AGORA Programme

Summary

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RESEARCH INSTITUTE(S): UNIVERSITEIT GENT / UNIVERSITÉ CATHOLIQUE DE LOUVAIN

CO-ORDINATOR: PROF. DR. MARIA DE BIE

PROMOTERS: PROF. DR. MARIA DE BIE
              PROF. DR. YVES ROSSEEL
              PROF. DR. JAN DE MAESENEER
              DR. SARA WILLEMS
              PROF. DR. THIERRY MOREAU
              DR. ISABELLE RAVIER

DATE : 230508

1. Introduction

On 1 October 2006, as part of the AGORA research programme of the Federal Science Policy and in response to a request from the Service for the fight against poverty, insecurity, and social exclusion the UGent and the UCL started up a research project into the relationship between living in poverty and the placement of children.

The aim of the Federal Science Policy's programme is *"the development, the support and the valorisation of socio-economic data in the possession of national institutions".[1]* As part of the research project 'Placement of children and poverty', the goal of the Agora programme quoted above was linked to the request from the Service for the fight against poverty, insecurity, and social exclusion to gain an insight into the relationship between poverty and the placement of children. The main goal of this research project is to develop a procedure that simplifies the linking of the different databanks rendering it practicable, in this specific instance with the goal of analysing the relationship between poverty and placement.

During the implementation this request for research it was decided to expand the concept of 'placement' to include all possible interventions by the Special Youth Help Services that are registered in the databanks of the three Communities. Our aim via the AGORA research project is to gain a more precise insight into the socio-economic background of children and adolescents who are the subject of an intervention by the Special Youth Help Services. To this end we will be studying which variables influence the likelihood of an intervention by the Special Youth Help Services.

The procedure that was established for the research of 'Placement of children and poverty', has made it possible to guarantee a longitudinal follow-up to the research. By repeating the procedure at different intervals, so that further attention can be paid to the momentary relationship between poverty and placement and also in order to gain an insight into the process of the target group over time.

2. Methodology

2.1. Description of the databanks

The main goal of the Agora project 'Placement of children and poverty', was to create a linking procedure between databanks to guarantee a longitudinal follow-up to the research. The following four databanks were linked: the databank of the administrative department of the Special Youth Help Services of the Flemish Community, the databank of the administrative department of the Special Youth Help Services of the French-speaking Community, The Datawarehouse Labour Market and Social Protection database and the data gathered for the publication of "Dynamic analysis of troubled neighbourhoods in the Belgian urban regions".[2] Datawarehouse data was linked to the databanks of the administrative departments of the Special Youth Help Services via the national registration numbers of the children and adolescents in question.   The data gathered for the publication of "Dynamic analysis of troubled neighbourhoods in the Belgian urban regions" was linked via the "statistical sector" variable.

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[1] http://www.belspo.be
[2] Please refer to the appendix 'Crossroads Bank for Social Security File'. You will find the documentation relating to the linked databanks.

Datawarehouse Labour Market and Social Protection gathers data relating to the whole of the population. By using this databank it is possible to make a comparison based on a number of selected background variables between the group of children and adolescents who have been the subject of an intervention and the sample group of children who have not been the subject of an intervention.

The data from the Flemish and the French-speaking administrative departments of the Special Youth Help Services have been linked to the Datawarehouse.

The research project covers three groups. A first group includes Flemish households with at least one family member having been the subject of a first intervention in 2005. This information was extracted from the BJ '96 databank. A second group includes the French-speaking households with at least one family member having been the subject of a first intervention in 2005. This information was extracted from the databank of the SIGMAJED administrative department.

The final group includes children and adolescents with no first intervention recorded in 2005. This information was taken from a random sampling of the Datawarehouse of 2.5%.

We are able to link the data for these three groups relating to the children and adolescents with data about their parents so that we are able to obtain information about the socio-economic background based variables such as the position on the labour market, salary, unemployment, disability, etc.

The linking procedure can be extended to include other databanks. The presence of at least one common piece of information is the only condition for this type of linking.

