Parental social licence for data linkage for service intervention

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Government departments and public services collect information about families. Different data sources can be linked together and, through the application of algorithms, used to identify families for service intervention. Data linkage and predictive risk modelling can offer more efficient public services, to pre-empt any problems. But concerns have also been raised about security, consent, and public acceptance and trust – social licence.

The Parental Social Licence project (http://generic.wordpress.soton.ac.uk/parentdata/) uses a mixed methods research design to provide a multifaceted understanding of parental social licence for operational data linkage and analytics that can inform public understanding, policy development, and practices in the field of family intervention.

There are five consecutive workpackages in the project, using different methods. All our methods were conducted online because of pandemic requirements.

1. *Documents.* We analysed the content of texts from national and local government, data analytics companies, and advocacy groups. This method helped us to identify rationales for data linkage and analytics, predictive risk modelling, and family intervention. Findings from this method provided a grounding for subsequent workpackages.

2. *Survey.* We commissioned a representative, probability-based online and telephone survey of just over 800 parents of children aged 16 and under. This method helped us to ascertain the consensus about what is acceptable or unacceptable in relation to data linkage and analytics as a basis for risk modelling and intervention in family lives. Findings from the survey concerning differences between parents from different social groups contributed towards sampling in the next workpackage.

3. *Focus groups.* We conducted online focus groups with different eight different social groups of parents organised around gender, ethnicity, class etc. This method allowed us to examine how the parents articulated and negotiated their perspectives on operational data linkage and analytics, predictive risk modelling, and potential benefits or harms.

4. *Individual interviews*. We used online interviews to explore the specific experiences of 25 mothers and fathers who were engaged with family services interventions. This method gave us insight into their views on the data held about them, and the parameters of their social licence and bases for trust in operation data linkage and analytics.

5. *Integrating findings*. We brought the discursive, survey, collective and individual interview findings into dialogue to provide a comprehensive dynamic understanding of parental social licence for and trust in operational data linkage and analytics.

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Project outputs:
http://generic.wordpress.soton.ac.uk/parentdata/resources-and-outputs/