Key challenges when evaluating loneliness prevention

Jose-Luis Fernandez

PSSRU at LSE

Aims of the presentation

- What do we mean by evaluation?
- What are the key challenges of social care evaluations? What about interventions aimed at reducing loneliness?
- Which principles should drive our evaluations?
- SSCR study on prevention

What are the aims of an (economic) evaluation?

- To understand whether something is good?
  - Does it improve things?
  - Does it help people?
- So we want to understand the “effectiveness” of an intervention/scheme
  - Health status
  - Quality of life
    - Of the person with needs
    - Of their family and friends
  - Social participation
    - Opportunities to socialise
    - Workforce participation

LSE

PSSRU
Personal Social Services Research Unit

Is something worth doing?

- Is doing something ***worth the effort***?
- Is the effect worth the resources that are required?
- Is it worth the cost?
  - Cost of the intervention
  - Cost of the other support services
    - Social care
    - Health care
    - Social security benefits
- So we want to understand the “cost-effectiveness” of interventions
  - Compared with other possible uses of available resources, is the intervention worth doing?

LSE

PSSRU
Personal Social Services Research Unit

Understanding cost-effectiveness

- Very simple aim! measure and compare
  - Effects of the intervention (its outcomes)
  - Costs of the intervention
- Answers the question:
  compared with other possible uses of available resources, is the intervention worth doing?
- Implementation can be (very) challenging
  - Measurement of outcomes and costs
  - Long-term nature of the relationships
  - Problems with the identification of the impact of the intervention

LSE

PSSRU
Personal Social Services Research Unit

Identifying and measuring outcomes

- Outcomes are ***complex***
  - Outcomes usually need to be multi-dimensional
  - Each dimension can be difficult to assess
  - Isolation vs. loneliness
- Sometimes the only change to be expected is ***deterioration***
- There are multiple and sometimes ***competing*** perspectives on outcomes
  - Maximising independence vs. minimising risk of harm
  - Improving the wellbeing of carers vs. service users
- Importance of process outcomes
  - Empowerment
  - Choice