In order obtain a broader conceptualisation of the notion of 'socio-economic background' we opted to link the complete database to the data that was gathered for the publication of the "Dynamic analysis of troubled neighbourhoods in the Belgian urban regions" (2006) for the purposes of this survey. The linking procedure gave us more information about the neighbourhoods in which children and adolescents live. Basing ourselves on 22 indicators it was possible to assess the degree of social deprivation in the neighbourhood. To this end we looked at different aspects such as the average level of educational, housing quality, etc. This data only relates to the 17 urban regions[3], or, 56% of the total Belgian population.

2.2. Delimitation of the research universe

The research universe was delimited as follows: Only the children and adolescents who had been subject to a first time intervention by the Special Youth Help Services in 2005 were included in the research universe. In parallel with this decision data for 2005 from the Datawarehouse Labour Market and Social Protection was also called up. This meant that it was possible to ascertain the family situation when the children and adolescents were first the subject of an intervention and we were also able to use the most recent data from the Datawarehouse Labour Market and Social Protection.

For the Flemish Community this meant using the BJ '96 registration system, the old registration system and not Domino, the current registration system of the Special Youth Help Services in the

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[3] List of urban regions: Antwerp; Mechelen; Gent; Sint-Niklaas; Bruges; Ostend; Hasselt-Genk; Courtrai; Liège ; Verviers ; Charlerloi ; Mons ; La Louvière ; Namur; Tournai; Brussels; Leuven

Flemish Community. At the time when the file was handed in the data from BJ '96 had still not been transferred to the new Domino registration system.

2.3. Procedure

The different phases of the linking procedure were discussed in-depth in the document 'scenario for the linking procedure' and for this reason we will just provide a summarised description here.

In the first phase, we familiarised ourselves with the different databanks. The administrative departments involved were consulted on a regular basis. We also looked into the possibilities of expanding the database so that additional factors that might influence the likelihood of an intervention could be included. The expansion of the database to include the data gathered for the publication 'Dynamic analysis of troubled neighbourhoods in the Belgian urban regions' seemed to be the only possibility. By linking this databank, we were able to obtain data about the degree of social deprivation in the neighbourhood.

The second phase of the procedure involved putting together the file for the Crossroads Bank for Social Security. This file had to contain a general presentation of the research project as well as a listing of all the data from the different databanks that could be used with a view to providing an answer to the research question. At the beginning of May this file was presented to the Crossroads Bank for Social Security for approval by the Management Committee and the Sector Committee of Health and Social Security.

The third phase of this type of linking procedure includes obtaining the approval of the file by both committees and the presentation to the Committee for the Protection of Privacy. After obtaining this approval it is possible to draw up the contract between the Crossroads Bank for Social Security and all the players involved. After signing this contract the database is transferred and the research team is able to start analysing the data.

3. **Results**

3.1. Introduction

Before describing the results, a few important elements should be mentioned. A first important comment relates to the units for analysis that was not the same for the different databanks. The databanks of the Special Youth Help Services register children and adolescents as one unit for analysis. The Datawarehouse Labour Market and Social Protection register data for each member of the household and the "Dynamic analysis of troubled neighbourhoods in the Belgian urban regions" registers households as one unit for analysis.

The research team decided to work with the households as one unit for analysis. The data from the Datawarehouse was elevated to a higher analysis level by counting the members of a household in one specific category. When at least one household member belonged to a specific category, this household in question was counted as part of this specific category. Information about the position of the labour market is split up in the Datawarehouse for instance into four categories: employed, unemployed, not professionally active and others. This information is available at household member level. The information was elevated to a higher level by referring to households where at least one member of the household was employed, unemployed, etc. The

same principle was applied for disability. The statistical analysis was carried out according to this principle.

A second important comment relates to the relationship with the initial research question. This research project developed a procedure enabling a long-term analysis of the relationship between poverty and an intervention by the Special Youth Help Services. Because the definition of poverty changes over time, we chose not to define the concept of poverty beforehand and therefore not to fix it. An important goal in the research project is the correct identification of factors that influence the likelihood of an intervention by the Special Youth Help Services. By not delimitating these factors beforehand, we create the possibility of including all the different interesting factors (present or potential) in the survey. After identifying all the possible risk factors we can then ascertain to what degree these influential factors correspond to the definitions of poverty in force.

