

Kinship Care and Behavioral Outcomes for Children in the Child Welfare System



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Safe Place: The Center for Child Protection & Health

Background:

- **Child welfare workers often choose between available kin vs. non-relative foster parents when faced with the decision to remove children from their homes.**
- **Exits to kinship care in recent years have been largely responsible for a nearly 10% drop in the out-of-home population.**
- **Children in supervised kinship care represent less than 10% of the 2.5 million children being raised in kinship settings**

Background:

- **Competing theories on kinship care:**

“Blood is thicker than water”

- Stronger attachment between caregiver and child
- Less disruptive

“The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree”

- Kin may share the same risk factors as the birth parents
- Unrestricted and unregulated contact with birth parents

Methods

- **Data Source:**
 - National Survey of Child & Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW)
- **Study Population:**
 - Children who entered kinship care or non-relative foster care following report

Results:

Total study population (N = 1,309)

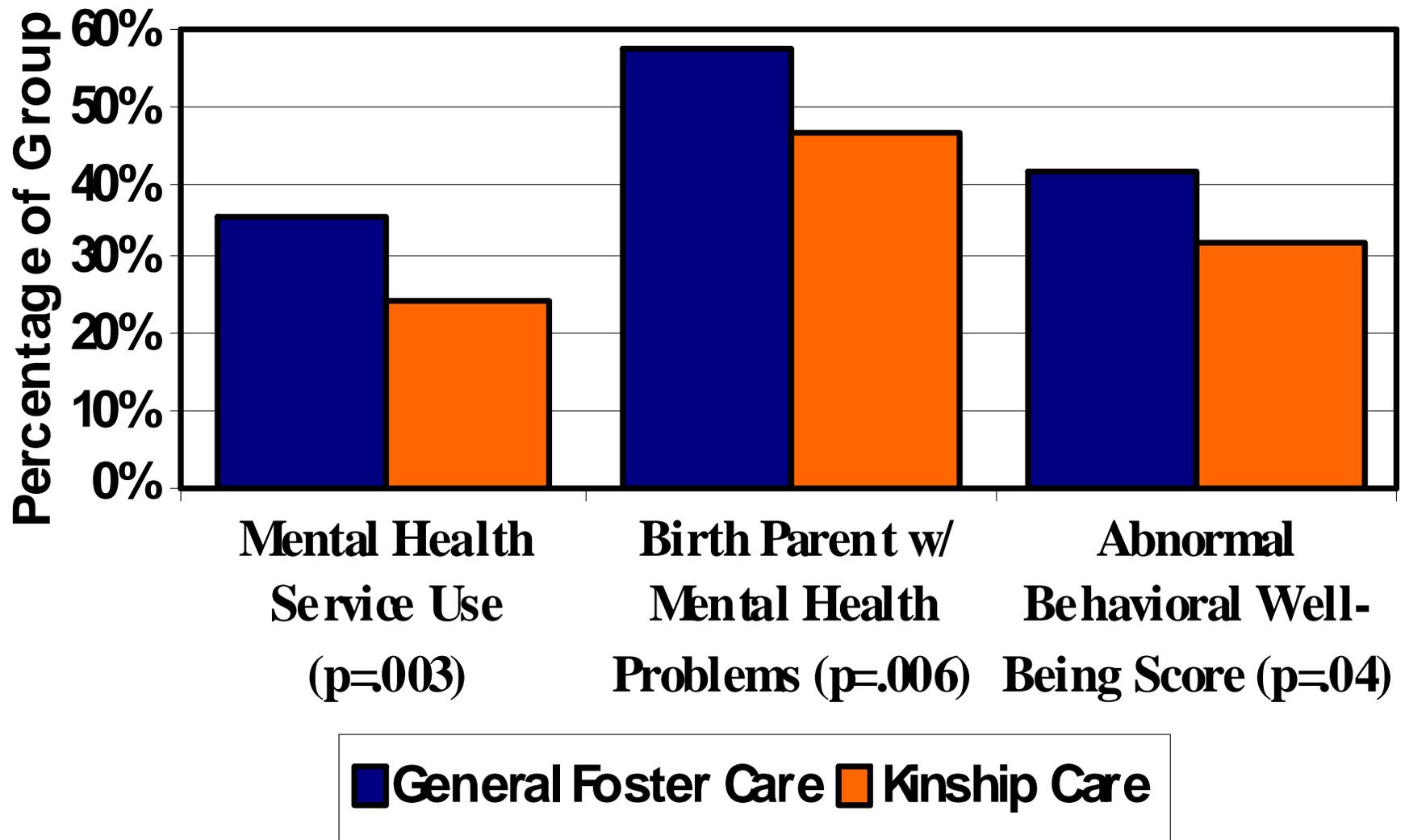
- **Gender:**
 - 54% female
 - 46% male
- **Age:**
 - 28% < 2 years
 - 50% 2-10 years
 - 22% > 10 years
- **Race & Ethnicity:**
 - 50% White
 - 38% African-American
 - 13% Hispanic
- **Abuse type:**
 - 57% neglect/abandonment
 - 19% physical abuse
 - 9% sexual abuse

