

SFI association

On the 27th November the research team (Mark Shevlin, PI; Jamie Murphy, CI; Daniel Boduszek, ECR) visited the Danish National Centre for Social Research (SFI). The SFI is responsible for conducting commissioned research in the area of welfare state policies and disseminates the results through the website, publishing reports, working papers, a quarterly magazine, and press releases.

We met with Dr Mogens Christoffersen who is an emeritus Senior Research Fellow at the centre. We originally met Dr Christoffersen while working on a Danish registry project with Professor Ask Elklit from the Psychotraumatology Research Centre at the Southern University of Denmark. The ESRC's "Encouraging the wider and more creative use of administrative data in the UK – the 'Administrative Data Liaison Service'" paper cited Dr Christoffersen's research as an example of state of the art use of administrative data based research. In 2015 Kleiner, Stam, and Pekari identified a study by Dr Christoffersen that they considered represented exceptionally powerful and creative use of administrative data

"To better understand the benefits and limitations of these usages, two case studies are presented below. The first one draws on a study entirely based on register data. We selected a Danish example to examine the potential of administrative data in an "optimal" setting, where exhaustive register data sources are available and can be matched together. The second case study draws on the Swiss context and illustrates the combined use of both survey and register data, an approach that is increasingly advocated by scholars, but which also faces important technical and ethical issues, which will be discussed later on."

Case study 1: Christoffersen et al. (2003), a study on suicide attempts among Danish children born in 1966.

This study, which was based purely on register data, aimed at assessing the risk factors that may explain suicide attempts of Danish children. Data on different aspects such as health, education, family dissolution, suicidal behaviour, substance abuse, criminality, and employment were investigated for some 84,765 children born in 1966 and their parents.

Analyses revealed some interesting findings, such as relationships between first-time attempts and parental psychiatric disorders, suicidal behaviour, violence, child abuse, and neglect. Those who suffered from psychiatric disorders or physical handicaps, as well as those who had been legally imprisoned, who were addicted to drugs, or who were jobless were also at higher risk of suicide attempts. However, the study also stressed a number of important limitations. Analyses included those who had been hospitalized following a suicide-attempt, therefore only representing a portion of the overall cases of suicide attempts. Those who did commit suicide were not included in the data. Turning to the factors that may explain suicide attempts, only serious cases would appear in the registers, for example when it comes to situations of child neglect. 'Soft data', such as psychological factors or personal events that may account for suicide attempts (like the failure to pass an exam or a sentimental break-up) are not measured in registers. The authors also noted that life events that occurred the same year as the suicide attempt could not be accounted for, as it was not possible to know what came first. Furthermore, young adults who had travelled to another country were absent from the registries. The study design also meant that immigrants and refugees were excluded."

The meeting with Dr Christoffersen was incredibly helpful as he has a lot of experience in dealing with administrative data. He has worked with the Danish National Prescription Registry. He described many of the potential pitfalls in coding prescription data and offered insightful and helpful suggestions.

The geographical mapping aspect of our study was something he was particularly interested in and has put us in contact with his colleague Dr Vibeke Jakobsen who has developed some interesting ways to construct 'neighbourhoods' based on geo-referenced data and administrative data.

Dr Christoffersen will be attending the June 2018 International Conference for Administrative Data Research. The project team will all be meeting at the conference to review the project outcomes and plan for future analysis, publications, and dissemination.



Daniel Boduszek – Jamie Murphy – Mark Shevlin