And finally it had also been decided from the outset that the data for the German-speaking Community should also be included in the research project. However, circumstances rendered this impossible. The German-speaking Community has no access to the national register and the transfer of the hard-copy files to an electronic databank would have been too time-consuming. This data refers to about 130 adolescents and is not yet available.
We are currently still looking for a solution in order to gain access to the national register. All the structural difficulties should normally be solved as quickly as possible so that we can ensure the participation of the German-language Community in the longitudinal follow-up of the research project.

3.2. Description of the research universe

A decision was taken to analyse the two Communities separately. On reason is that the data for the French-speaking Community relates to a selection of interventions while for the Flemish Community the analysis covers all the interventions. The data relating to the French-speaking Community only includes the following interventions: interventions in a non-residential setting, placement in a community institution, placement in a residential setting. Interventions such as orientation, supervision, etc. are not included therefore in the analysis of data for the French-speaking Community while these types of interventions are included in the Flemish database. For these reasons, it was impossible for the research teams to analyse the two Communities as a whole, as each of the databanks relates to a different research universe.
Moreover each of the Communities has a different reality. The differences in implementation procedures, registration, socio-economic context, infrastructures, are so great that it was deemed that they merited a separate analysis.

Within the Flemish Community the survey covered 3717 children between 0 and 18 years of age with a first intervention in 2005; 2193 boys (59%) and 1524 girls (41%).

In the French-speaking Community there were 3709 children with a first intervention in 2005. Again we refer to the selection of the interventions: only the placements in a residential setting, in a community institution and the non-residential interventions were included.
When both databases were linked to the Datawarehouse Labour Market and Social Protection we obtained information about the households of the children and adolescents in question. This information relates to a number of socio-demographic characteristics and to a number of socio-economic background variables. Moreover we now also have the same information for the random

selection that includes a number of children and adolescents and their households not having been the subject of a first intervention in 2005.

3.3 Identification of the factors that influence the likelihood of an intervention

Because of the difficult position of the Brussels Region it was impossible to keep the split between the French-speaking and Flemish Communities. This split as defined by the Special Youth Help Services is based on language. French-speaking children and adolescents are processed by the Youth Help Services of the French-speaking Community and Dutch-language children and adolescents are processed by the Special Youth Help Services of the Flemish Community. The Datawarehouse has no information about the mother language of the children and adolescents involved. When they live in Brussels, it is particularly difficult to attribute them to the Flemish or French-speaking community.

In the light of these difficulties we chose the following solution. The regions are split up based on the administrative districts. The Flemish administrative districts are attributed to the Flemish region and the same applies to the French-speaking administrative regions. The Brussels region is treated separately. This affects just a small group, but because of the specific socio-economic reality (nowhere in Belgium is the concentration of poverty so great) there is no problem justifying this decision.

The question about which factors increase the likelihood of an intervention by the Special Youth Help Services is a key element in this research project. By using a logistical regression we looked into the factors that influence the likelihood of an intervention. What is important to note here is that we always checked for other possible variables that might have an impact. This means that the effect of a significant predictor is always considered in the context of identical households for the other variables. When an effect is found therefore for a certain factor, this can be ascribed with confidence to that specific variable.

For the Flemish regions the following factors have been identified:

- Gender: boys have a significantly higher likelihood of being the subject of an intervention than girls.
- Age: the older the children the greater the likelihood of an intervention.
- Gender of the head of the households: when a woman is at the head of the household there is a significantly higher likelihood of an intervention. Further analyses reveal that this only applies to households with two parents. This trend is not confirmed among single-parent families.
- Number of members of a household: the greater the number of members of a household greater the likelihood of an intervention being made.
- Employment: the likelihood of an intervention being made is significantly lower in households where at least one member of the household works.
- Unemployed: the likelihood of an intervention being made is significantly higher in households where at least one member is out of work.
- Benefits: the likelihood of an intervention being made is significantly higher in households where at least one member is on benefits or receives financial assistance.
- Disability: the likelihood of an intervention being made is significantly higher in households where at least one member is disabled.