Results:

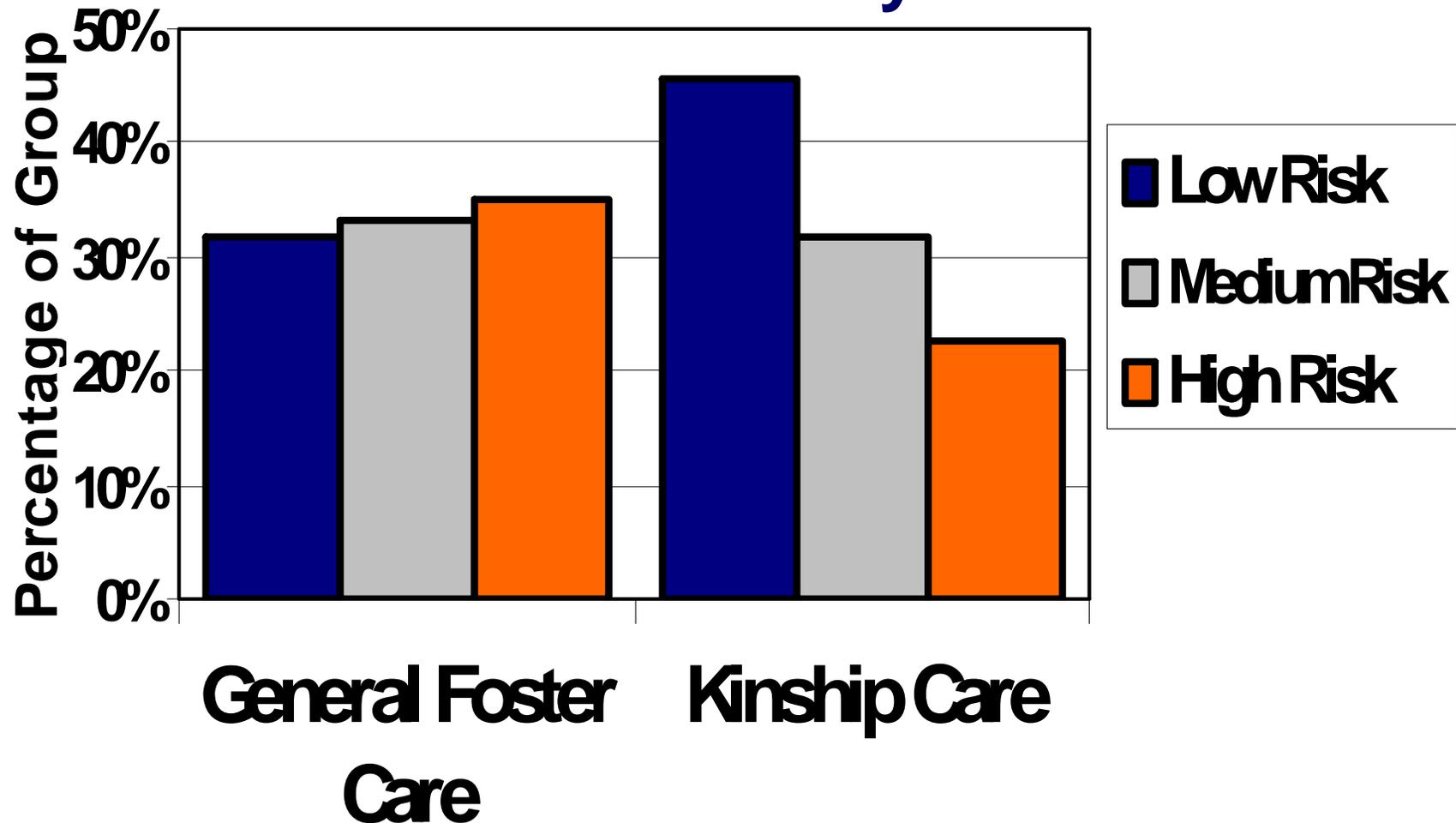
- **Initial Placement Setting**
 - 50% kinship care
 - 50% non-relative foster care
- **36-month CBCL Scores**
 - 38% had scores indicating behavioral problems