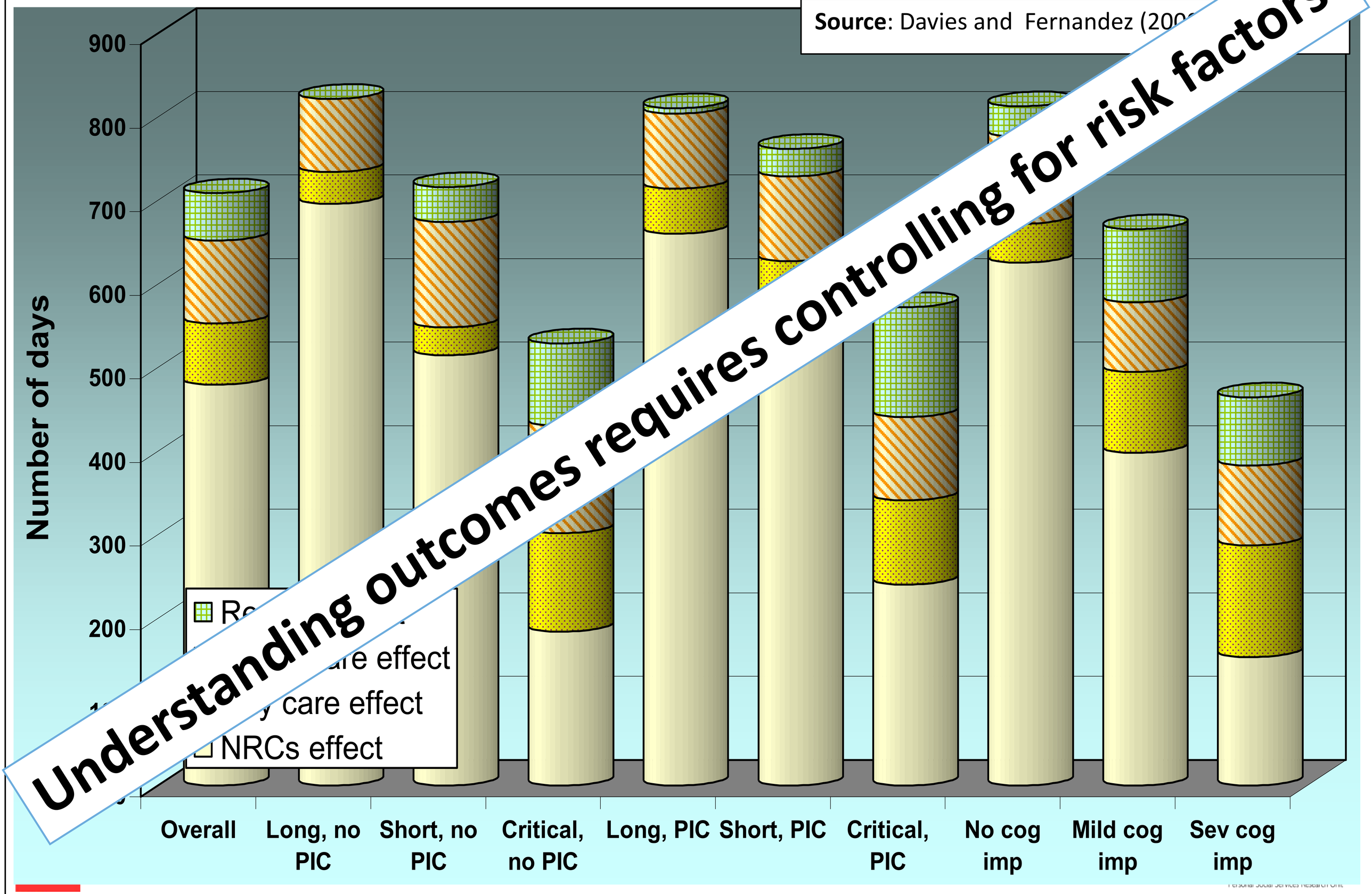
LSE

PSSRU
Personal Social Services Research Unit

Social care outcomes (ASCOT) domains

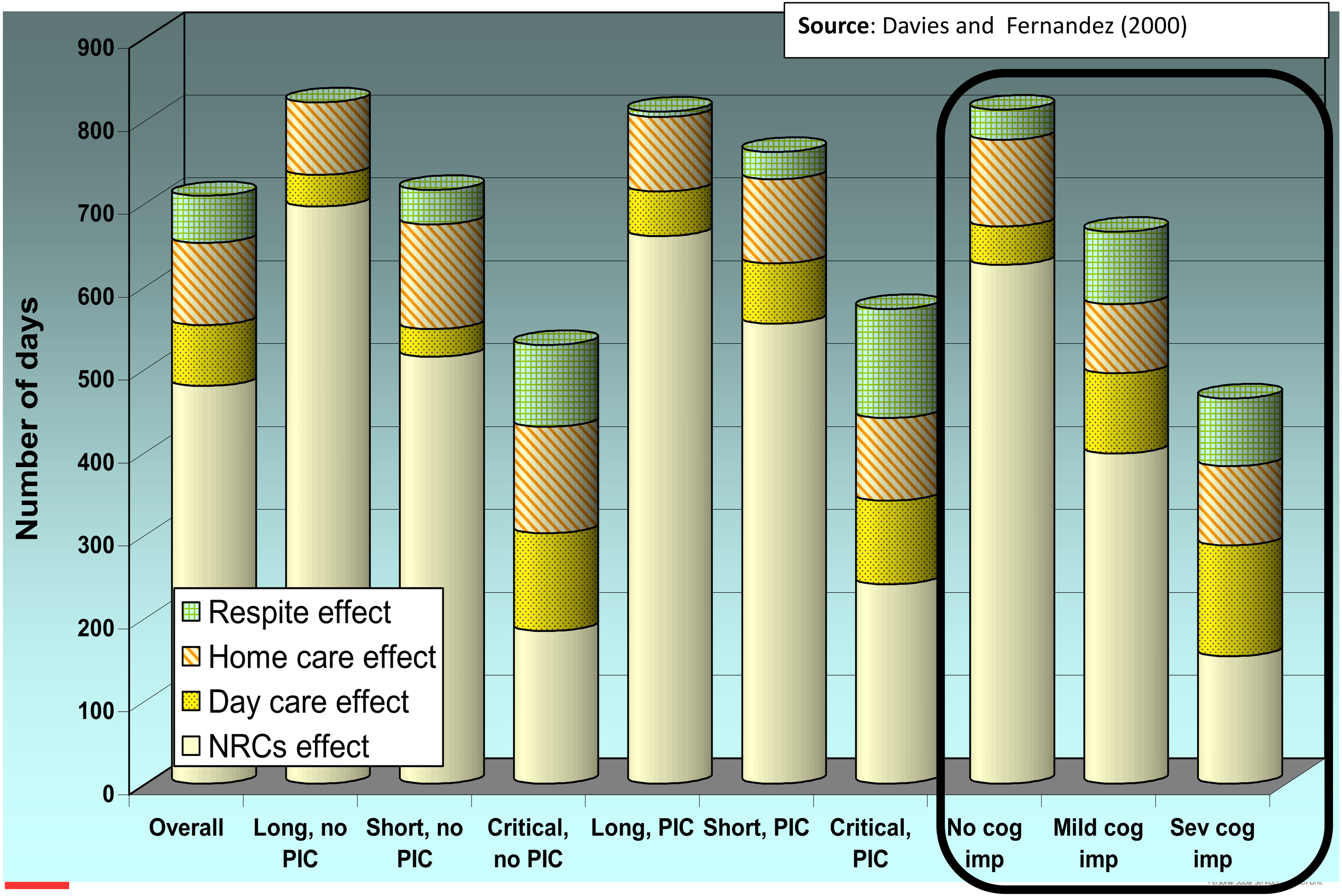
- Personal cleanliness and comfort
- Food and nutrition
- Safety
- Clean and comfortable accommodation
- Occupation
- Social participation and involvement
- Control over daily living

