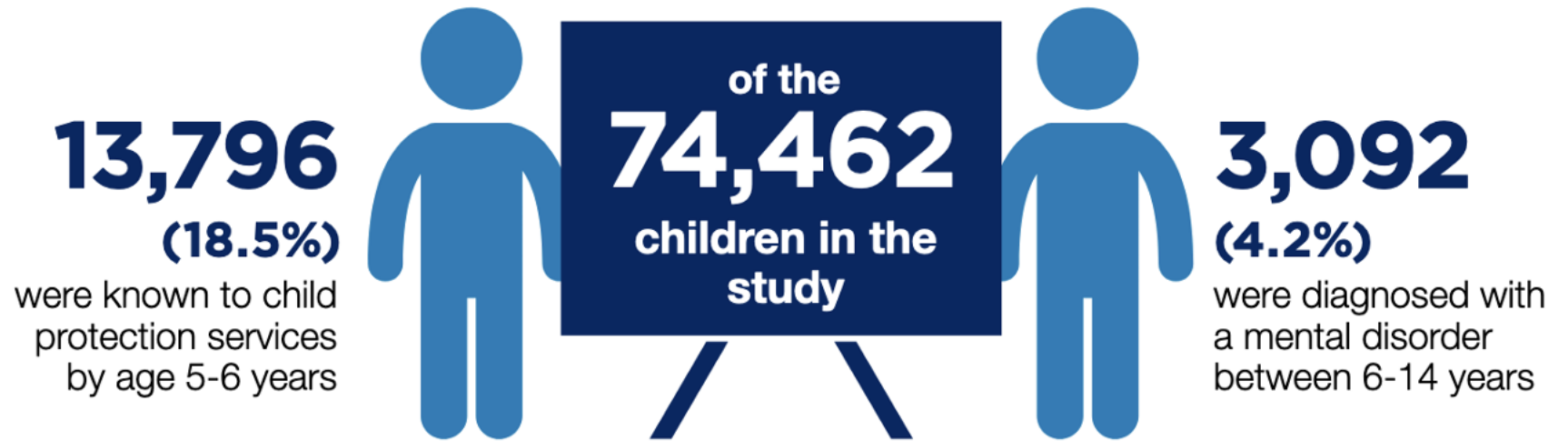*A population-based longitudinal study conducted via waves of record linkage*

Research | 🔒 Free Access

Mental disorders in children known to child protection services during early childhood

Melissa J. Green ✉, Gabrielle Hindmarsh, Maina Kariuki, Kristin R. Laurens, Amanda L Neil, Ilan Katz, Marilyn Chilvers, Felicity Harris, Vaughan J Carr

13,796 (18.5%) were known to child protection services by age 5-6 years

of the **74,462** children in the study

3,092 (4.2%) were diagnosed with a mental disorder between 6-14 years

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Of the children in the study:

9.8%
of the children **known to child protection services** before the age of 5 years had a record of **at least one mental disorder diagnosis** in middle childhood
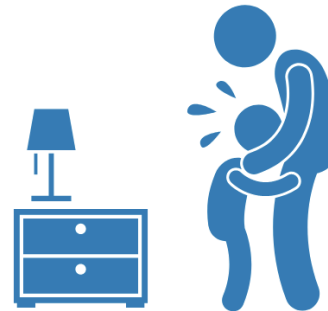
2.9%
of children with **no child protection contact** had a record of **mental disorder diagnosis** in the same time period

Children known to child protection services by the time of school entry were:

more than **4x**
as likely to engage in self-harm, or be diagnosed with a hyperkinetic or conduct disorder
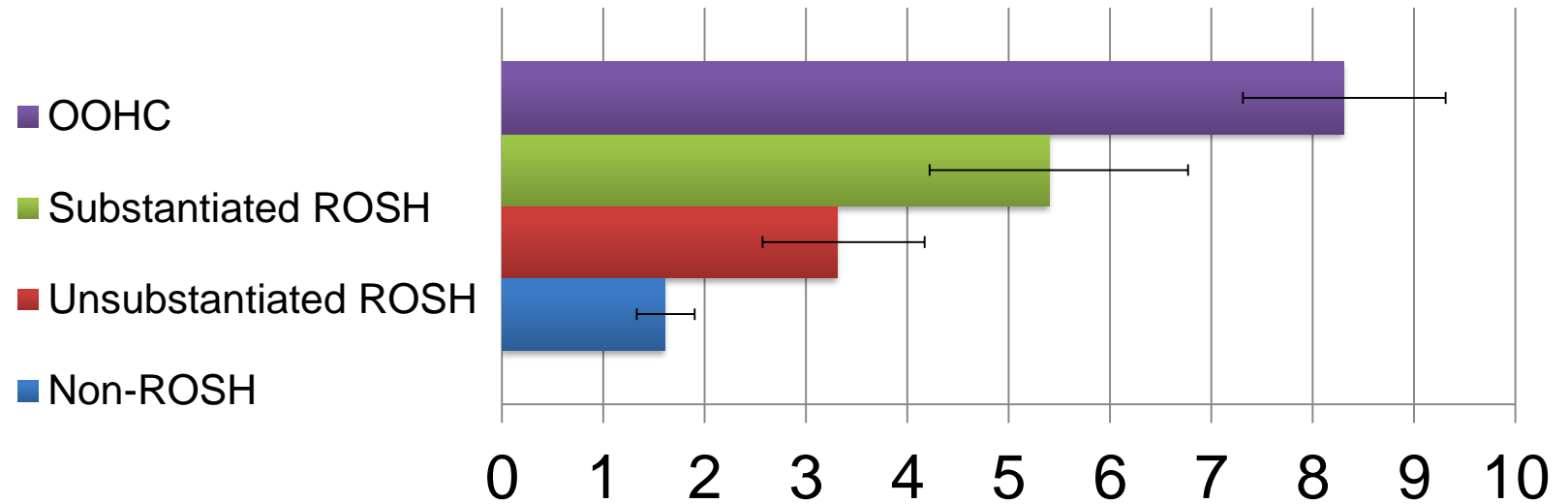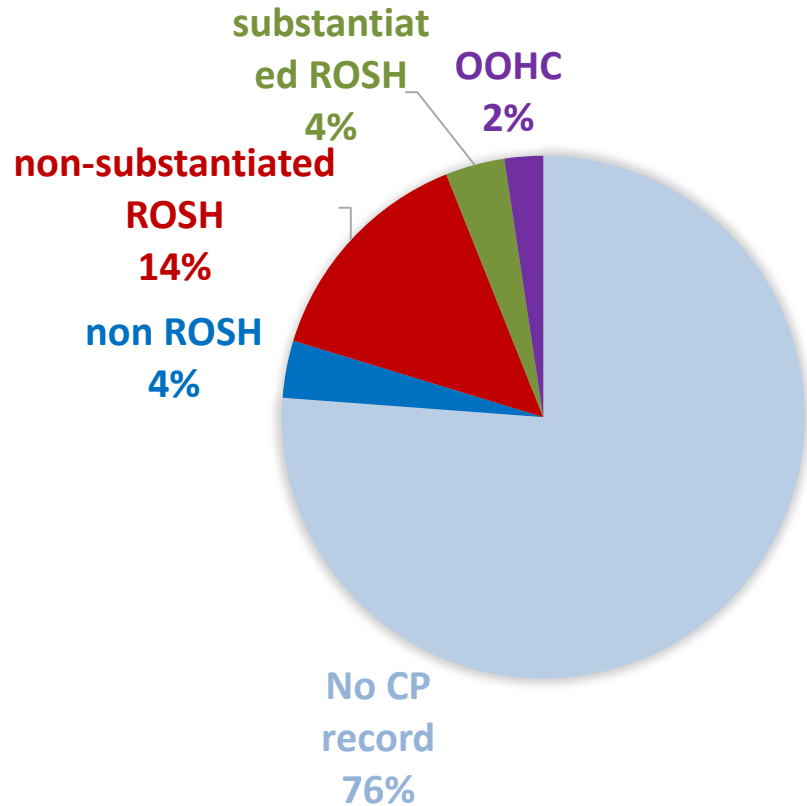
more than **3x**
as likely to be diagnosed with an emotional disorder or stress reactions

more than **2x**
as likely to be diagnosed with a developmental disorder

Green et al., (2020) *Medical Journal of Australia*.