Were children who were placed into kinship care different from those who were placed into non-relative foster care?

Differences in Baseline Characteristics by Initial Placement Setting



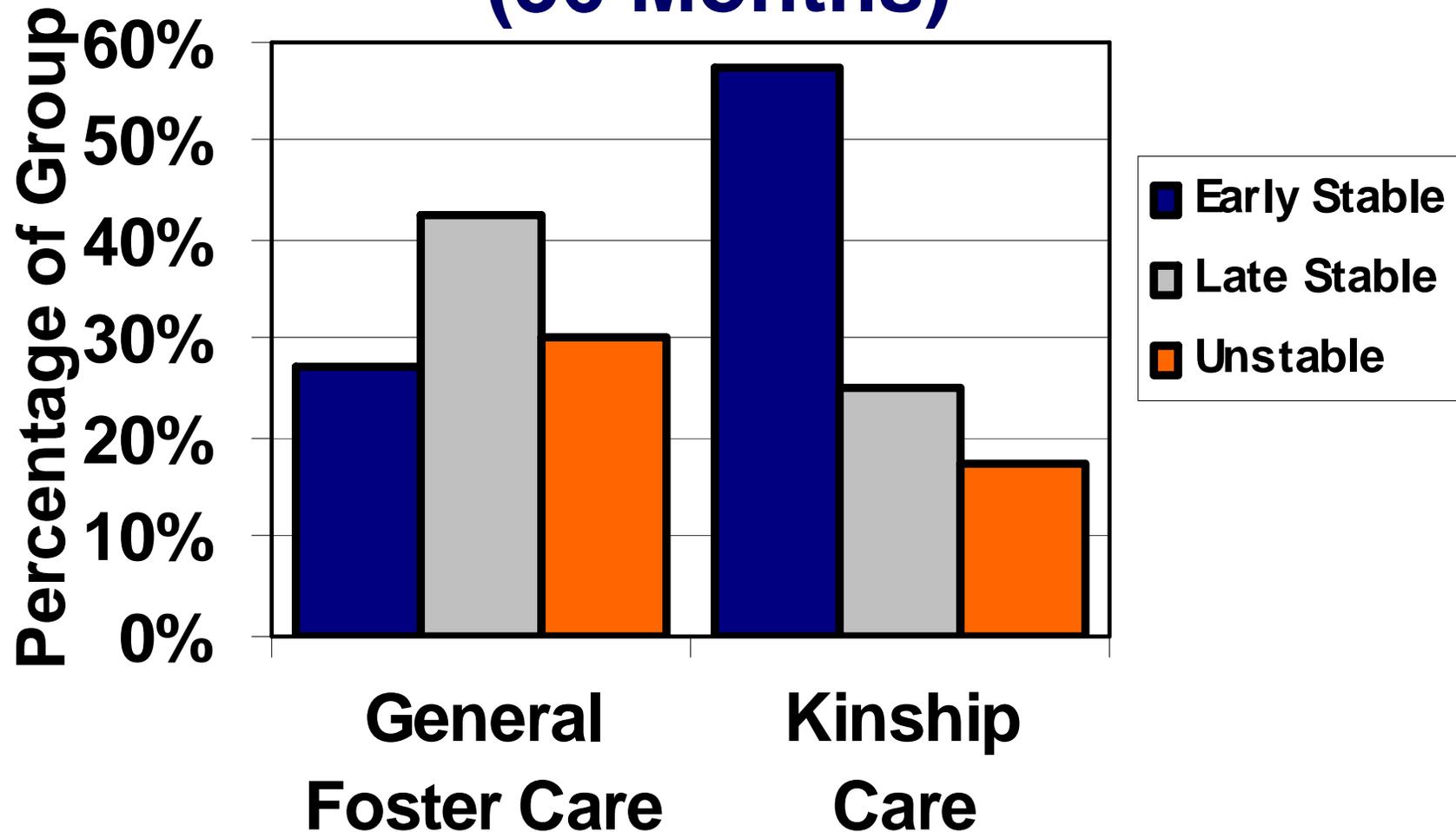
Child's Baseline Risk for Placement Instability



$\chi^2: p = .007$

Did children in kinship care have more stability than children in non-relative foster care?

