

Are children at the center of policies and what data supports their needs in multi-sectoral programming? Exploratory analysis of the Western Cape, South Africa

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Introduction

- Child health and wellbeing requires a multisectoral approach.
- The Western Cape promotes collaborative government and is a good learning environment to understand if and how multisectoral data use is practiced for child health and wellbeing.

Methods

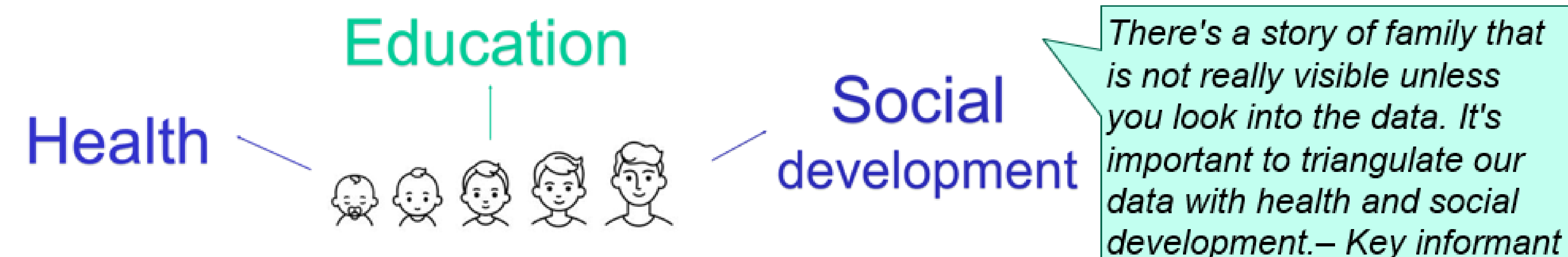
- Study design: descriptive and explorative
- Data collection from August 2023 to June 2024 included key informant interviews across sectors (18), desk review (30+ resources), non-participant observation of meetings (6), and stakeholder engagement meetings (5).
- Thematic coding using the health policy triangle framework.

Results

- **Provincial policies include multisectoral child health and wellbeing indicators** (Box). Yet, multisectoral indicators are not routinely reported together in publicly available or observed government documents over time for accountability. Government uses low birth weight as a tracer indicator to track their “Wellness” priority at the highest strategic levels.
- Western Cape has **strong data ecosystems within sectors**, notably health and education, enabling wide use of routine data to inform decision-making, often through data visualizations and dashboards. Routine data on early childhood development is a gap across sectors.
- **Health data is used to inform other sector activities**. For example, the Provincial Safety Dashboard uses data from Hospital and Emergency Centre Tracking Information System (HECTIS) to identify hotspots and inform law enforcement planning. The Department of Health and Wellness hosts the new Violence Prevention Unit to coordinate a data-led approach across sectors.
- **Multisectoral governance structures exist and use data** to inform policy decisions at strategic levels (i.e. committees convened by the Premier’s office) and operational levels (i.e. Child Death Reviews).
- **There are not formal structures that enable sharing about an individual child across sectors** hindering a holistically response to their needs by providers.

Box: Western Cape Strategic Plan 2019-2024 indicators relating to child:

- Infant Mortality rate
- Retention rate in schools
- Adult Years of life lost
- Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) (15-24 years)
- Percentage of learners reading for meaning by age 10
- Stunting, as measured by height for age for children under five years



Conclusions

Children need to be at the centre of multi-sectoral data use for decision making at all levels. The new government must be held accountable to prioritize child health and wellbeing in their next provincial strategic plan (2025-2030) with a strong data ecosystem that enables multisectoral data-driven decision making and accountability.

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Further information

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