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Any mental illness recorded in health records up to age 13 years

Odds of any mental disorder according to the highest level of child protection service received, relative to non-maltreated peers (Unadjusted model)

Specific diagnoses recorded in health records up to age 13 years
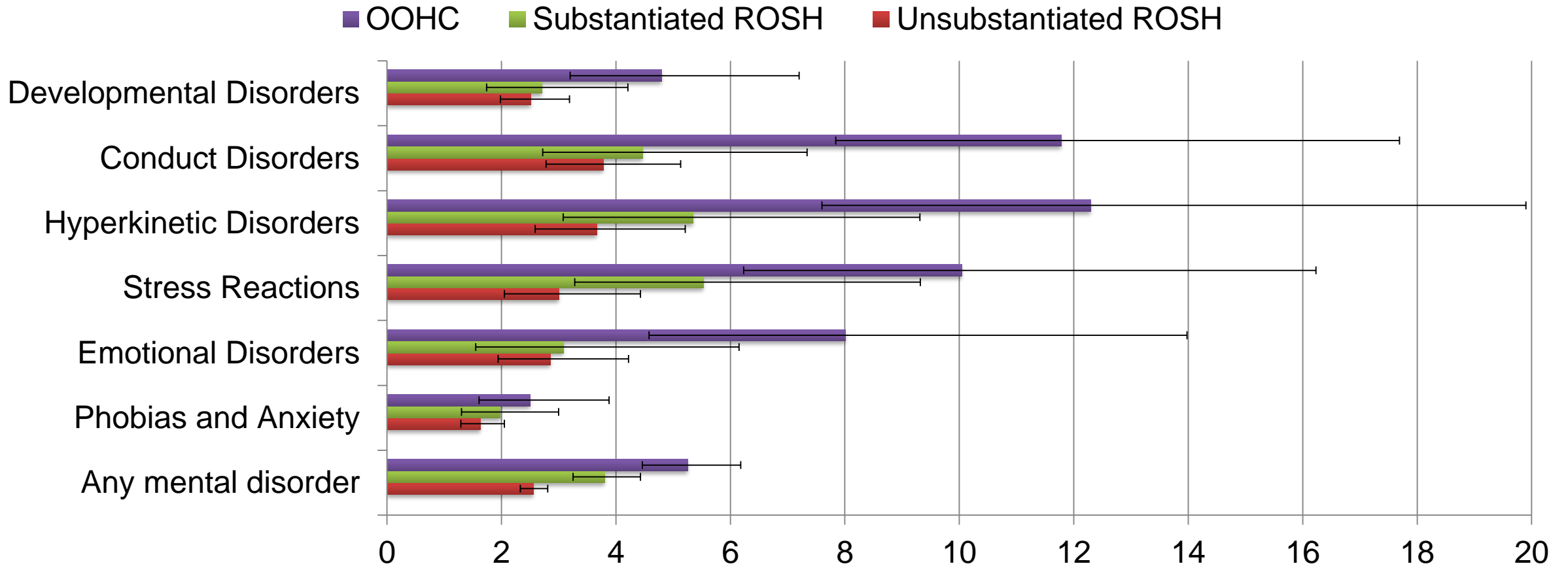
Odds of particular mental illness diagnoses among children known to child protection services, relative to non-maltreated peers (*Adjusted models)

ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

Check for updates

Self-reported mental health of children known to child protection services: an Australian population-based record linkage study

Kirstie O'Hare[1] · Aniqa Hussain[1] · Kristin R. Laurens[1,4] · Gabrielle Hindmarsh[1] · Vaughan J. Carr[1,2,3] ·
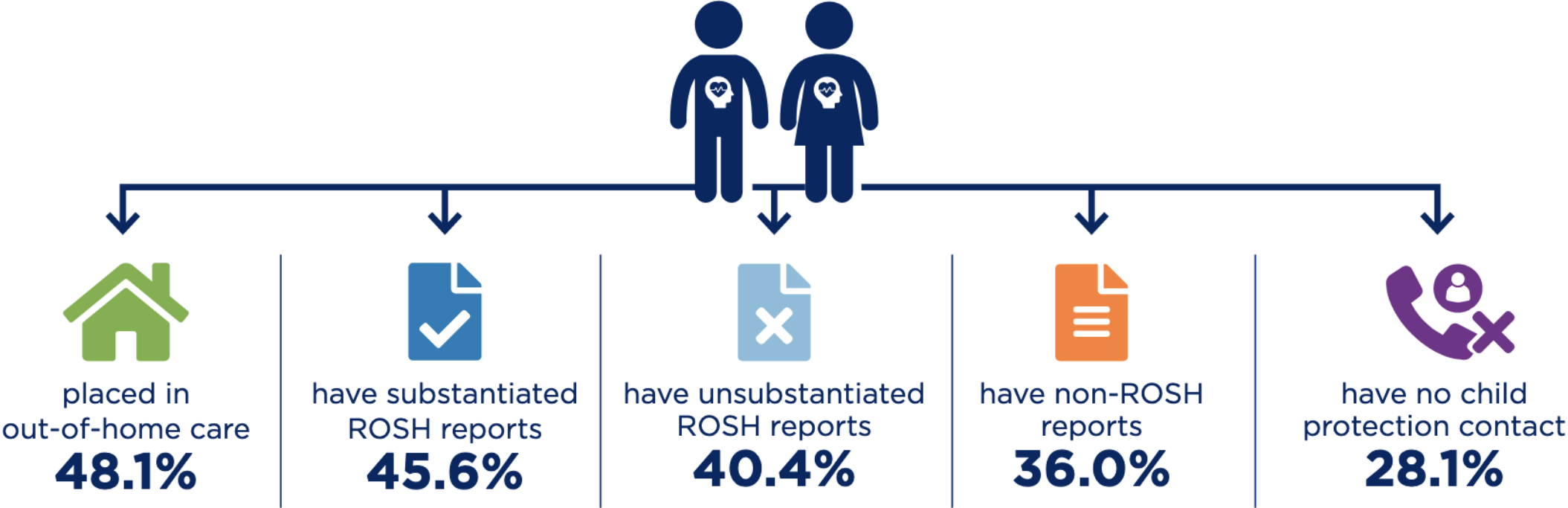Stacy Tzoumakis[5] · Felicity Harris[1] · Melissa J. Green[1,2] (iD)