For the French-speaking regions, the following factors have been identified:

- Gender: boys have a significantly higher likelihood of being the subject of an intervention than girls.
- Age: the older the children the greater the likelihood of an intervention.
- Gender of the head of the household: for the French-speaking region the gender of the head of the household has no impact. More in-depth analysis however reveals differences between the types of households. Single-parent households, where the man is the head of the household have more likelihood of being the subject of an intervention. In households with two parents where the woman is the head of the household, the likelihood of an intervention being made increases. This difference is significant.
- Number of members of a household: the greater the number of members of a household greater the likelihood of an intervention being made.
- Employment: the likelihood of an intervention being made is significantly lower in households where at least one member of the household works.
- Unemployed: the likelihood of an intervention being made is significantly higher in households where at least one member is out of work.
- Benefits: the likelihood of an intervention being made is significantly higher in households where at least one member is on benefits or receives financial assistance.
- Disability: the likelihood of an intervention being made is significantly higher in households where at least one member is disabled.

The following risk factors have been identified for Brussels:

- Gender: boys have a significantly higher likelihood of an intervention than girls.
- Age: the older the children, the greater the likelihood of an intervention.
- Gender of the head of the households: households with a woman as the head of the household have a significantly higher likelihood of an intervention being made. More in-depth analysis reveals that this trend only applies to households with two parents. The trend is less pronounced among single-parent families.
- Number of members of a household: the greater the number of members of a household greater the likelihood of an intervention being made.
- Employment: the likelihood of an intervention being made is significantly lower in households where at least one member of the household works.
- Unemployment: the likelihood of an intervention being made is significantly higher in households where at least one member is out of work.
- Benefits: the likelihood of an intervention being made is significantly higher in households where at least one member is on benefits or receives financial aid.
- Disability: the likelihood of an intervention being made is significantly higher in households where at least one member is disabled.

The linking with the "Dynamic analysis of troubled neighbourhoods in the Belgian urban regions" revealed a strong relationship between the different indicators of social deprivation in neighbourhoods and the likelihood of an intervention. The more socially deprived the neighbourhood the greater the likelihood of an intervention being made by the Special Youth Help Services. This data only covers the urban regions.

This presentation of the results should be viewed with a great deal of caution as the data involves registration data from the Special Youth Help Services. This data is not collected with a view to carrying out socio-scientific research and it remains a fact therefore that a lot of essential information is lacking. The context and reality behind the decisions of the committee and the youth court, the implementation procedures of the different players involved is not taken into account here although this data is of crucial importance in any survey into the reality of the Special Youth Help Services.

4. <u>Limitations of the research</u>

4.1. Administrative databanks

Familiarising ourselves and working with administrative databanks did not always prove to be simple. These databanks are always created for administrative departments and often act as a system for financial registration but are not intended for socio-scientific research. This was observed both while in familiarising ourselves with the databanks as well as processing the data. In-depth familiarisation with the databanks, with regular discussions with the managers of the databanks is also recommended therefore.

One particularly important point is the question of the degree to which the administrative databanks are suitable for socio-scientific goals. The fact that the linking should be made via the registration number was contractually confirmed by the three administrative departments, and yet it seemed that only the Flemish Community recorded the national registration number of children and adolescents. The procedure for obtaining the national registration number for the two other Communities proved to be time-consuming and expensive.

A second consideration when using the administrative databanks is the lack of context. In the context of this specific research project there are a number of aspects that are lacking and that can not be extracted from the available data. The context of a decision whereby children and adolescents become the subject an intervention by the Special Youth Help Services is lacking for example. By using focus groups we can put the most important results into a context via the experiences of a few involved groups, but the fact remains that the context, the real situation behind the intervention is not present even though it is essential in order for us to provide an answer our research question.

A third consideration when using administrative databanks involves the difference between the actual and administrative situation. This applies in particular to Datawarehouse Labour Market and Social Protection where the difference between these two situations can be quite significant. The composition of the households was measured on 1 January. In other words, changes throughout the year were not registered.

The definition of households also deserves a mention. Households means everyone who lives at the same address. The gender and age of every member of the household was requested. This data provides an indication about the role of the parents, but we have no guarantees about it.