Impact of needs and services on Days Living at Home

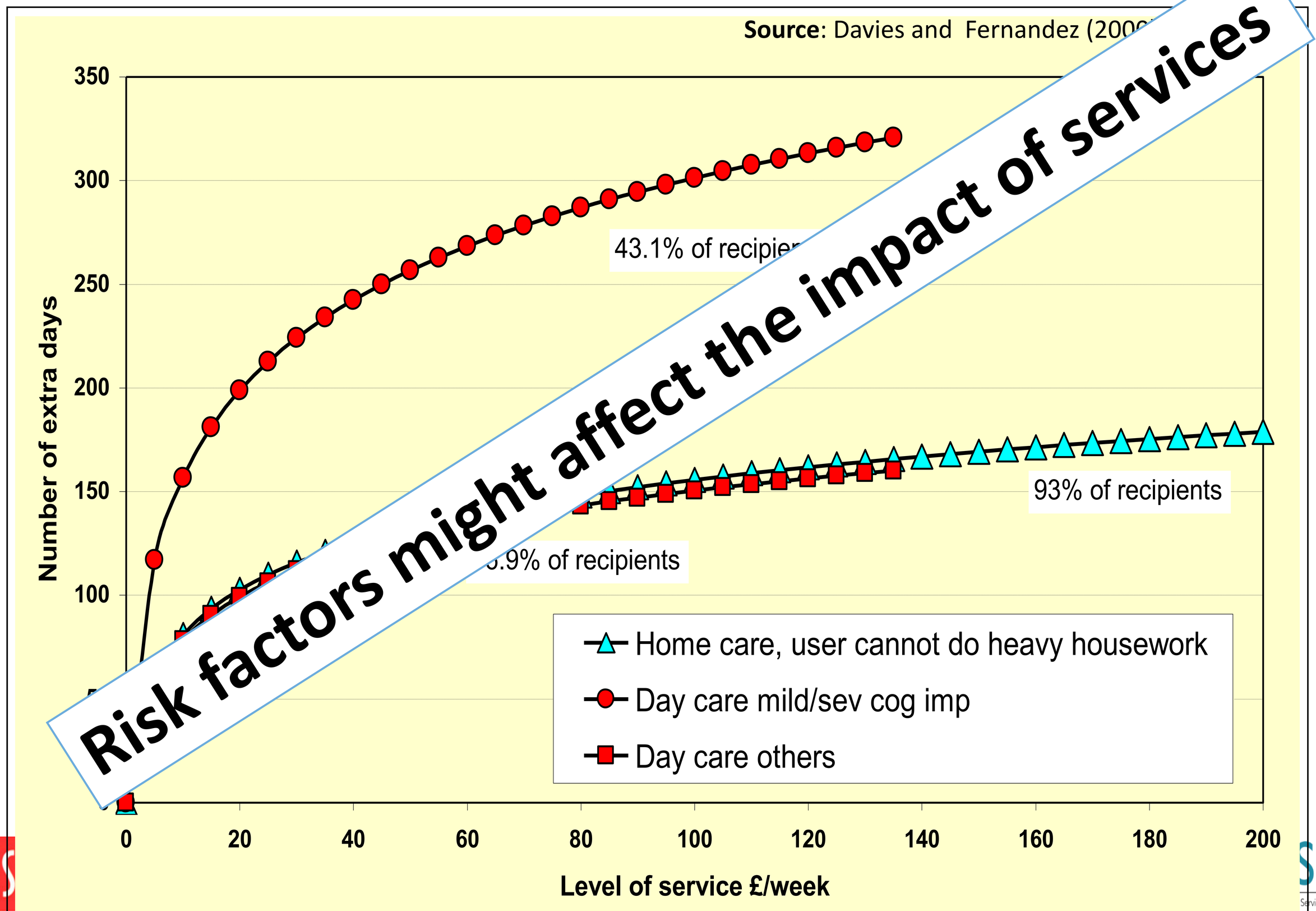


Impact of needs and