

POLICY BRIEF 2

Étude Longitudinale Du Développement Des Enfants Du Québec (QLSCD)



1 SUMMARY

This case study has been developed for the COhort cOmmunity Research and Development Infrastructure Network for Access Throughout Europe (COORDINATE) Horizon 2020 project. It provides evidence of how longitudinal studies on child wellbeing can affect policy, and is thus informative about the invaluable role of these longitudinal studies in informing how policies addressing children and young people's wellbeing should be designed.

The case study is of the *Étude Longitudinale du Développement des Enfants du Québec (QLSCD)*, a cohort survey jointly led by the Statistical Institute of Québec and the QLSCD scientific committees. QLSCD gathers data from more than two thousand children, from birth until they transition to adulthood, at ages 25-26. Researchers collected general and age-specific data related to children, their parents, and their home and school environments. They explored physical and emotional wellbeing, as well as academic achievements and common adolescence-related matters. These data allow policymakers to develop informed policies contributing to children's wellbeing. This policy brief presents QLSCD's impact on children's harmonious development through Québec's childcare educational services.

QLSCD data contributed to the formulation of the last (2019) programme of the Family Ministry of Québec on childcare educational services. The programme contains guidelines aimed at educational childcare professionals to ensure they can deliver services that benefit children based on the latest theoretical developments and empirical findings in the field of children's wellbeing. QLSCD data provided evidence about the importance of ensuring children's sleep needs are met and developing their ability to go to sleep autonomously (selfsoothing). The programme also stresses the importance of fostering respect for family diversity citing QLSCD data about the significant share of children having experienced family reorganization.



¹ Québec Longitudinal Study of Child Development

2 INTRODUCTION

Growing Up In Digital Europe (GUIDE) is a proposed European longitudinal survey on children and young people's wellbeing. The survey is currently being developed through the COhort cOmmunity Research and Development Infrastructure Network for Access. Throughout Europe (COORDINATE) project, which is led by the Policy Evaluation and Research Unit (PERU) at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) in the UK.

The aim of GUIDE is to provide deep, insightful, comparative, and longitudinal data on the wellbeing and experiences of children and young people across Europe. With such data, researchers, governments, and other relevant stakeholders might better understand – and take steps to improve – the life chances, outlook, happiness, and wellbeing, of children and young people.

To understand whether and how GUIDE might have such an impact, researchers from the University of Bologna (UniBo) and MMU have developed a series of Policy Briefs. These examine policy impacts that longitudinal surveys have delivered in the past, in a range of contexts throughout the world. They explore how and in what ways these surveys have affected government policies, by asking three important questions:

1. How did the survey affect policy? Did survey analysis directly lead to new or changed policies? Did it contribute to wider discussions on the need for policy change?
2. What type of knowledge or insight did the survey provide? Did the survey provide insight into social problems? Or did survey evidence show which policy interventions worked and which ones did not work? or did they provide insight into how to make policies more effective?
3. Was the survey useful to evaluate the policies that were implemented? Is there any evaluation or other research evidence which shows that implemented policies were effective and had positive effects in the ways intended?

These impact case studies provide valuable insight into the policy and wider impact of longitudinal surveys.

² The project is funded under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 101008589.

3 THE CASE STUDY

QLSCD is a multi-disciplinary longitudinal study on children's development that investigates the life of approximately 2 thousand children born in Québec in 1997 and 1998 (2.2% of the total births). The study followed the children until 2023.

The study was conducted in four phases. Several socio-economic variables were examined in all the phases, with each focusing on age-specific issues. The first phase took place between 1998 and 2002. Researchers collected data mainly about possible determinants of children's future academic achievements and social development. This included the functioning of the family, the pregnancy experience, as well as the children's and parents' health. The second phase took place between 2003 and 2010, when children were between 6 and 12 years old. The study focused on primary school experiences. The third phase lasted from 2011 to 2015.

Researchers explored issues related to adolescence, such as smoking, while also keeping track of academic performance. The fourth and last phase concerned the years up until 2023. For the first time in the study, researchers gathered data about adolescents' stress, mental health, and suicidality (Orri et al., 2021).

