



Ministry of Justice Data First: Cross-Justice System Linked Dataset Research Priorities

ADR UK Research Fellowships 2024

Background

Many people in our society have complex and multiple needs. They are likely to interact with a range of public services, from health and social care to housing and welfare through to the justice system. While the government collects a large amount of data as the public interacts with these services, it is vastly underused. Understanding these populations, their needs, and how they interact with public services over time is vital if we are to improve outcomes. Robust data is central to this, and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has committed to using it more effectively to enhance the evidence for policy and practice.

Data First is an ambitious data-linking, academic engagement and research programme led by the MoJ and funded by ADR UK. Data already shared under Data First has linked criminal justice administrative datasets held by MoJ and its executive agencies; from the start of cases in the magistrates' courts and Crown Court through to time spent in custody and under the supervision of the probation service.

About the dataset

The latest release from Data First is the creation of a cross-justice system linked dataset, which connects users of the civil and family courts in England and Wales with users of the criminal justice system for the very first time. It will deliver vital evidence to better understand people's journeys across different jurisdictions of the justice system and the impact this has on outcomes.

For example, it will enable researchers to look at both adults and children involved in resolving family issues such as divorce, child arrangements, and adoption through the courts and whether they also appear in criminal or civil cases, such as money claims, damages, possession and eviction. People involved as both claimants and defendants, including tenants and landlords, can be linked to family and criminal cases.



Research themes

To date, ADR UK Research Fellows have used the Data First linked datasets to explore themes such as serious and organised crime heard before the Crown Court, disproportionate outcomes by ethnicity, the links between social care, education and offending, the effectiveness of enforced alcohol abstinence orders, and domestic abuse in the family courts. More information on these can be found on the [ADR UK website](#).

The cross-justice system linked dataset allows researchers a unique opportunity to study interactions and journeys across the justice system. We welcome applications exploring policy-focused questions based on the following themes. Other research questions are also welcomed providing you can evidence policy-relevance. Please see the [MoJ Areas of Research Interest \(2020\)](#) which sets out the department's evidence priorities.

1. What links are there between people's cases in the civil and family courts, and their interactions with the criminal justice system? For example, people involved in civil disputes as well as criminal court cases. Or people with criminal charges of child or domestic abuse and involved in family court cases, such as making contact arrangements with children.
2. How can we better understand how problems interact and reinforce each other, and how people move through different courts across the system as they attempt to resolve them? For example, the impact of parental imprisonment or criminal offending on family cases, or the likelihood of eviction or housing repossession actions following time spent in prison and the impact of the use of short-repeated sentences.
3. Who are the 'repeat' users across the justice system? Does involvement in other areas of the justice system influence criminal (re-)offending? What works to enable effective outcomes across the justice system and reduce (re-)offending? For example: are some children in family court cases at an increased risk of (early) criminal offending compared to the general population? Are certain family court processes or outcomes associated with a lower risk of children becoming involved with criminal justice?
4. How do individuals in the justice system vary and compare across the courts in the justice system? For example: differences in protected characteristics or socio-economic/demographic backgrounds. How far do user populations overlap between civil, family and criminal justice, and how similar or different might their needs be?



Research proposals may either take an overview, or focus on a more specific question relating to one or more of these themes, for example based on a specific user group or case type.