services on Days Living at Home

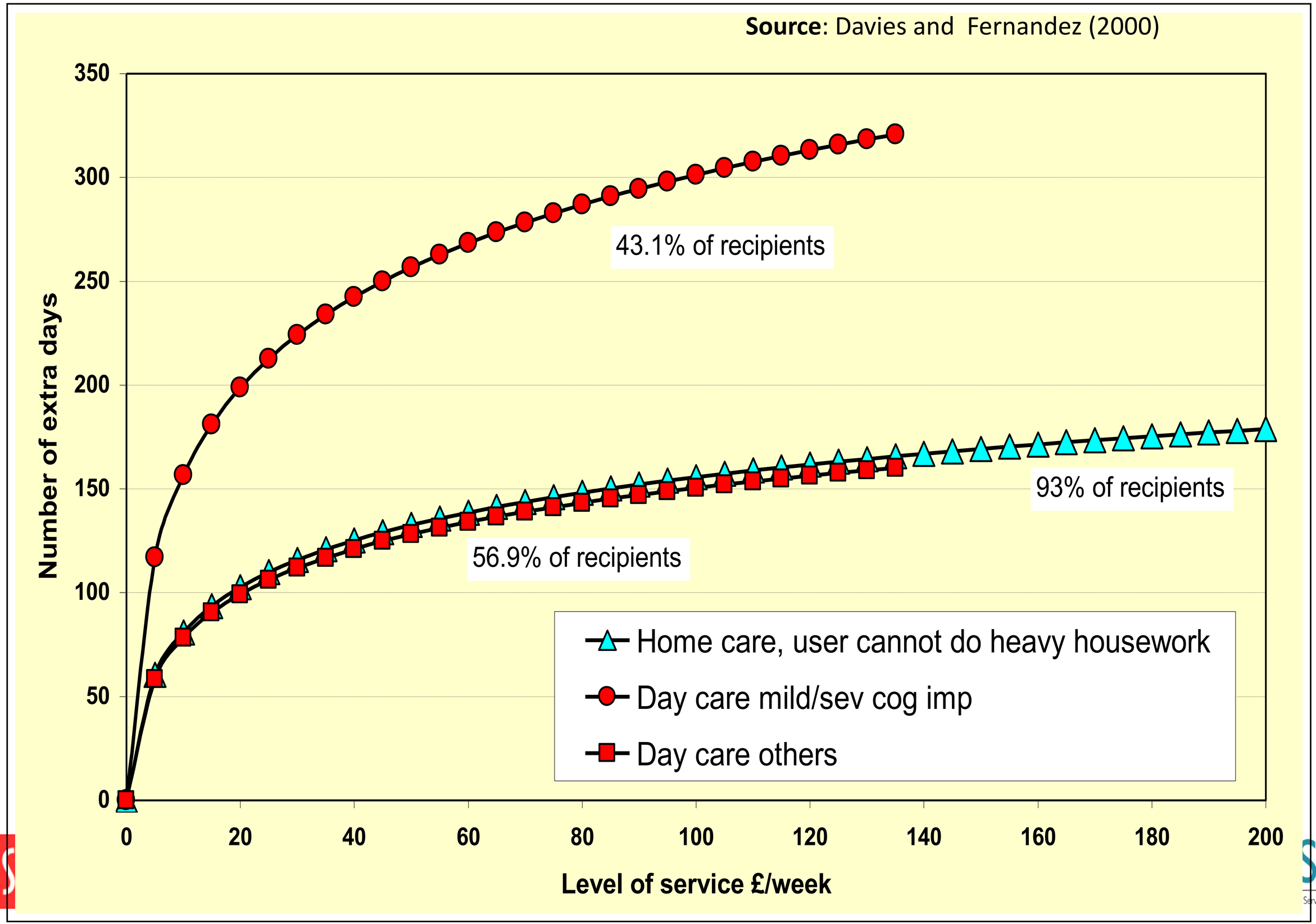
Source: Davies and Fernandez (2000)



