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The potential of linking cohort participants to official criminal records: a pilot study using the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC)

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Background

Policing in the UK is increasingly taking a public health approach to tackling crime. Birth cohort studies are potentially well-placed to provide evidence on the most important risk and preventative factors. Linking official police records to cohort data offers considerable potential for future research, but data privacy concerns mean achieving such linkage is challenging. As a pilot, the Ministry of Justice provided ALSPAC with an anonymous extract (cannot be linked to study data) detailing consenting participants' criminal convictions and cautions held within the Police National Computer (PNC).

have explicitly opted-in generally self-report fewer criminal behaviours and have less missing data than those who have not responded to the consent campaign.

Conclusions

If future linkage to individual police records was only achieved for explicit consenters, this would under-estimate criminality in the cohort. The geographical clustering of the crimes means local police records, which are more detailed than those of the PNC, could also be used.

Main aim

To use anonymised PNC data to inform the potential for future research using ALSPAC and individual-level linked crime data.

Methods

We examine criminality (type, when and where committed) in the cohort participants who were sent for linkage to the PNC in 2013 when they were aged approximately 21 years (n=7358). We consider the representativeness of these participants by comparing their self-reported crime-related behaviours during adolescence to those of participants who did not consent to linkage (n=7604). Finally, we consider these self-reported measures by present-day crime linkage consent status.

Results

Of those sent for PNC linkage, 885 were linked to a criminal record(s) comprising 2635 convictions and 1365 cautions. A third related to serious crimes, and >90% were committed in Avon and Somerset constabulary. Those sent for linkage self-reported fewer criminal behaviours than those not sent for linkage. Regarding present-day consent status, those who

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