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The Nuffield Family Justice Observatory Data Partnership

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Background

Not enough is known about how the family justice system is working, the children and families using these services, and their wider outcomes beyond their involvement with the family court. The Nuffield Family Justice Observatory (FJO) Data Partnership, comprising a bespoke analysis platform hosted within the Secure Anonymised Information Linkage (SAIL) Databank and analytical teams at Lancaster and Swansea Universities, has been established to address this knowledge deficit.

Methods

Family justice data, from the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) in England and Wales, will be deposited in SAIL Databank. Data are acquired using a standardised split-file approach, stored in an anonymised format and made available to projects as linked data using a unique encrypted project anonymised linkage field. These data can be augmented with a wealth of available health, education and other governmental/social routinely collected datasets, and future data acquired from other sources, for a range of research projects.

Results

Cafcass Cymru data has been transferred to the SAIL Databank, and agreements to transfer the Cafcass England data are being finalised. Applications are now welcomed to use these data to enhance understanding of the family justice system and children and families involved with the family courts in public and private law. Access will be facilitated through the SAIL Databank, subject to relevant governance procedures.

Conclusion

We will discuss the rationale of the Nuffield FJO Data Partnership, and how it aims to a) increase capacity and capability of researchers and data scientists utilising family justice and other relevant administrative datasets, b) improve understanding about the family justice system using data from the Cafcass in England and Wales, c) demonstrate the complexities and value of data linkage, and d) assist future policy and practice development. It will also set out the support available from the partnership to those wishing to access and utilise family justice data.

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