Home care and day care effect on Days Living at Home



Home care and day care effect on Days Living at Home

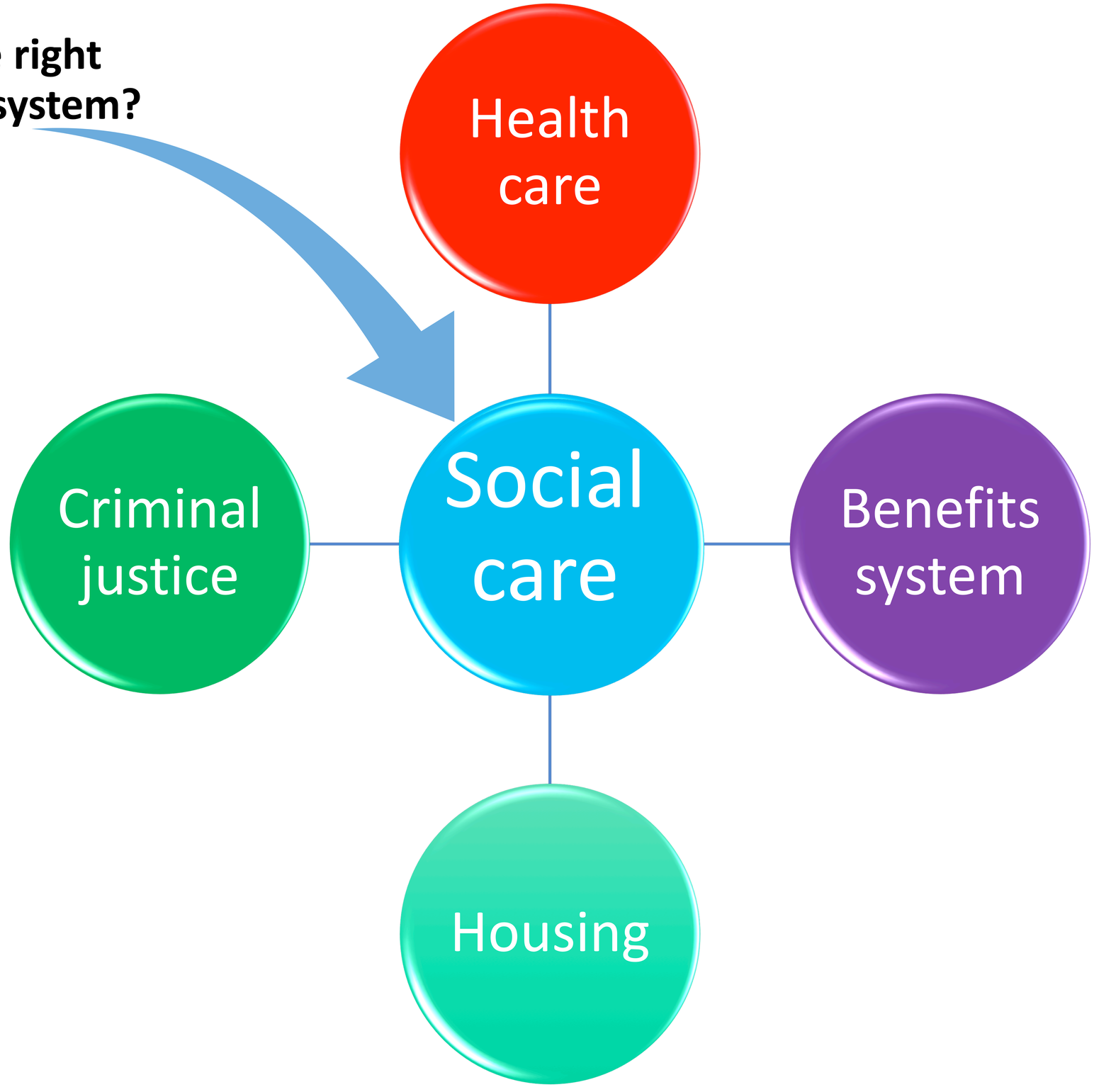


Heterogeneity of social care needs

- Physical health / disability
  - Problems with Activity of Daily Living (ADLs)
    - (housework, cooking, washing, feeding, transfer…)
- Mental health
  - Cognitive impairment
  - Depression
- Informal support networks
  - Amount of support
  - Nature of the interrelationship
  - Informal carers as resources and co-clients
- Other environmental factors
  - Housing
  - Safety
  - Local deprivation
- Personal traits
  - Self assurance
  - Aggressiveness

Social care linked to a complex network of support services

Do we have the right incentives in the system?



LSE

PSSRU
Personal Social Services Research Unit

Need-related factors

User and carer characteristics

-Dependency

-Mental and physical health problems

-Informal care support

Environmental factors

-Housing environment

-Neighbourhoo

Outcomes

-Loneliness

-Quali fe (users & carers)

nt

ty…

WE NEED A BETER UNDERSTANDING OF THE PRODUCTION OF WELFARE PROCESS

Services

-Information and advice

-Befriending services

-Infrastructural investment

-Social care services

-(home care; day care; meals ; direct payments…)