This study included 26,960 children who completed the Middle Childhood Survey in 2015 (in Grade 6 primary school, age 11 years)

Of these 26,960 children, 5,754 (21.3%) had at least one instance of contact with child protection services

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Mental health difficulties were assessed with Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire as part of the Middle Childhood Survey

The proportion of children that have abnormal levels (top 10%) of difficulties in at least one of the mental health domains:

placed in out-of-home care
48.1%

have substantiated ROSH reports
45.6%

have unsubstantiated ROSH reports
40.4%

have non-ROSH reports
36.0%

have no child protection contact
28.1%

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Adjusted* Odds of scoring in the Abnormal range of each SDQ 'psychopathology' domain according to the highest level of child protection contact

*Adjusted for Socio-economic disadvantage, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background, and male sex
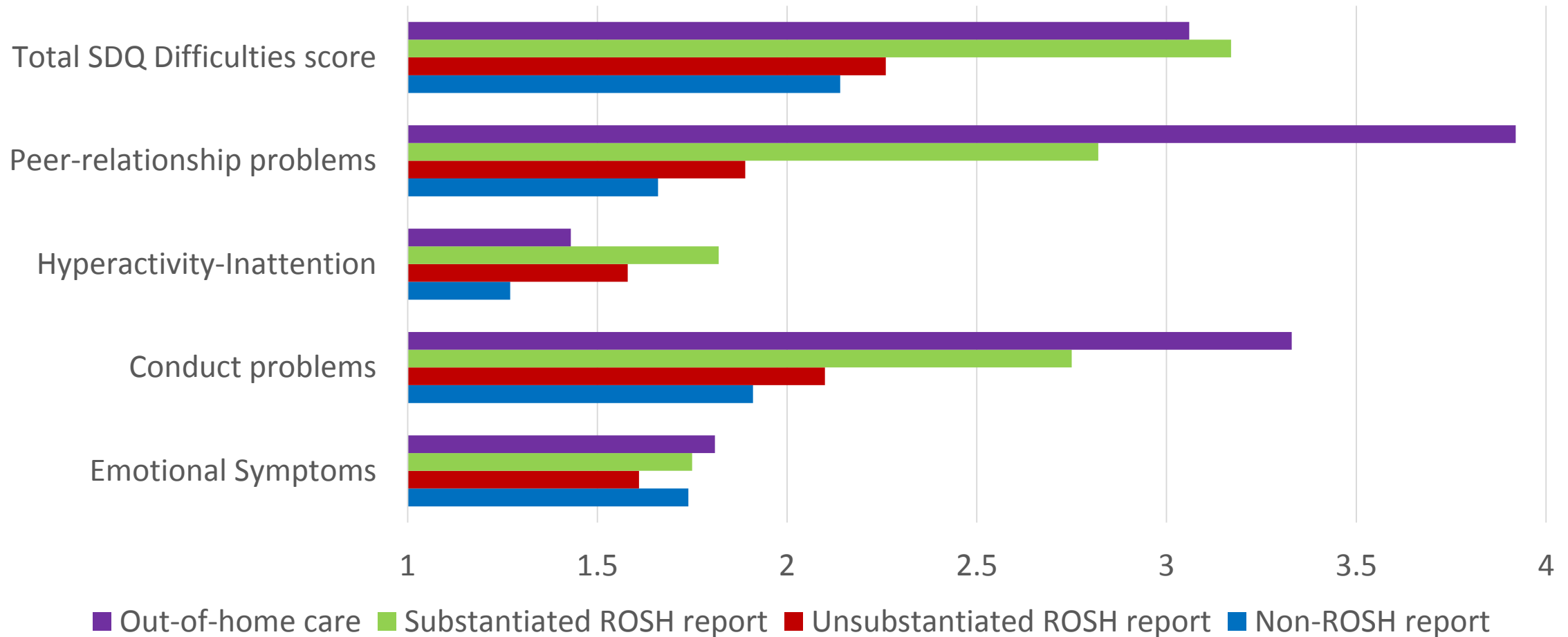
Out-of-home care | Substantiated ROSH report | Unsubstantiated ROSH report | Non-ROSH report

