

Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study - Census 2011 beta test project

The effect of social & economic transitions on children & young people

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Background

Safeguarding the health, prosperity and wellbeing of children and young people is an effective means of improving population health throughout the life course. Better understanding the effects that the social environment can have on children and young people will help identify ways to mitigate harmful influences. Low familial Socioeconomic Status (SES) has been found to have a negative effect on child health, but studies have shown that this effect diminishes over time, especially where SES increases in adulthood. Changing social circumstances in childhood, such as marital breakdown, may also have an effect on the physical and mental health of young people. This project aimed to assess the feasibility of using linked Census data to study the influence of change in social and economic circumstances on children's outcomes.

The datasets

This project used data from the 2001 and 2011 Censuses, Land and Property Services (LPS), and health card registration information. Mental health, physical disability and educational attainment were ascertained for people aged 18 and under in 2001. Living arrangements and housing tenure in 2001 and 2011 were obtained from Census data about the household. For home owners, house value (fixed at 2005 prices) was used to indicate relative affluence.

Findings

- For those experiencing no change in circumstances, children living in rented accommodation had poorer mental health, physical health, and educational outcomes than those in owner occupied homes. There was a trend for better educational performance with increasing house value, but less of a gradient for health outcomes.
- For those experiencing downward transitions, greater downward shifts were associated with poorer mental health. The gradient was less marked for physical health, and there was no gradient for educational attainment, unless the family moved into rented accommodation.
- For those experiencing upward transitions, moving out of rented accommodation was associated with better outcomes. Further upward moves into higher value homes had little effect; in the case of mental health was sometimes associated with poorer outcomes.

Conclusion

The NILS 2011 link provides detailed information on health and educational outcomes for young people, and also gives the demographic, social and economic 'location' of young people at risk of poor outcomes. These preliminary findings will feed into ongoing work of a knowledge exchange group involving the ICCR, NI Children's Commissioner, Parenting NI, Family mediation NI, and the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

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