The Production of Welfare

PSSRU

Personal Social Services Research Unit

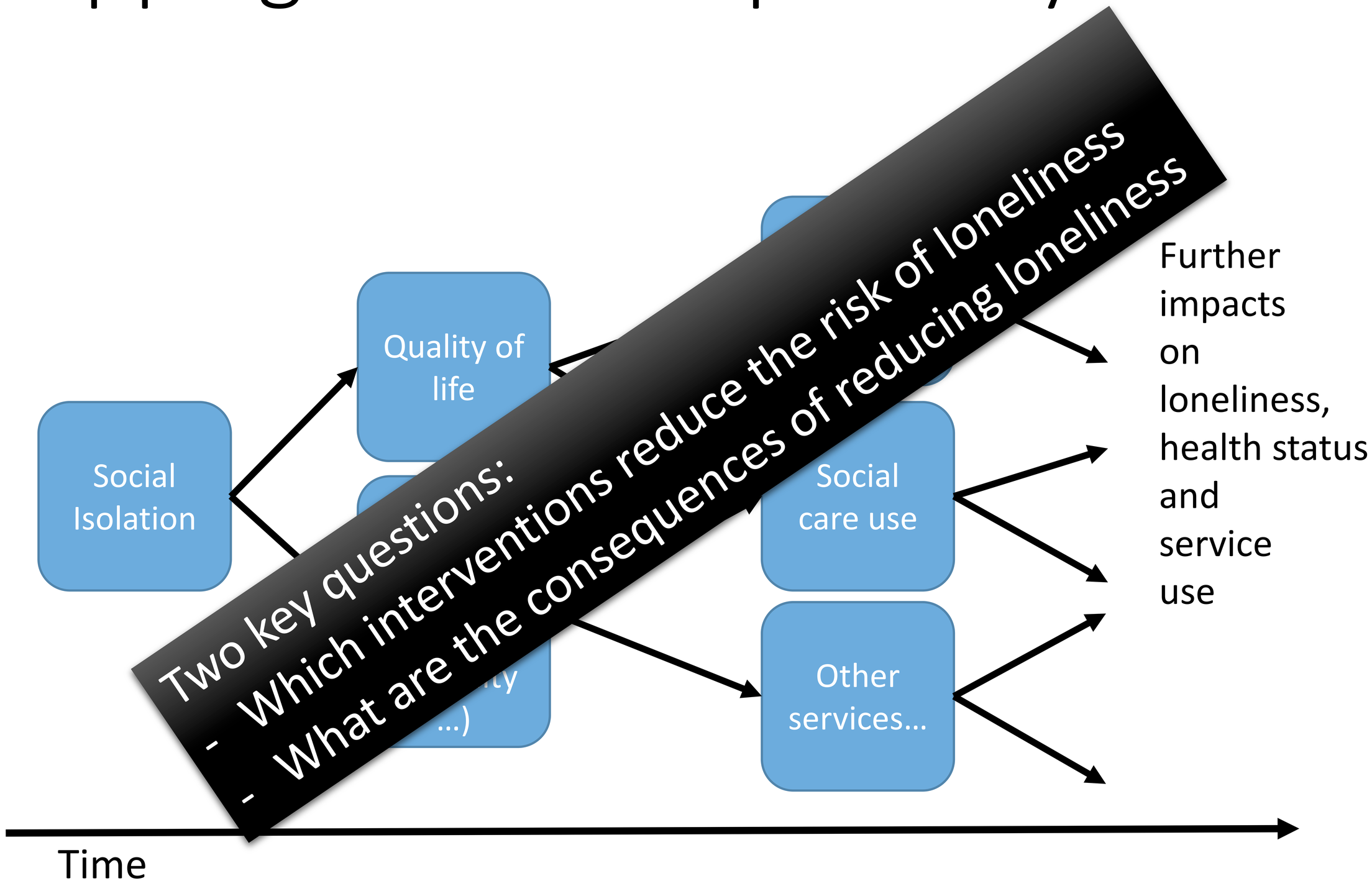
Long-term effects and costs

- Social care problems are often long-term
- Interventions are also often long-term
- The outcome effects of interventions are often slow to materialise
- And so too are some of the costs