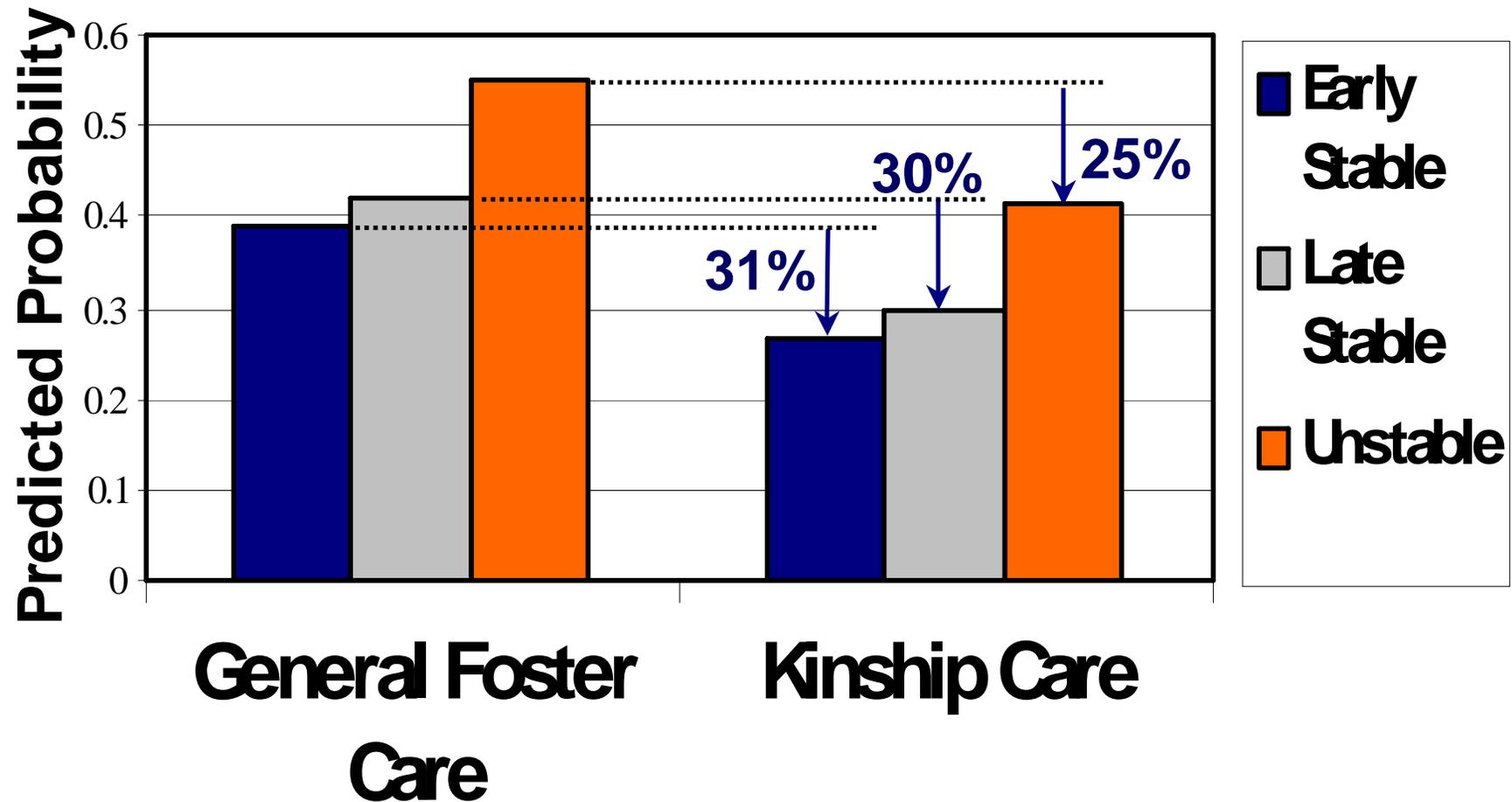
Actual Placement Stability (36 Months)



$\chi^2: p < .001$

Controlling for the lower baseline risk and increased placement stability among children in kinship care, were behavioral outcomes different between children in kinship and non-relative foster care?

