Using Technology to Repurpose and Expand Ethical Research on Vulnerable Populations

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CASCW’s Minn-Link project uses state administrative data from multiple agencies to answer questions about the impacts of policies, programs, and practice on the well-being of children in Minnesota. State agencies that provide data work in partnership with CASCW to discuss and address these issues. The project serves as a research support for faculty and students at the University of MN.

Minn-Link produces reports that have implications for practice, policy, or both, and builds upon the work of other state agencies and university researchers. Findings of Minn-Link studies are also used to create training for child welfare professionals and are disseminated to local and national audiences.

Using Integrated Data in Minn-Link

Benefits:
- Cost-effective Research—Connecting existing databases can eliminate the need for collecting data from multiple sources (or developing multiple study-specific data sharing agreements) and recruiting participants, reduce research staff needed, and shorten project timelines
- Systematic Protection of Privacy to Understand Issues Affecting Vulnerable Populations—Data access is limited to de-identified data for study research personnel only
- Statewide Data—Use of existing statewide data allows for creation of matched comparison groups and state-level analysis

Limitations:
- Secondary Data—Data is limited to data collected by state agencies; data was not originally collected for research purposes and some data varies by jurisdiction
- Complex Data—Datasets are often very large and complex, requiring advanced data management and analysis skills

Research Process

1. Identify research topic/model
2. Identify available state agencies/agencies to request data
3. Begin with multiple data sources (state, school, etc.)

Research/Data Use

Dissemination

Research/Results

Example 1: Education Outcomes for Children in Out-of-Home Placement
Research Purpose: To explore the associations between out-of-home placement and educational well-being via rates of individualized education plan (IEP) utilization, school mobility, and MCA II achievement scores.

Results: A disproportionate number of children involved in child protection, especially those with out-of-home placement, received IEPs, changed schools, demonstrated lower proficiency on standardized tests of achievement.

Example 2: The Role of Supportive Housing in Homeless Children’s Well-Being: An Investigation of Child Welfare and Educational Outcomes
Research Purpose: To explore how supportive housing impacts children’s educational outcomes (i.e., proficiency on standardized tests of achievement) and child safety (e.g., accepted child maltreatment reports).

Results: Children in supportive housing had statistically higher math proficiency and a decreased level of accepted child maltreatment reports than their peers.

Access to Minn-Link Data

Interested in using Minn-Link data in your research? Contact Kristine Piescher, PhD., CASCW’s Director of Research & Evaluation, at kpiesche@umn.edu or 612-625-8169.