Commentary: The revitalization of the Stockholm Metropolitan Study

Carl-Gunnar Janson

As described in detail in the cohort profile by Sten-Åke Stenberg and Denny Vågerö the Stockholm Metropolitan study is a follow-up of individuals born in 1953 and who were living in the Stockholm Metropolitan area in 1963. The follow-up of this particular study continued until October 1995 when the last report in the series of reports for the study was published. Data collection on school-based characteristics of all participants was successfully completed in 1966 and then in 1968 these data were supplemented with detailed data on the family characteristics obtained from a stratified sub-sample of the mothers (n = 4021). The study was primarily concerned with sociological issues of social mobility and organization, conformity and deviance, and marital patterns. This study has resulted in over 100 publications with some of the key findings highlighted by Sten-Åke Stenberg and Denny Vågerö.1

In 1986 some bad publicity in the media questioned the storage and use of personalized (identifiable) data as part of this research project. Difficult decisions then had to be taken by the study staff and research authorities. On March 5, 1986 the Data Inspection Board decreed that the key tape containing personal identification data must be destroyed by May 30, 1986 at the latest. It is worth noting that this decision was not based on agreement of all of the board members and that some eminent members dissented, feeling that this could result in the loss of a very valuable research resource. Nonetheless, on May 16, 1986 the key tape was destroyed and the research files were thus permanently de-identified.2

Though this decision and subsequent action created difficulties for the project we were determined not to stop using the data for important research. Based on these data, in 2002 ‘Criminality and Violence among the Mentally Disordered: The Stockholm Metropolitan Project’ by Sheilagh Hodgins and me was published3 and in 2004 ‘Youth Justice in Sweden’ was published (pp. 391–447) in Michael Tonry and Anthony Doob’s famous book on youth crime and justice.4

Around this time Sten-Åke Stenberg also got access to all Project Metropolitan data (including research reports) and his and Denny Vågerö’s dedication and skill at performing probability matching with other datasets has given Project Metropolitan a new start. Their efforts have also allowed me to continue working with the data and I am currently planning a research project in which I will apply Sampson’s and Laub’s ‘Crime in the Making’ theory to the Metropolitan data.5 I am very excited about the continued work on this project and believe that it will continue for the long term to make important contributions to sociological and health research.

References