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Extract from Rigsrevisionen's report on

the basis for documenting the effect of social interventions

submitted to the Public Accounts Committee



1849
147.281
237
1976
114.6
22.480
908

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1. Introduction and conclusion

1.1. PURPOSE AND CONCLUSION

1. This report concerns the Danish Ministry for Children and Social Affairs' (Ministry of Social Affairs) efforts to ensure that data available from Danish national statistics databases provide an adequate basis for documenting the effect of social interventions.

In the context of social intervention, effect is defined as a change in the citizen's circumstances that can be ascribed to the intervention. Therefore, documenting the effect of social interventions requires collection of data on the citizen's social problems, characteristics and circumstances. This information must then be combined with data on the social services provided to the citizen, the outcome for the citizen and any parallel or future interventions planned for the period under review. Having knowledge of the effect of social interventions is crucial for ensuring that the citizens are offered the services that will have the greatest positive impact on their lives. Knowledge of the effect of social interventions can also help the government and municipalities prioritise social spending on the most effective interventions, and thereby achieve the most efficient use of resources.

2. Over the years, changing governments have had focus on the need to identify and develop more knowledge about the most effective social interventions. Since 2006, the governments of the day and the Danish national association of municipalities' (KL) annual agreements on the economy of the municipalities have reflected their shared ambition to work toward better documentation of the effect of social interventions.

3. The study was initiated in February 2016 and flows from findings made in connection with Rigsrevisionen's previous studies in the area and several internal analyses and reports by the Ministry of Social Affairs. This material demonstrates that producing exact statements, updated statistics and analyses concerning social services and interventions, broken down by social group, continues to present difficulties. Particularly the topicality and quality of existing data are causing problems.

NATIONAL STATISTICS

The Danish municipalities are by law required to report social data to the national statistics databases like, for instance, the database on children in care.

Being addicted to heroin is an example of a *social problem*, the *characteristics of a citizen* could be his/her age or education, the *circumstances of a citizen* could refer to his/her network, i.e. family and friends that can provide support to the citizen.

4. The purpose of the study is to assess whether the Ministry of Social Affairs has ensured an adequate basis for documenting the effect of social interventions. The report answers the following questions:

- Has the Ministry of Social Affairs provided a framework that facilitates systematic reporting of data from the municipalities to the national statistics databases?
- Has the Ministry of Social Affairs supported work procedures that ensure the reliability of national statistics data?
- Has the Ministry of Social Affairs ensured that national statistics data provide the basis for developing knowledge to document the effect of social interventions?

CONCLUSION

It is Rigsrevisionen's assessment that the Ministry of Social Affairs has not, to the extent required, ensured that national statistics data provide a basis for documenting the effect of social interventions. This is not considered satisfactory by Rigsrevisionen when taking into account that changing governments for the past ten years have shared an ambition to achieve just that. Knowledge about the effect of social interventions will make the municipalities better equipped to deliver the right social services to the citizens. To this should be added that evidence-based social policy is also associated with potential cost savings.

In order to procure a sufficient basis for documenting the effect of social interventions, the Ministry of Social Affairs must specify the type of data needed, collect the data and assure the quality of social data provided by the municipalities. In the next phase, the data should be made available through the relevant national statistics databases and used to carry out analyses of effect. It is essential that the ministry, to the extent possible, uses existing data to document the effect of social interventions irrespective of any issues with the quality of data. Active application of data can contribute to enhancing the data quality. The fact that the ministry has not used data from the national statistics databases to develop knowledge of the effect of social interventions is not considered satisfactory by Rigsrevisionen. Rigsrevisionen notes that the ministry has not developed any plans or strategies concerning how and the extent to which the ministry intends to use data for documenting the effect of social interventions. Rigsrevisionen finds that the ministry should use data to carry out analyses of the effect of social interventions. In order to be able to do that, the ministry needs to establish and clarify the definition of the type of analyses that can document the effect of social interventions.

The study shows that collecting and reporting data to the national statistics databases have caused problems. The municipalities are responsible for registration and reporting of data on the citizens and the social services they receive. It is the Ministry of Social Affairs' responsibility to ensure that data are being collected, made publicly available through relevant national statistics databases and used to develop knowledge about the effect of social interventions. It is also the ministry's responsibility to address problems relating to the collection of data across municipal borders, but the ministry has no authority to implement changes in the municipalities' practice of registration or IT systems. Rigsrevisionen recognises that the fact that the ministry has no power to impose sanctions on the municipalities can make it difficult for the ministry to ensure that the municipalities fulfil their reporting obligations. The ministry has issued a draft bill for consultation that calls for improved options to follow up on and sanction the municipalities in the event of repeated omissions to report data to the national statistics databases.

The study also shows that the Ministry of Social Affairs has not established adequate procedures to assure the quality of reported data. It is Rigsrevisionen's assessment that there is significant risk that the data held in the four national statistics databases included in this study are not reliable, because the ministry has not, to the extent necessary, ensured that data collected from the municipalities are reliable, comprehensive and updated.

It is Rigsrevisionen's assessment that it has taken a long time for the Ministry of Social Affairs to define a framework for the collection of data in the municipalities. Particularly the ministry's work to develop indicators for the type of data to be collected has been drawn-out.

It is also Rigsrevisionen's assessment that the Ministry of Social Affairs could do more to develop the existing guidelines aimed at the municipalities to ensure that they specify data reporting and quality assurance requirements. Rigsrevisionen notes that greater focus on correct reporting and collection of data will reduce the need for subsequent quality assurance of the data.

In May 2016, the Ministry of Social Affairs implemented a data strategy with the purpose of enhancing the quality of data in the social area. Rigsrevisionen welcomes this initiative to solve some of the problems relating to data in the area and recommends that the ministry includes the following aspects in the strategy:

- The establishment of standardised procedures for assuring the quality of data held in the national statistics databases.
- Prioritizing resources for the analysis of data that can document the effect of social interventions.
- Identifying data quality issues to ensure that these are considered in the Ministry of Social Affairs' analyses.