

TROUBLED FAMILIES PROGRAMME ESSAY

STUDENT ID: 11340063

The Troubled Families Programme (TFP) was an initiative run by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), all 150 upper tier Local Authorities and their partners, to help and support families who are dealing with a variety of issues, including worklessness, poor school attendance and attainment, mental and physical health problems, crime and anti-social behaviour, domestic violence and abuse, and children who are deemed as in need of help. The goal of the programme is to provide better value for taxpayers by lowering the demand and dependency of these complex families on expensive reactive public services. To gauge progress towards service transformation, the programme's evaluation tracks staff experience, evaluates programme outcomes for up to five years following intervention, and assesses the cost-benefit ratio of the interventions. Local authorities use the evaluation results to inform future service development and improvement efforts during the programme's duration. [\[1\]](#)

MHCLG ensures that the public money is used to best effect by understanding how well the programme is working. Local Authorities provides information about all the families across England who are supported by the programme to MHCLG. The information collected is solely used for research by the Office of National Statistics (ONS), commissioned by MHCLG. Prior to sending the data, the Local Authorities de-identify the data by removing all personal identifiers of the families and sends the data in a secure method to the ONS. Only a limited group of researchers at the ONS, selected after extensive security checks, have access to the received data. The primary objective of the research is to examine the programme's long-term effects and benefits on families. The information that MHCLG collects and shares for research purposes complies with data protection laws. [\[2\]](#)

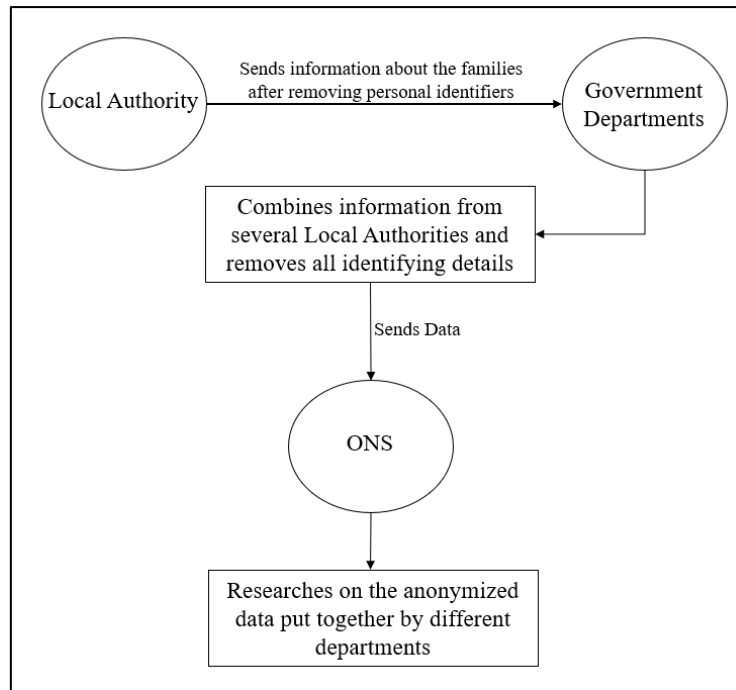


Figure 1: Data Flow Diagram of the Troubled Families Programme

Data security and anonymity is of high importance in this programme. It is therefore necessary to carefully assess any risks that may arise for the families participating in the programme before granting academic researchers access to the Troubled Families dataset for deeper analysis. Considering the metadata provided, composite variables that include gender of the child (gender), year of birth of the child (yob), the order in which the child was born (sibling_order) and the child's age at the time their family received a TFP intervention (age_at_tfp) can pose a risk to re-identifying the child and thereby re-identifying the family. The composite variable including number of fixed term exclusion episodes the child has had prior to the first Child Protection (CP) intervention (ftex_eps), the total number of days that a child spent on fixed term exclusion prior to CP intervention (ftex_duration) and the child's age when they had their first fixed term exclusion (age_first_ftex) can also pose a risk for re-identification, thus breaching confidentiality.

Analysis on the metadata also gives information regarding mental health and drug abuse in the families. This information should be handled cautiously as they are extremely sensitive and raises ethical consideration. Variables like mhda_eps_pre_cp and age_at_mhda gives information regarding mental health and drug abuse. Information related to crime is also present in the dataset which can lead to unintentionally stigmatizing certain families or communities. There can be cases where home schooled students might get labelled for not

getting education because they are not on the school roll and may be considered as ‘missing’. Such information can target children who belonging to this vulnerable category. [\[3\]](#)

During the sharing process, the data may be exposed to hacking, illegal access or other security breaches. The data may be used by academic researches for unexpected purposes, like unjust policies or discriminatory practices. Without taking into account how sensitive the data is, academic researchers may also share or publish their findings, increasing the risk of confidentiality violations or other misuse. Noncompliance with legal requirements when sharing data could result in legal ramifications and regulatory penalties.

It is crucial to put mitigation plans into action in order to reduce these risks. As an addition to the original plan, the new data sharing plans must be presented to the families enrolled in the programme for their consent. Strong anonymization strategies must be employed to lower the possibility of re-identification, possibly by using statistical techniques, encryption or aggregation. Additionally, by restricting the amount of detail in the data that is shared for research, can reduce the risk of re-identification. Researcher guidelines are to be put into place, with a focus on how to present results in a way that minimises harm and steers clear of reinforcing negative stereotypes. The risks to data security can be decreased by enforcing stringent data security measures, such as access control, encryption and secure data transmission protocols. Clear definitions of the extent and intent of data usage should be included in agreements with researchers. To make sure that the research is in line with intended goals and societal values, ethical guidelines and review procedures need to be put in place. Lastly, make sure that all data sharing procedures adhere to pertinent privacy and data protection laws, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Navigating the terrain of sharing the Troubled Families Programme dataset with academic researchers demands a conscientious and ethical approach. Robust mitigations are imperative, given the range of risks identified, which include privacy concerns and stigmatizing segments of society. The goal is to achieve a careful balance between promoting research and protecting individual privacy through careful anonymization, informed consent procedures and strict security measures. Through the implementation of these mitigations, stakeholders collaborate to create an ethical research environment that upholds individual rights, promotes data integrity and makes a significant contribution to interventions for families experiencing difficulties. In addition to guarding against potential dangers, this proactive and moral approach fosters a research environment dedicated to responsible data use and societal well-being.

REFERENCES

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