Research article

Costs for physical and mental health hospitalizations in the first 13 years of life among children engaged with Child Protection Services

Amanda L. Neil[a],*, Fakhrul Islam[b], Maina Kariuki[b], Kristin R. Laurens[b,c], Ilan Katz[d], Felicity Harris[b], Vaughan J. Carr[b,e,f], Melissa J. Green[b,f]

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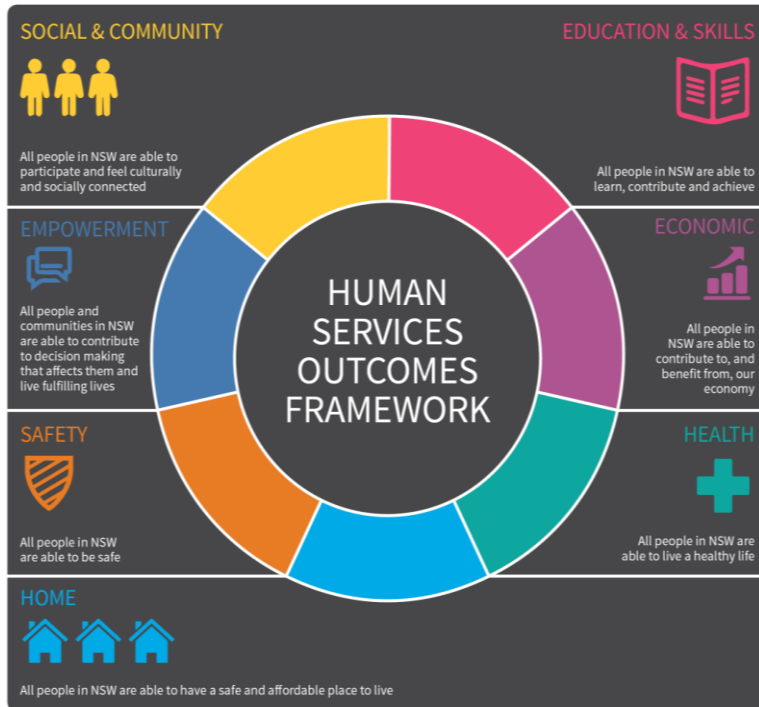[e] Department of Psychiatry, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia
[f] Neuroscience Research Australia, Sydney, Australia

Per capita costs of admitted patients for mental health care according to child protection status