Predicted Probability of Behavior Problems at 36 Months Based on Placement Stability and Setting*

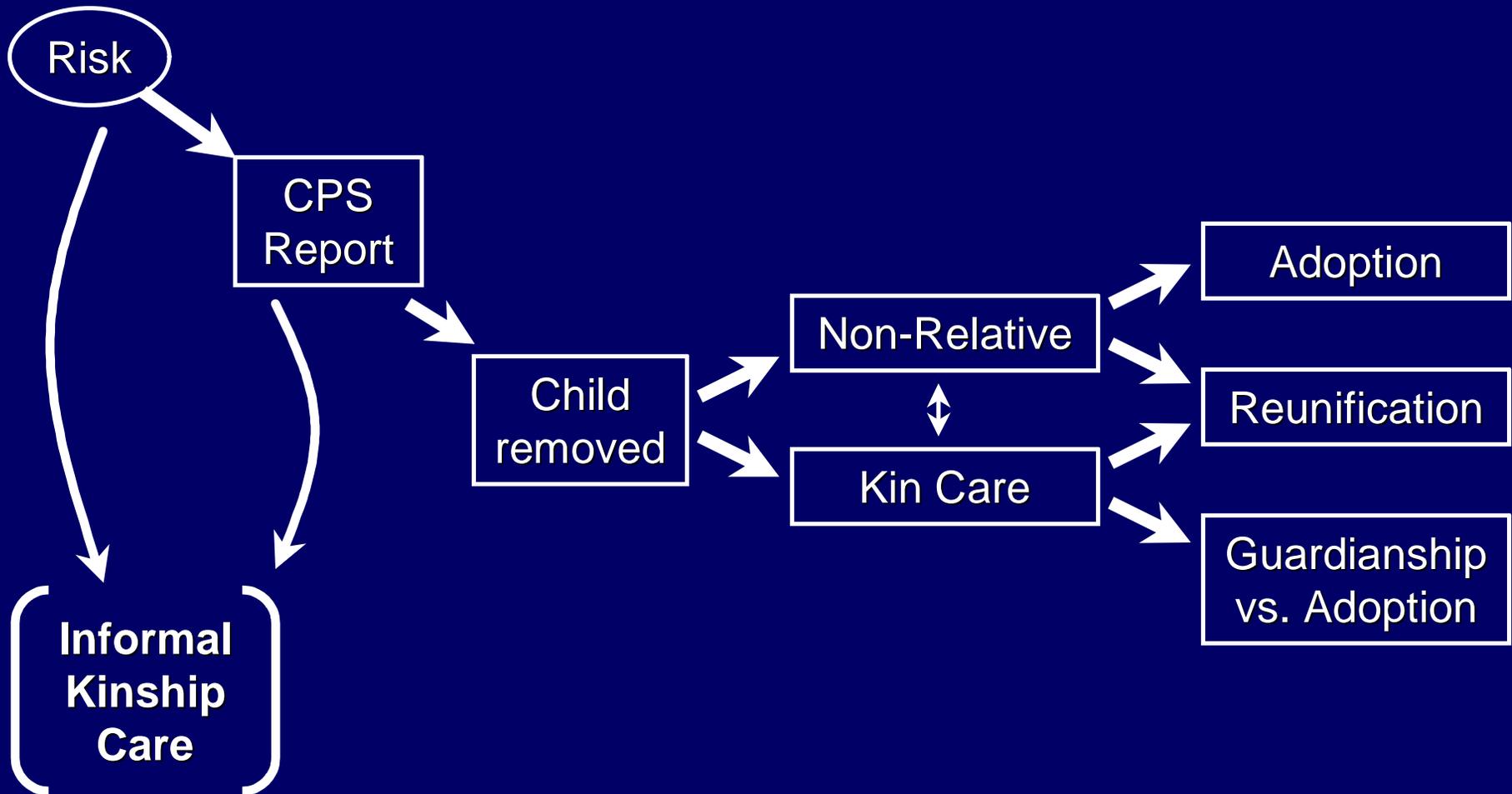


*Marginal standardization, adjusting for baseline risk and reunification status

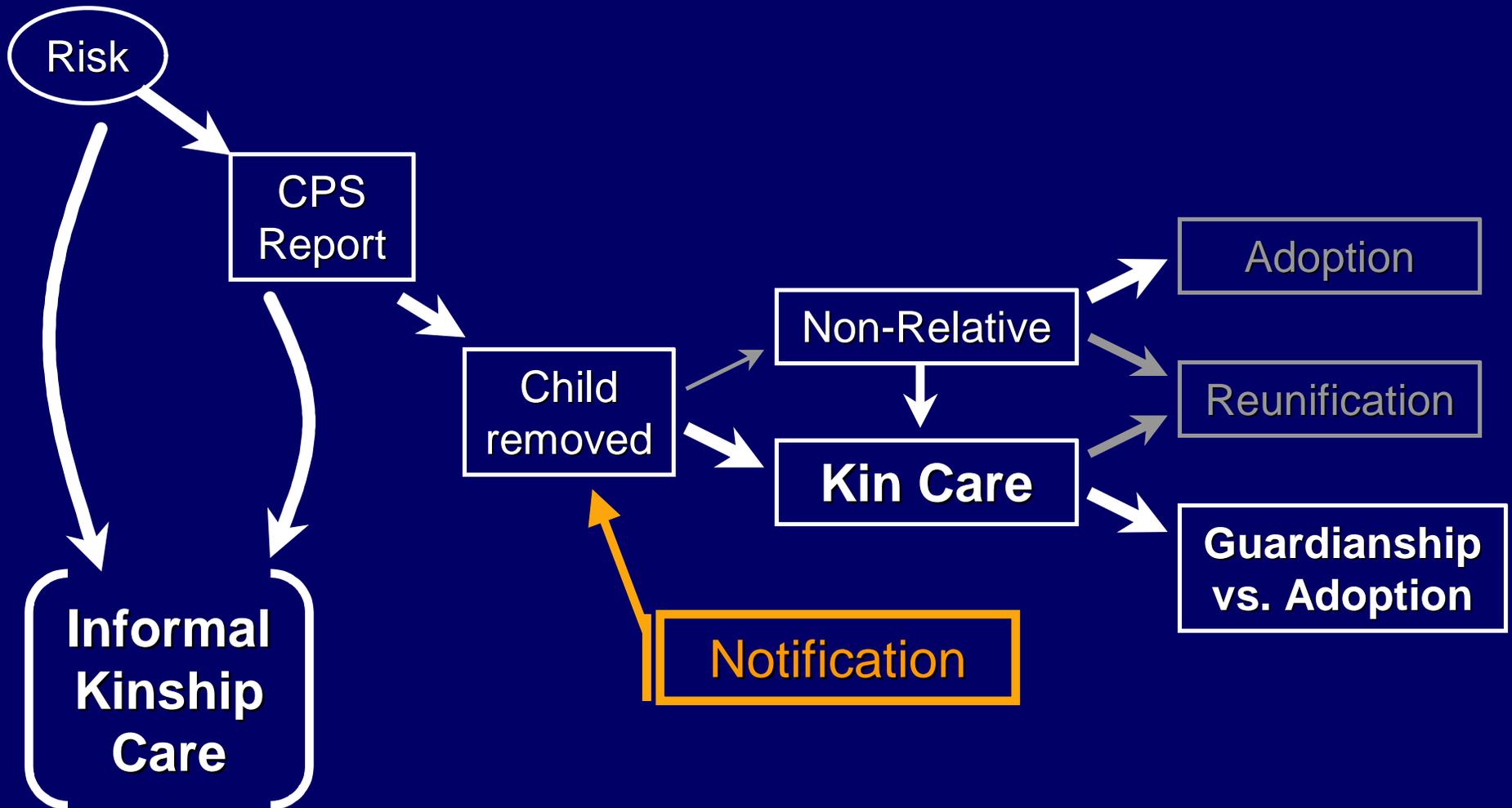
Some words of caution

- **Although children in kinship had fewer behavioral problems than children in non-relative foster care, their rates of behavioral problems were greater than other children in general.**
- **Kinship care is not a realistic option for all children who enter out-of-home care.**
- **Reporting bias among the kinship care population might have explained some of the difference.**

