My experience with administrative data

Catherine Stewart & Ruth Dundas
MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit
17 May 2016

Overview

- Sourcing data
- Data application process
- Data linkage & transfer
- Data cleaning
- Benefits of using linked data
- Final reflections
Example

The importance of secondary school education in the patterning of health outcomes in Scotland

Background

- Broad aim: Investigate how various health outcomes in Scotland are patterned according to educational status.

- Particular focus on educational attainment at school-leaving.

- Several ways in which education may influence health:
  - Better education can lead to better job opportunities and income.
  - Better education can improve knowledge of how to live a healthy life and have a better understanding of how certain behaviours can affect health.
Sourcing Data

- Health outcome data:
  - Hospitalisation and mortality records (ISD).

- Education data (??):
  - Scottish Longitudinal Study (SLS)
  - Obtain education data directly from Scottish Government

- Obtaining data from Scottish Government:
  - As with SLS, we would also only be able to access education data as far back as 2007 (due to data quality issues)
  - Could we gain access to pupil names to improve linkage to health data (SQA)?

Data Application Process (~2012/13)

1. Define specific research questions
   - Cohort and hence health outcomes restricted by availability of education data back to 2007 only.
   - Focus on
     - Mental health outcomes e.g. suicide/attempted suicide and psychiatric hospital admission as well as
     - Alcohol and drug-related deaths and hospitalisations
     - Accidents and assaults

2. Data applications
   - Three different data applications had to be made to the three different agencies providing data:
     - Privacy Advisory Committee (PAC) application to ISD to use health data and request linkage of previously unlinked datasets.
     - Data access application to Education Analytical Services (EAS) at the Scottish Government to access education data.
     - Application to Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) to access names of pupils for education and health data linkage.
Data Requested

- **Health data (ISD)**
  - General acute inpatient & day case discharges (*SMR01*)
  - Psychiatric admissions (*SMR04*)
  - Maternity inpatient & day case discharges for cohort member & any offspring of female cohort members (*SMR02*)
  - Deaths

- **Education data (Scot Gov)**
  - School attainment data for all school leavers
  - Pupil Census data
  - Attendance, absence and exclusion data
  - Destination information
  - School-level deprivation information (SIMD)

- **Other (SQA)**
  - Identifiers (including Scottish Candidate number, forename & surname, gender and DOB)

Variable Selection

- Applications to both ISD and Scot Gov required detailed lists of all variables that required for the research.

- Any variables requested at a later date may (or may not) have to go through another formal application process and be signed-off separately.

- **Sourcing education variables**
  - ScotGov (ScotXed) website - data specification documents for each survey
  - Administrative Data Liaison Service (ADLS) website

- **Sourcing health variables**
  - SMR crib sheets
Problems with the data (Received June 2013)

Major problems

- Health and education data did not appear to be referring to the same person when cross-checking on variables like gender and year of birth.

- ISD had sent an old version of the anonymised ID to ScotXed for them to attach to the education data.
Education data was very messy - inconsistencies within data - having to check for consistency within individuals for all variables (very time-consuming!!).

Data extraction problems - delete all education data (January 2014)!!
New (cleaner!!) dataset received end February 2014.

Minor Problems (some examples)

- Death records for individuals who had further records (health and/or education) after date of death.
  - Most of these death records had been linked to individuals who were multiple birth babies and the death record was actually for their twin: delete death record.

- Mismatch between education and health records based on gender/YOB cross-checks: full exclusion

- Attainment data where the date of award was after supposed date of school-leaving.
  - Keep the attainment record if the date of award within 1 year of school-leaving.
  - Assumed this would capture courses that had been taken at school, but had been awarded at a later date due to late submission, but would exclude any courses taken at college.
Benefits

- Large datasets
  - Rare outcomes

- Range of confounders

- Natural experiments
  - Causal relationships

Opportunities for Publications

- Inequalities in Perinatal outcomes

- Evaluation of the Health in Pregnancy Grant policy
  - NIHR Report due soon
  - 5 conference presentations

- Evaluation of the Healthy Start Voucher Scheme
  - Linking survey data to routine data

- Educational effects on health of young adults
  - Stewart CH, Leyland AH. The role of educational attainment in explaining the relationship between perinatal conditions and suicidal behaviour in young adults in Scotland: a prospective cohort study
  - Cohort profile paper
  - 4 conference presentations
Final Reflections: What I’ve Learned

- Linking previously unlinked data is a long process, but it can provide access to large, rich datasets.
- Document all the data cleaning decisions that have to be made and any cases that have to be excluded.
- Get in touch with data custodians sooner rather than later if data seem more ‘messy’ than expected.

Final Reflections: What could have been done better?

- Data custodians could have been better at suggesting further information that I would probably need e.g. continuous inpatient stay variable - chance conversation with colleague.
  - Having data agencies and ‘experts’ that know the data and what is available may help to overcome this.
Thank you

catherine.stewart@glasgow.ac.uk

ruth.dundas@glasgow.ac.uk