4.2. Duration of data storage

For this research project we chose to delete the data as soon as the research was completed on 31/07/08. The data will be deleted by the research team, but will be kept for the next ten years at the Crossroads Bank for Social Security. Storing the data for ten years at the Crossroads Bank for Social Security was essential in order to ensure the longitudinal follow-up of this project. In the interests of the scientific publication and other more in-depth statistical analyses, a storage period of up to six months after the end of the contract would certainly be useful.

4.3. Conceptualisation of the socio-economic backgrounds

At an individual level, the definition of the socio-economic background of the children and adolescents in question was created uniquely on the basis of information extracted from the Datawarehouse Labour Market and Social Protection. The data, which plays an important role in the socio-economic background of the children and adolescents, was based mainly on one aspect; namely the financial risks such as the parents' salary and their situation on the labour market. The definition of the socio-economic background of children and adolescents at an individual level is rather limited and one-dimensional therefore.

In terms of neighbourhood, this conceptualisation was expanded to include a number of variables such as the average educational qualification, average health circumstances, etc., the same number of indicators that were included in the 'Dynamic analysis of troubled neighbourhoods in the Belgian urban regions'.

In the section on 'Recommendations' you can read more about other possible expansions of the concept of 'socio-economic background'.

4.4. Absence of family allowance in income

Levels of poverty such as 60% of the average income are generally identified in the scientific research world. These levels are based on total income, including family allowance. Studies such as the EU SILC survey that provides a Europe-wide comparative survey, are based on total family income (including child allowance) and use poverty levels such as 60% of the average income.

The Datawarehouse Labour Market and Social Protection does not hold information about child allowance paid out. Only the status of the person (giving a right to, having a right to, and receiving benefits) and the payment period per child are included. This information only covers the files included in the central files of the RKW, RSZPPO and RSVZ (National Office for Family Allowances, National Social Security Office, Social Security Office for the Self-Employed) This does not include all the family allowance files due to the fact that a relatively large number of files that are handled by the government institutions themselves (Central Department for Fixed Expenses). An average calculation per household proved to be impossible because of the particularly wide variety in the amounts paid out (depending on which criteria were met).

This meant that there was a serious limitation therefore. Literature shows that family allowances for families below the poverty line constitute an important source of income. Given that family allowances are not included as part of the family income in this survey, this could give us a false picture of the reality.

For the longitudinal follow-up of this project we should definitely look for possible solutions to compensate for this limitation. For the national and European comparability of this survey, it is of particular important to be able to work with generally recognised poverty levels such as 60% of the average income. For this we absolutely must have an overview of total family income.

The same principle applies to the problems of debts. This information is not held in the administrative databases either when calculating income and again this can possibly give us a false picture of the reality.

5. Recommendations

We conclude this research report with a few recommendations relating to the longitudinal follow up to the survey. These recommendations involve possible databanks or extensions to the databanks currently used where a linking to the Agora database would add value to achieving the research results.

5.1. Expansion of Datawarehouse Labour Market and Social Protection

The Datawarehouse Labour Market and Social Protection has expanded considerably in recent times. Different sources of information have been added to the Datawarehouse since 2003 and these have also been documented extensively.
Several sources of information could be of great importance for the longitudinal follow-up of this research project.
The expansion of the Datawarehouse to include the data from the *Fund for Accidents in the Workplace'* and the *'Fund for Occupational Illnesses'* could be interesting for this survey. This would mean that we could partially include the 'health' aspect in the analysis. The increased risk of these families suffering from poverty has also been written up extensively in the literature.
From 2003 the data from the *Social Integration Programme* has also been included as a source of information in the Datawarehouse. This data could be of particularly crucial importance in this research project.
The current file will only allow us to check whether an individual receives replacement income or not but the possibilities are actually much greater: it is possible to make certain specifications and the exact amount of the replacement income paid out could be checked. The integration process has only just been completed and so it was too late to include these variables in the linking file.

More information about the expansion of Datawarehouse Labour Market and Social Protection can be found on the website of the Crossroads Bank for Social Security.

