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Child poverty and multidimensional disadvantage: Tackling “data exclusion” and extending the evidence base on “missing” and “invisible” children

Overview report (Summary)

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Aims and objectives

- Measuring child poverty and disadvantage for different groups of children, moving beyond overall (population level) measures to more nuanced estimates for specific groups of children, is important to inform policy and practice. However, some key groups of children remain missing from, or invisible within, the current evidence base. The main objective of this study is to address this data exclusion, illustrating the potential for building up quantitative data on child poverty and disadvantage by providing new estimates and more nuanced information on four specific groups of children.
- The four exemplar groups covered by the study are: young carers, children from the Gypsy, Traveller or Roma ethnic minority group, children in recent migrant families, and children at risk of abuse and neglect. New quantitative evidence on child poverty and disadvantage is presented for each of the exemplar groups.
- The study focusses on challenging data exclusion through secondary data analysis techniques and illustrates what can be achieved through broader and deeper analysis of existing datasets. It shows how methods such as data pooling, data linking and intersectional analysis can be successfully applied to tackle different kinds of 'data exclusion' using existing datasets and to highlight the potential of new social survey and administrative data.
- The project builds on and supplements broader initiatives that aim to build up new quantitative evidence on missing and invisible groups. This includes ongoing work by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to build up the data infrastructure for equality and human rights monitoring, and ongoing work by the Children's Commissioner for England to build up the data infrastructure for vulnerable children.
- This overview report provides a summary of our findings on each of the four groups. We also draw overall lessons and implications looking across the workstreams and make recommendations on what needs to be done and the next steps in tackling the phenomenon of "data exclusion" and building up further quantitative evidence on missing and invisible groups in the future.

Exemplar groups, domains and measures

- The project examines the feasibility of identifying each of the four exemplar groups within social survey and administrative datasets and builds up new quantitative evidence on outcomes for each group across four domains: the standard of living domain; health; education; and physical security and safety.
- The review of a range of survey and administrative data sets found that it is possible to build up a substantial body of quantitative evidence on headcounts and outcomes for each of the four exemplar groups across these four domains. Having reviewed data sources for each group within each domain, areas for depth analysis were identified for each group.
- The focus of the depth work and the measures of child poverty and disadvantage used within each workstream varies, depending on the underlying data availability and the data sources that are used. The age thresholds applied also vary, depending on underlying definitional issues and the data sources used.

Young carers

- The study establishes that it is possible to identify young carers using the Family Resources Survey / Households Below Average Income Survey and to provide robust estimates of the extent of child poverty amongst young carers using specialised household income data from the Family Resources Survey / Households Below Average Income Survey using three years of pooled data.
- We demonstrate that the prevalence of child poverty amongst young carers can be robustly estimated using six indicators that are widely used for overall child poverty monitoring purposes (relative low income before and after housing costs, anchored low income before and after housing costs, low income and material deprivation; and severe low income and material deprivation).
- We show that time series analysis of trends is also possible. The analysis of the differential experiences of young carers in terms of their child poverty outcomes in the period following the financial crisis, economic downturn and onset of austerity illustrates the importance of separate identification, monitoring and reporting of young carers as a specific group within child poverty research and national child poverty monitoring exercises, and targeting this group within policy and practice.

Children in recent migrant families

- The study establishes that it is possible to identify dependent children living in recent migrant families and to make robust comparisons with children living in families where parents are UK-born, or long-term residents, using the Family Resources Survey / Households Below Average Income Survey. In addition, it is possible to distinguish between children whose parent(s) were born within the European Economic Area (EEA) and those outside of it (non-EEA).
- We show that robust estimates of the prevalence of child poverty amongst the children in recent migrant families are possible using three years of pooled data. This is possible for six child poverty indicators used in national child monitoring exercises (relative low income before and after housing costs, absolute low income before and after housing costs, low income and material deprivation; and severe low income and material deprivation).
- We highlight the potential for further and deeper analysis of factors that are associated with child poverty amongst children in recent migrant families, including household employment status, housing costs and parental nationality.

Children from Roma, Gypsy and Traveller ethnic minority groups

- The workstream on children from Roma, Gypsy and Traveller ethnic minority groups focussed on building new quantitative evidence on multidimensional disadvantage.
- The study establishes that children from Roma, Gypsy and Traveller ethnic minority groups can be identified using the Secure Microdata Files of the random sample of 10 per cent of households from the 2011 Census of England and Wales, accessed via the Secure Research Service (SRS) at the Office for National Statistics.
- Using this source, our findings illustrate that it is possible to build up quantitative evidence on outcomes amongst children from Roma, Gypsy and Traveller ethnic minority groups *within* three domains of disadvantage: the standard of living domain, the education domain, the health domain.
- In addition, we establish that it is possible to estimate multidimensional disadvantage amongst children from the Roma, Gypsy and Traveller ethnic minority groups *across* these domains and to make comparisons with the prevalence of multidimensional disadvantage amongst other children.

