

MENTAL HEALTH AND THE UK WELFARE SYSTEM: INITIAL RESULTS FROM A NOVEL DATA LINKAGE

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Background:

Mental disorders are one of the prominent health reasons of sickness absence and permanent occupational disability. However, large-scale, individual level data sets that can be used to interrogate the complex interrelationships between work, welfare and mental health are non-existent in the UK.

Aims:

To describe the process of establishing a unique data linkage between mental healthcare records from the South London and Maudsley (SLaM) NHS Foundation Trust with benefits records from the Department for Work and Pensions. To provide an overview of the profile of patients who were successfully linked and their benefits receipt over time.

Methods:

448,404 IDs of patients who accessed secondary mental healthcare services at SLaM were sent to the DWP, including personal identifiers. Data from SLaM covered years 2007-2019, whereas data from DWP covered years 2005-2020.

Results:

Despite a high linkage rate of 93%, certain patient groups were less likely to be linked, such as women, those from a racial and ethnic minority background and younger patients. Four in five patients had received benefits at some point over a 15-year period, with many of them receiving unemployment related or income replacing disability benefits.

Conclusions:

This novel data linkage is the first of its kind in the UK to demonstrate the use of routinely collected mental health and benefits data. This data source provides opportunities to provide much needed high-quality evidence that can be used to inform public health and welfare policies, as well as mental healthcare service delivery at a local, regional and national level.