Neil et al., (2020) *Child Abuse and Neglect*.
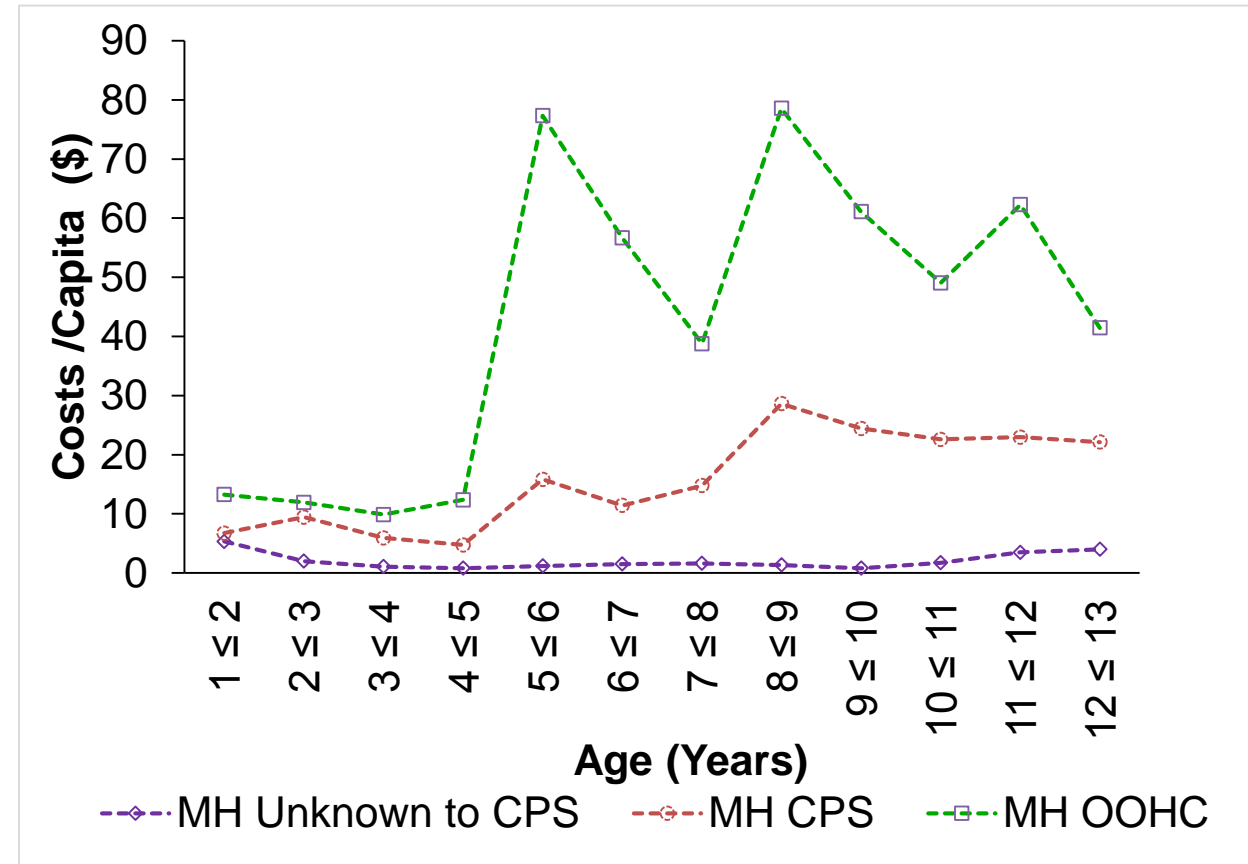
Policy Implications

Children who are known to child protection services in early life (<age 5 years) are at higher risk of being diagnosed with a mental illness by early adolescence, or self-reporting mental health difficulties in the final year of primary school, than their peers

The increased mental health costs associated with child maltreatment are evident at an early age of development

School-based mental health programs may be beneficial for these children

http://nsw-cds.com.au/

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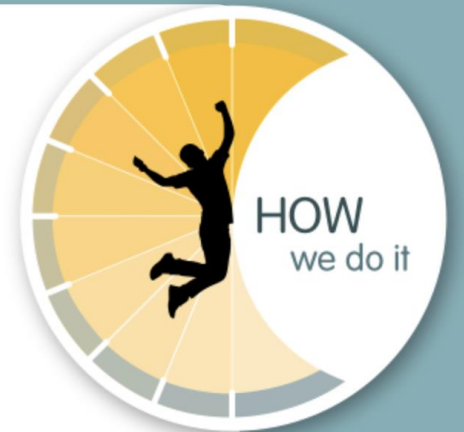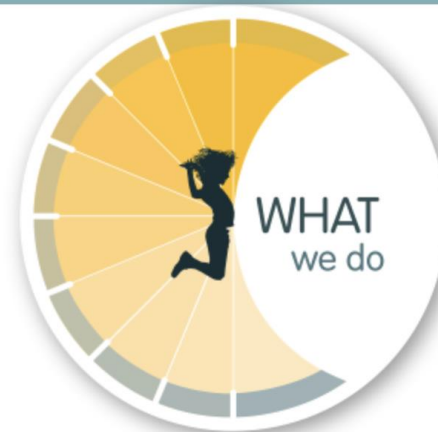
Acknowledgements

Data custodians

We pay respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of the lands we meet on today. We pay respects to elders past, present & emerging.