Children at risk of abuse and neglect

- The workstream aims to build new evidence on multidimensional disadvantage for children at risk of abuse and neglect, using multiple data sources. The study explores different definitions of abuse and neglect, and examines the potential for identification of these children using the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), as well as Children in Need (CIN), the Children Looked After (CLA) census data.
- Using CSEW responses to the adult self-completion questionnaire and household information on the number of children under 16, we estimate the headcount for children living in households affected by domestic abuse and drug use. We also show that linking adult data to that from the youth questionnaire enables the analysis of child-level outcomes for those who live in households with domestic abuse or drug use. The outcomes for children living in households with domestic abuse we explored were physical security (bullying, experience of violence and personal crime), education-related (truancy) and health (limiting long-standing illness or disability).
- Using CIN/CLA data, we examine the numbers and characteristics of those recognised by Children's Services to be at risk of abuse and neglect, including those who were considered at continuous risk of abuse or neglect (subject to a Child Protection Plan); those whose primary need at assessment was 'abuse or neglect'; and those considered to be at risk of domestic violence, drug or alcohol misuse at end of assessment. In order to examine overlaps / intersectionalities with the other focus groups, we provide estimates of CIN/CLA who are Roma, Gypsy and Traveller children; who are unaccompanied asylum seekers (CLA); and where young carer status is recorded as a risk factor at the end of assessment (CIN). In further exploratory work, we examine the potential for building up quantitative evidence on outcomes across for CIN/CLA children.

Broader lessons and implications for improving the data infrastructure

- The project illustrates the potential for tackling the phenomenon of data exclusion and building up evidence on missing and invisible groups through secondary data analysis. There is rich potential for extending this approach and applying this model to tackle the phenomenon of "data exclusion" more widely by building up quantitative evidence on additional groups of children and adults.

- The project findings focus attention on the importance of recent data innovations that support new and deeper analysis of outcomes for hitherto “invisible” children as well supporting new and improved headcount and population prevalence estimates, including new social survey questions, new identifiers within the census and new opportunities for analysis created by increased access to administrative data sets together with data linkages and data matching.
- Looking forward, further increased access to administrative data and associated linking/matching exercises would improve the data infrastructure for equality, inequality and human rights analysis, including in the context of analysing outcomes for vulnerable children.
- Specific recommendations regarding data development for the four focus groups are included in the body of the report.

Sample size and survey design

- An important lesson from the project is that data pooling techniques can to a certain extent be applied to overcome the limitation of small sample size. In the context of our analysis of income poverty outcomes amongst young carers and migrant children using the Family Resources Survey, annual sample size was found to be inadequate both from a data confidentiality/disclosure perspective (on which, see below) and from the point of view of statistical estimation. However, data pooling techniques enabled us to proceed with analysis and to overcome the limitations of small sample size to a certain extent.
- At the same time, we found that the trend towards complex survey designs (rather than simple random surveys) has particularly important implications in the context of research amongst vulnerable children. This design feature increases uncertainty around point estimates and these effects are particularly problematic in the context of research involving small groups. Whilst pooled sample size was adequate to support point estimates, the range of uncertainty resulting from the complex survey design correction was relatively wide. As a result, increases in child poverty amongst young carers over the period under observation that are intuitively large and substantial were not found to be statistically significant.
- Looking forward, we recommend that data providers take into account any implications for the analysis of vulnerable children when reducing sample size and departing from random samples.

Data security and the new data ethics environment

- The emergence of new data security and data ethics environment poses additional new challenges for researchers undertaking research on “invisible” children. Research often deals with small groups of children and deals with sensitive data in areas such as abuse and neglect. Therefore, a whole panoply of issues around confidentiality, identification and potential disclosure need to be addressed in undertaking research in this area.
- These developments have implications for research training, data access, data analysis, data management and resources. They provide new opportunities for researchers and research as undertaking data analysis under secure conditions opens up as a new and specialist area of research. However, relevant datasets and variables are increasingly likely to be accessed only under secure conditions. This has implications in terms of the time and resources required to maintain local secure environments and / or to travel to secure data environments; and staff costs in terms of ongoing training and management.
- Looking forward, data providers can help by making datasets and variables (including the variables needed to undertake complex survey adjustments) available through standard arrangements where there is no need to apply enhanced conditions. Funders can help by recognising the additional resources required to ensure compliance with the new and emerging data security and data ethics environment.
- ESRC funding for Safepods that will provide local access to secure microdata is an important step forward and could potentially eliminate the costs associated with repeated researcher travel to remote safe rooms in remote locations.

Priorities for future research and next steps in enhancing access to data

- Overall, there is rich potential for extending the approach adopted within this programme of research in the context of other groups of ‘invisible’ children and adults. The current focus on building up the data infrastructure for ‘invisible’ children should be maintained and taken forward by bodies such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Children’s Commissioner for England, supplemented where necessary by in-depth academic research projects where more in-depth analysis is required.

- The development and application of quantitative methods in equality, inequality and human rights analysis, including analysis of outcomes for “at risk” and “vulnerable” groups, should likewise be further developed and taken forward through a combination of public policy focussed and academic research. This includes taking forward the further development of techniques such as data pooling, data linking and matching, systematic disaggregation and intersectional analysis.
- A number of specific priorities for future research projects have been identified during the course of the project. Further details are provided within the body of the report. A further concrete proposal relates to the establishment of a data lab / web tool providing a single point of access to high quality and reliable data and research findings on missing and invisible children.

This is a summary of the overview report of the Nuffield Foundation funded research project, ‘Multidimensional child poverty and disadvantage: tackling “data exclusion” and extending the evidence base on “missing” and “invisible” children’. Further details of the project findings are provided in the full overview report and a series of underlying papers which can be accessed via our project website

(http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/case/new/research/child_poverty_and_disadvantage.asp).

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