5.2. General socio-economic survey

The aim of the general socio-economic survey is to collect a large arsenal of information. Information about the level of education, health circumstances, employment situation are all included in it.
The general socio-economic survey comprises a personal questionnaire and a questionnaire about housing.   The personal questionnaire gathers information for each individual about their employment situation, health circumstances, civil status, educational level, etc.   The housing questionnaire is set up for each household and gathers information about the type of housing, the level of facilities, the surroundings, etc.

Both types of questionnaires could make an important complement to the data supplied by the Datawarehouse Labour Market and Social Protection. They offer a broader conceptualisation of the concept of 'socio-economic background' by including aspects such as health, housing and levels of education.
It was not possible to make the linking because of the absence of the national registration number in the socio-economic survey. Moreover the privacy law regarding this survey is very strict and it is particularly difficult therefore, to gain access to the results of this survey for scientific ends.
The problem caused by the absence of the national registration number – required in order to make the linking with the Datawarehouse and the Special Youth Help Services databanks of the three Communities – could be solved perhaps in the future. If it could be arranged that the

national registration number of the participants in the survey be requested directly for the next socio-economic survey, this survey could provide a particularly interesting source of information for this research project.

5.3. Databanks of level of education

Since the 2003 - 2004 school year secondary education diplomas that are awarded in the Flemish Community are registered systematically. However, there is no detailed reproduction available for the BUSO. The higher education diplomas that are awarded have been registered since 2001 - 2002. For the purposes of the longitudinal follow-up of this research project this databank could be of great importance with regards individuals. It is technically possible to link this databank to the Datawarehouse where the national registration number is available.
The target group for this survey will be included in the databank in a few years' time and it will then be possible to compare adults who have had contact with the Special Youth Help Services in their youth, based on the criterion of level of education, with adults who have never had any contact with the Special Youth Help Services.

The same applies to the databank that includes information on the level of education among the French-speaking Community. There is no mention here however of a fully developed registration system yet. The databank is still under construction and the final phase is planned for 2009 -2010. In the future, this databank could offer the same possibilities as the databank for the Flemish Community. It will be possible to make a comparative survey of the educational levels between the adults who have been the subject of an intervention by the Special Youth Help Services in the past and those who have never been the subject of an intervention by the Special Youth Help Services.

5.4. Surveys

Different surveys look at different aspects of the socio-economic situations of families. The *EU-SILC Survey* looks at the different indicators of poverty and social exclusion. It also focuses on non-monetary indicators. This would mean an extremely relevant extension of this survey into the relationship between the socio-economic background and interventions made by the Special Youth Help   Services.
The problem with this survey – and all other surveys – is that we suspect that the sample group would include an insufficient number of individuals from our target population. This under-representation of people in poverty in the different databanks leads us to conclude that carrying out surveys in order to obtain an answer to our research question is not feasible. In order to reach the decision that there is an over-representation of poor families in the Special Youth Help Services, it is necessary to work with a sample group, families that have never been in contact with the Special Youth Help Services. In order to compare these two groups, both groups need to be sufficiently great in number. We assume that the group 'having had an intervention by the Special Youth Help Services' would be too small within the context of the survey so that a valid comparison between both groups would no longer be possible.
The same also applies to other surveys. The *2004 Health Survey* could possibly also be an interesting source of information. It is generally acknowledged that health and socio-economic situations are strongly related. A survey into the link between socio-economic situation and interventions by the Special Youth Help Services could certainly be enhanced with information gathered from the health survey with a view to implementing the 'socio-economic situation' concept. The same limitations of the EU SILC survey also apply here and form a serious limitation for the practicability of this type of data gathering.

5.5. Variable 'statistical sector'

It would be of added value to the longitudinal follow-up of this survey if the variable 'statistical sector' could have been called up from the file of the Crossroads Bank for Social Security. This did not take place due to privacy reasons given that some sectors have less than 50 inhabitants, but the research team believes that this would be an important added value.

When combined with the tables per district (split up into statistical sectors) that are obtainable from the National Census Office of the department of Statistics and Economic Information, this could provide interesting information in terms of neighbourhoods.