LSE

PSSRU
Personal Social Services Research Unit

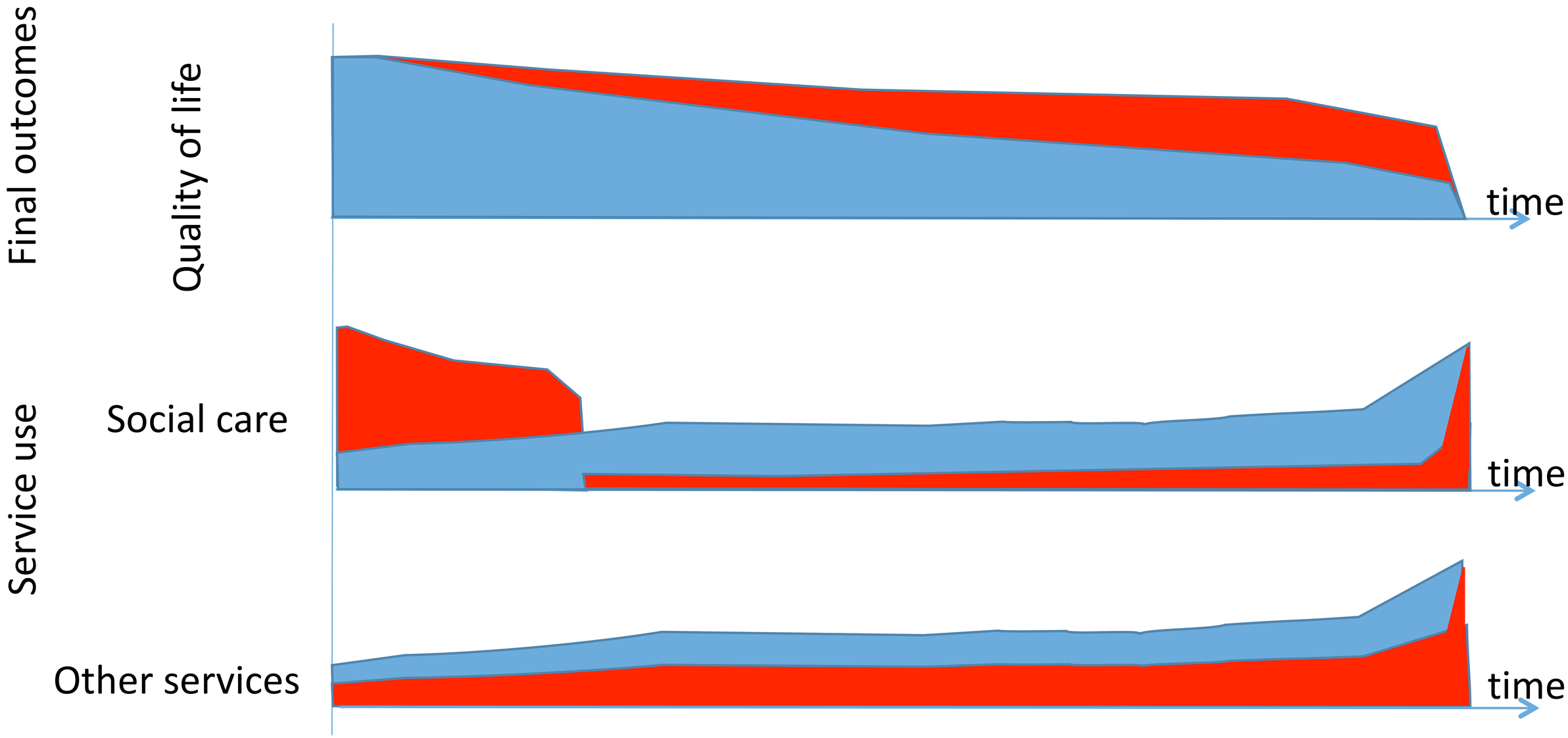
Mapping the causal pathways



LSE

PSSRU
Personal Social Services Research Unit

The prevention evaluation challenge



Key principles for the evaluation of prevention (including loneliness prevention)

- Map all relevant resources use (intervention and other services)
- Map all relevant outcomes
- Map risk factors likely to affect isolation/loneliness
- Follow the intervention for a sufficient period of time
- Use methods which help identify the impact of the intervention

LSE

PSSRU
Personal Social Services Research Unit

Identifying the effect of the intervention: controlling for needs and other confounders…

- Experimental set-ups
  - Random allocation of intervention to intervention group
  - Random allocation at the individual level or at the group level (e.g. geographical clustering)
- Difference in difference set-ups
  - Staged implementation (e.g. by area) with pre and post implementation data available
  - Disentangling the effect of policy changes through time from the effect of the intervention
  - Control, Intervention, before and after
  - Ideally individual level, but might be helpful at aggregate level too
- Matching strategies
  - Using alternative sources of data (from other areas; from national surveys)
- Regression methods
  - More powerful but more complex to apply
  - Can be used with some of the strategies above
  - Can identify strategies for improving targeting of resources

LSE

PSSRU
Personal Social Services Research Unit

Generating and using evidence for policy and service development

- Matching evaluation strategies to policy scenario
  - Building business case before a ***new intervention***
  - Evaluation of a new ***scheme being implemented*** or ***piloting*** of new ideas
  - Evaluation of ***existing services***. Analysis at the margin.

- The ***methods*** and ***data requirements*** will ***depend*** on the nature of the intervention/aims of the evaluation

- Need to ***integrate evaluation approach*** into policy development process

LSE

PSSRU
Personal Social Services Research Unit

Integrating evaluation activity into policy and practice processes

- Improving our ***understanding of the relationship between needs, resources and loneliness***
  - ***Is possible!***
  - ***Key*** to targeting interventions appropriately
- Increasing efforts ***to summarise evidence*** to help service development
- Potential for ***strategic partnership*** between research and policy and practice community
  - Common research objectives
  - Access to large amounts of new evidence
  - Opportunities to co-produce service/policy development

LSE

PSSRU
Personal Social Services Research Unit