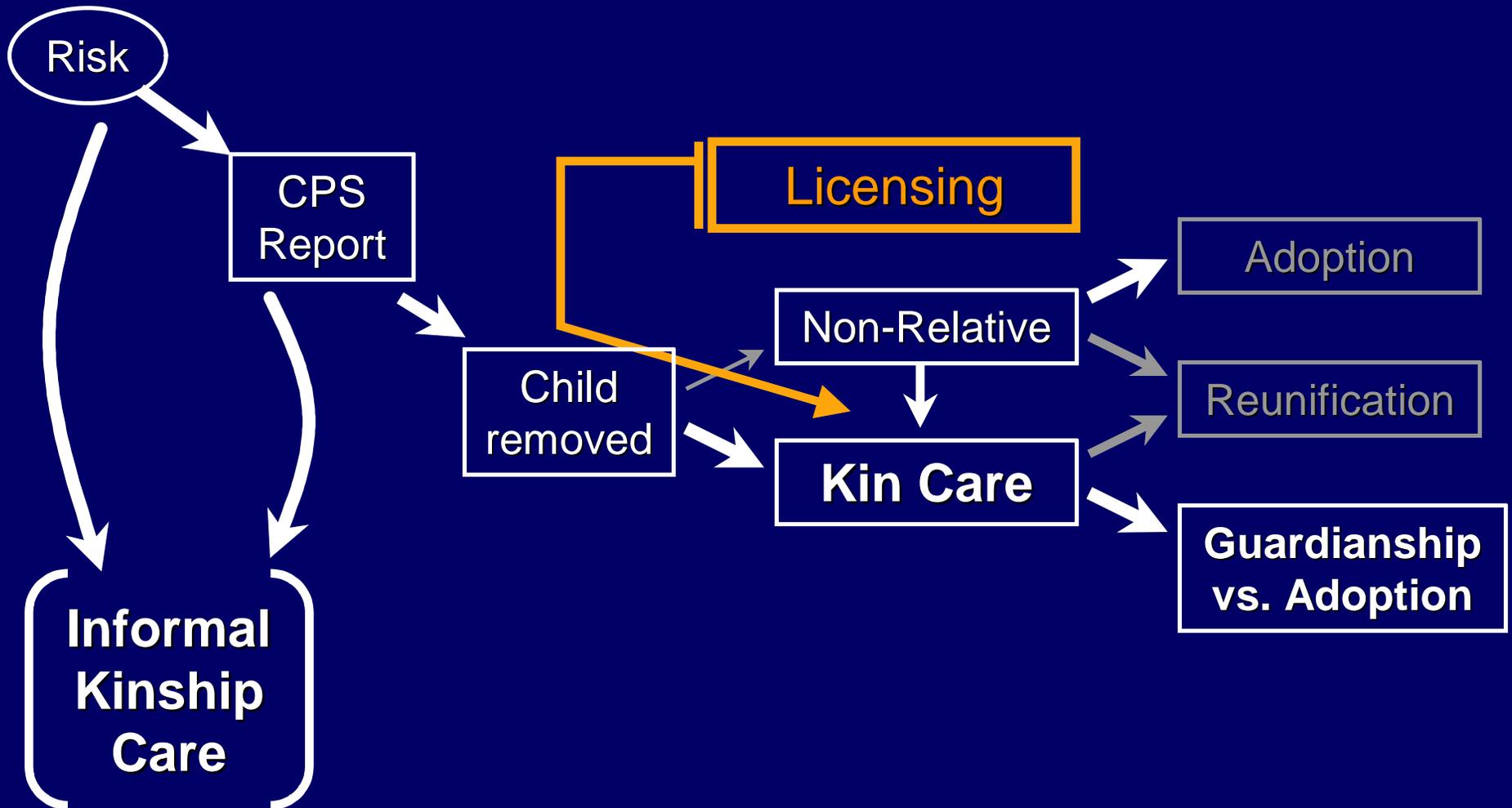
From Policy to Impact



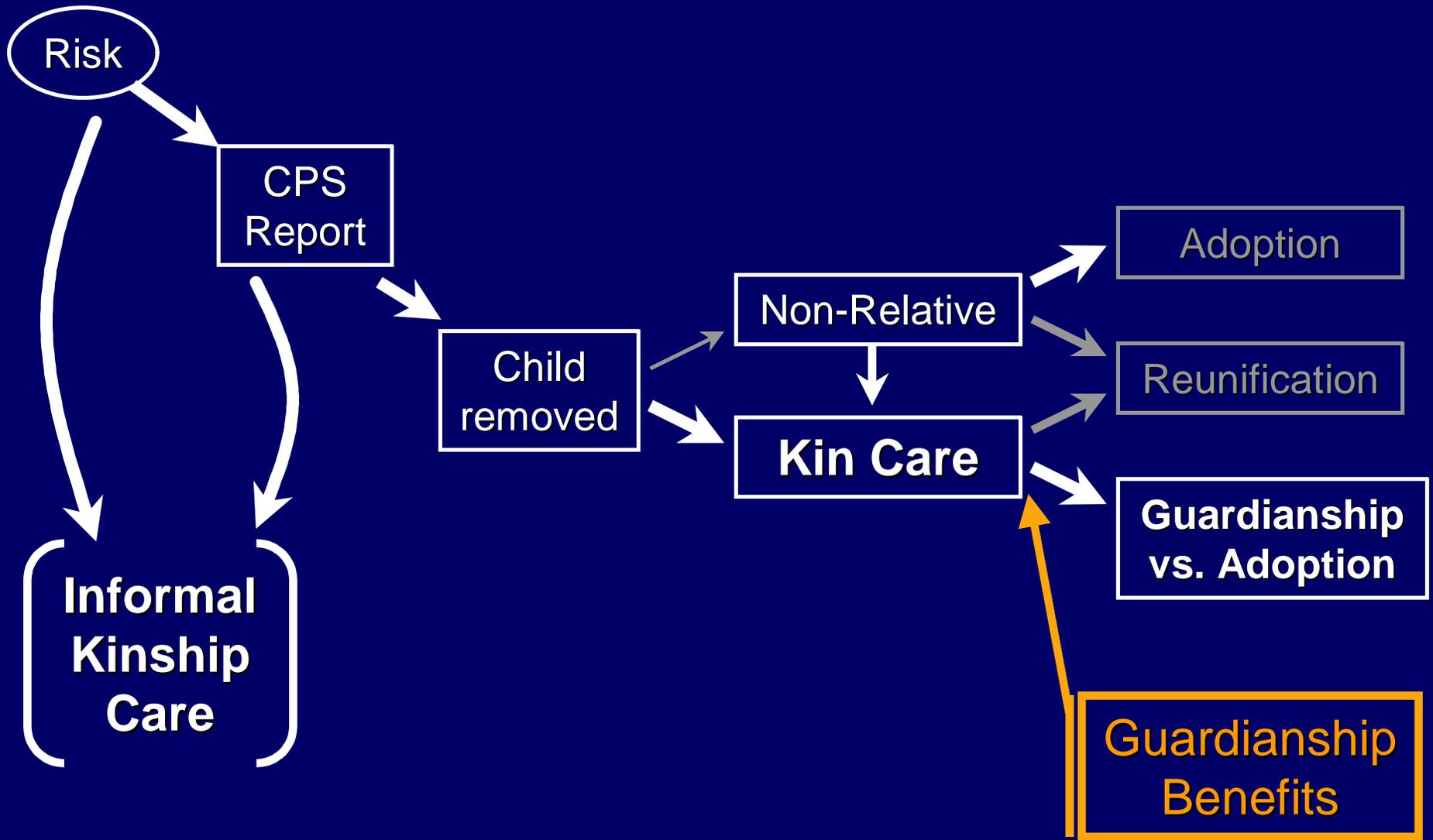
From Policy to Impact



From Policy to Impact



From Policy to Impact



Conclusions

- **Children raised in kinship settings had more stability than children in non-relative foster care**
- **Kinship care conferred benefits to children beyond the increased stability that was achieved**

Implications:

- **Provides empirical data to support efforts to improve the early placement of children with kin when appropriate**
- **Also reinforces the need to provide better services (via accessible navigator programs) among kinship families, which can only support efforts to achieve stability and maintain permanency**

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