Can a Mixed Methods Approach Help to Mitigate the ‘People Problem’ of Administrative Data for Evidence-based Policy Making?

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1.1 Research Context

- Mirroring trends in other European countries, Ireland is experiencing an acute housing crisis that has seen an unprecedented rise in the number of families presenting as homeless since 2014, particularly in the capital (see Figure 1). Yet, dedicated research on the distinct needs of families experiencing homelessness and the ways in which they move through and out of the homelessness service system has been very limited (Bassuk, 2007). As a result, familial dimensions of the homeless experience have been largely neglected within policy and service development throughout Europe (Baptista et al., 2017).

1.2 The Role of Admin Data

Led to a ‘data revolution’ in homelessness research

The development of longitudinal administrative data systems designed to collect client-level information on homelessness service use has advanced understanding of homelessness over the past 20 years (Culhane, 2016). Analyses of this data can reveal the temporal dynamics of homelessness and help inform the scale, nature and target populations for interventions.

Development of homelessness database in Ireland

Developed in 2008, the Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS) is a national shared database that generates longitudinal administrative data on those using State-funded homelessness services. PASS data can be linked with the Local Authority social housing list using a unique identification key. However, to date, no systematic analysis of family homelessness has been conducted using these data.

The ‘people problem’ of administrative data

Whilst valuable, administrative data are limited in that they are designed to measure service contact and not lived experience. Thus, they cannot speak to the full complexity of an individual’s homeless journey and, as a consequence, may yield an incomplete ‘picture’ of the housing and other support needs of homeless families. This, in turn, can be problematic in the context of longer-term programme and policy development.

1.3 About the Study

Using a sequential (explanatory) mixed methods design, this research seeks to examine families’ trajectories through and out of homelessness. The central aim is to integrate administrative and narrative data to advance understanding of the factors that conduct salient patterns of family homelessness, including experiences of short-term, recurrent and chronic housing instability.

2.1 Mixed Methodology

- Quantitative techniques will be used to characterise the population of homeless families in the Dublin region; identify ‘clusters’ of homelessness service use; and tease out causal mechanisms related to the temporal dynamics of family homelessness.
- Qualitative methods will then be deployed to contextualise/explain the statistical findings in more depth and examine experiential aspects of family homelessness that cannot be captured by the variables available in the administrative datasets.

2.2 Methods & Analysis

1. QUANTITATIVE

- Analyses of linked administrative datasets: Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS) + Local Authority housing list (2011-16)
- Ind. variables: Socio-economic status + personal characteristics
- Dep. Variables: Level and chronicity of homelessness
- Analysis: clustering, descriptive and inferential (SPSS)

2. QUALITATIVE

- Random stratified sampling strategy: 30 families grouped by whether they experienced short-term, recurrent or chronic homelessness (see 2.3 below)
- In-depth interviews

2.3 Qual Sampling Strategy

Full sample (PASS dataset)

Random stratified (X3) sample

Included

Refuse

Contacted by researcher

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5. References


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