The Public Services Programme
Quality, Performance & Delivery

Impacting on Quality of Life:
Where can Public Services Organisations Make a Difference?

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Background

The declared aim of public services is to improve citizens' quality of life. But despite much talk of 'impact', little is known about the degree to which public service organisations (PSOs) can influence specific quality of life (QoL) measures, especially those outside their main sphere of influence. For example, do Local Authorities have any influence over variations in health outcomes?

In most public sector service areas, administrative organisations are arranged in a hierarchical manner with regional organisations at the upper levels (e.g. strategic health authorities, SHAs), lower-level organisations (e.g. primary care trusts, PCTs) nested within their boundaries, and smaller geographical areas below these. This project examines the geographical variation in QoL measures at different hierarchical levels in order to shed light on the potential influence of PSOs.

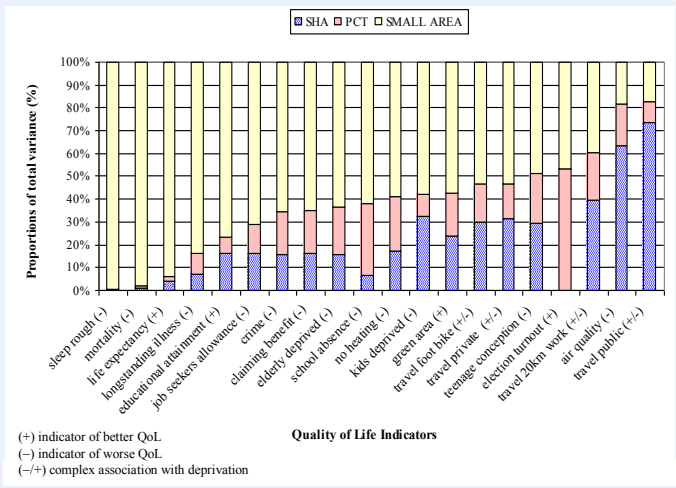

Figure 1 How much variation in quality of life indicators is found at higher level SHAs, PCTs and small areas (controlling for need variables and PCT performance indicators)

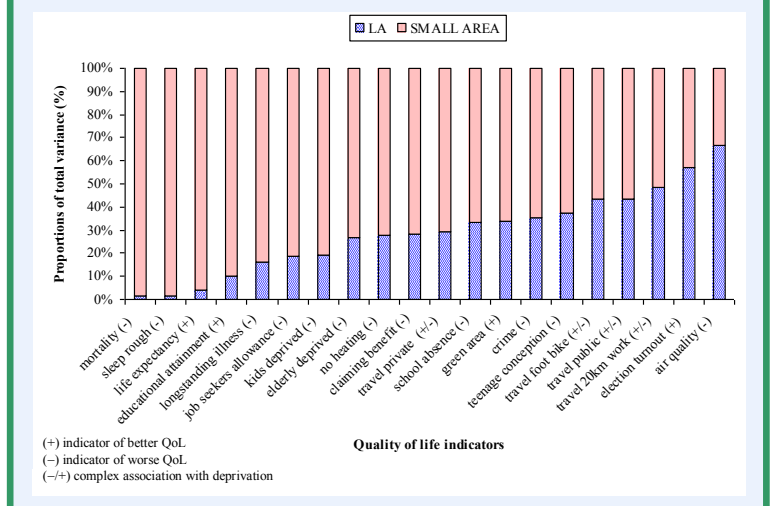

Figure 2 How much variation in quality of life indicators is found at higher level Local Authorities (LAs) and small areas (controlling for need variables and LA performance indicators)

What We Did

- We assembled a database of quality of life measures in England proposed by the Audit Commission covering areas such as safety, housing, health, education, and transport, measured at "small area" level. We added data on deprivation (to measure 'needs' of the local population) and on the performance of PSOs.
- We used advanced statistical methods to examine the variation in quality of life measures at different hierarchical levels. Our approach took account of potential interactions between QoL measures and hierarchical levels.

Findings

- Some indicators have a large variation at small area level (indicators on the left of Figures 1 and 2) but for others, most of the variation appears at the higher levels (indicators on the right of Figures 1 and 2).
- Geographical variation exists for PSOs on QoL measures beyond their traditional domains, providing support for the notion of partnerships working across sector boundaries.
- The results suggest that the organisational level at which we find large variations is the level at which PSOs may have most influence over quality of life.
- There is clearly scope for PSOs at higher levels to have an important role in influencing quality of life. However, the large variation found in many QoL indicators at small area level is also important. Whilst there are no PSOs with responsibility for quality of life at this level, it indicates the importance of policies that operate at neighbourhood and community level.

Aims

We investigated the influence of PSOs on aspects of quality of life in England by:

- considering how far PSOs can influence the quality of life of citizens across a range of measures both within and outside their official jurisdiction;
- examining the degree to which factors outside the control of PSOs (such as the specific needs of a particular local population) influence quality of life outcomes;
- investigating at which level in the organisational hierarchy there appears to be most scope to influence quality of life.

Most variation at small area level	Fig 1, 2 indicator
Standardised mortality ratio	mortality
Average points score Key Stage 4	educational attainment
Percentage of people living rough	sleep rough
Deprivation score for children	kids deprived
Life expectancy at birth	life expectancy
Area of green space per head	green area
Most variation at PSO level (i.e. PCTs, SHAs, LAs have most influence)	
Percentage of population travelling to work by public transport	travel public
Percentage of population travelling over 20km to work	travel 20 km work
Election turnout	election turnout
Combined air quality indicator	air quality
Teenage conceptions	teenage conceptions
Deprivation score for crime	crime

Table 1 Summary of 6 quality of life indicators which consistently across all model specifications have the most variation explained at each level

Find out more...

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