During the first years, data were mainly provided by parents and additional insights came from teachers and research assistants. Data were also gathered through different ageappropriate tasks. The children started filling out questionnaires after their 15th birthday. QLSCD's main financial partners are the Lucie et André Chagnon Foundation, the Statistical Institute of Québec, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of the Family, the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Solidarity, the Robert-Sauvé Research Institute for Occupational Health and Safety, the Sainte-Justine University Hospital Center, and the Québec Ministry of Health and Social Services.

QLSCD findings contributed to fostering debate in Québec on children's wellbeing and influenced policymaking in different areas. In this policy brief, we focus on its contribution to the development of ministerial guidelines for children's educational services, so that they can contribute to children's harmonious development from several points of view. QLSCD constitutes an example of how longitudinal studies provide a valuable and unique source of empirical evidence, which governments can use to take informed decisions on how to reach broader policy goals.



³ The last planned data collection was successfully completed in August 2023.

⁴ The complete list of financial partners can be found at: https://www.jesuisjeserai.stat.gouv.qc.ca/equipe_partenaires/_partenaires.html

4 POLICY IMPACT

The 2019 programme for the educational childcare services

In 2019, the Family Ministry of Québec published the latest version of its programme for educational childcare services : “Accueillir la petite enfance” (Government of Québec, 2019). These services are dedicated to children between the age of 0 and 5. This is the third version of the programme, which was previously published in 1997 and 2007. The programme is complementary to pre-school education programmes dedicated to children of age 4 and 5

The programme contains guidelines for educational child services based on rigorous scientific evidence in the field of children’s wellbeing. It aims to allow these services to contribute to the harmonious development of children. It presents both theoretical explanations and practical advice. QLSCD is one of the many sources the programme is based upon, starting from the recognition that poor quality educational services negatively affect children’s development (Japel et al., 2005). These guidelines are used by each childcare educational service to develop its educational programme, granting the flexibility to adapt to specific local contexts.

The programme focuses on children’s development from several perspectives: physical, cognitive, linguistic, and social. As far as physical development is concerned, QLSD data contributed to the programme finding that sleep during the day benefits children in many aspects of their mental, physical, social, and emotional health (Petit et al., 2010).

The programme encourages educational professionals to accommodate children’s sleeping needs. Citing QLSCD data, it also draws attention to the importance of developing the children’s capacity to self-soothe:

“According to the Longitudinal Study of Québec Children’s Development, a large majority of children who have difficulty falling asleep at night or who wake up frequently during the night have not developed autonomy in relation to their sleep; they have not learned to self-soothe.” (pg. 105)”

Given this evidence, the programme argues that educational services should help and actively encourage children to develop this capacity. The programme suggests involving parents to get insights into the children’s sleeping habits. QLSCD data also showed a positive statistically significant correlation of sleeping difficulties with low income, depression, and separation anxiety (Petit et al. 2008). Another important contribution from QLSCD data is related to the field of family diversity. The programme stresses the importance of respecting and accepting the different types of families that children come from, as well as their different values and habits. It argues that different socioeconomic and sociocultural characteristics are a richness for educational childcare services. It highlights the importance of this issue in present-day Québec citing QLSCD-based estimates revealing that 25% of children under the age of 6 have experienced “family separation of reorganisation” (Desrosiers, 2010).

⁵ Services de garde éducatifs à l’enfance (SGEE)

⁶ Supporting early childhood

5 CONCLUSION

Among the longitudinal surveys on children's wellbeing, QLSCD is significant for its broad scope and long-term approach. It followed more than 2,000 children from birth to the ages of 25 or 26. It studies a range of interconnected themes which are important in their own right and as determinants of children's future outcomes. Topics covered include the child's economic conditions, education, family structure, healthcare, physical activity, psychology, and schooling. This enables researchers to investigate the growth and development of children across several dimensions, and to have impacts on a range of policy fields.

This policy brief has illustrated the contribution of QLSCD data in shaping childcare and educational services. It has been used as evidence to develop guidelines for these services, published by the Ministry of Family of Québec. QLSCD data has highlighted the important role performed by childcare education services for children's development. It has been used to promote the importance of meeting children's sleeping needs, and in developing an environment that is supportive of different types of family.

This example shows how a Europe-wide longitudinal cohort study such as GUIDE could be used to help future European policymakers spot socio-economic trends affecting European children and their families and inform these same policymakers on how to develop policies to address these issues. It also shows how a study like GUIDE could provide valuable inputs to formulate European-wide guidelines that can be adapted to national-specific contexts.



6 REFERENCES

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