International Journal of Population Data Science

Journal Website: www.ijpds.org

Transforming children's futures: the challenges and benefits of using data linkage to improve the planning of children's services within Scotland

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Background

Realigning Children's Services is a programme which aims to improve the commissioning and planning of children's services through the use of evidence and implementation science. A key focus of this is an ambitious data linkage project which links two sets of survey data with local administrative data from Education and Social Work in local Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) within Scotland. The initial tranche for the programme worked with three CPPs in 2015/16 and has involved work at a national and local level.

Aims

The data linkage component to the project has been closely aligned to local need and interest with continued collaboration with professionals in local areas from strategic managers to schools. The data resulting from the linkage will allow for a series of reports tailored to local priorities and will also inform a data visualisation tool which will help professionals to look closely at the data. It has also prompted discussion and reflection within the local areas around what data is currently used in each locality, how evidence can inform their planning and what gaps exist within their knowledge base which could be filled through the data linkage.

Approach

Contribution Analysis was used as a framework to evaluate the effectiveness of the Realigning Children's Services programme. This allowed a focus on far reaching outcome measures alongside process measures through a mix of qualitative and quantitative data. Data from this evaluation will inform future linkage projects and evaluate the use of linked data in strategic planning in children's services.

Conclusion

The Realigning Children's Services programme has shown that data linkage within a children and families context can be complex and ethically challenging. However it also offers professionals access to critical data which can otherwise go overlooked. This presentation will discuss these challenges and consider how this work has been used to help local areas improve their planning of their services for children and families within a multidisciplinary setting.

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