A Glimpse of Longitudinal Social Data in Australia and Two Studies relating to Physical Activity and Substance Abuse

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Abstract

In this presentation I will give a broad overview of the sources of longitudinal social data in Australia and associated research projects in ISSR. Prior to 2002 few national population-based surveys for collecting social, economic and health data at regular time intervals have been undertaken in Australia. Three of these are the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey which commenced in 2001, the Negotiating the Lifecourse (NLC) survey and the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (ALSWH) both commencing in 1996. Increasingly, as the policy relevance of research outcomes arising from longitudinal studies is recognised, the development of these studies is becoming more widespread. For example, in addition to HILDA, the Commonwealth government in Australia is now funding the national longitudinal cohort study of Australian Children (LSAC) which commenced in 2004. Other studies have followed cohorts or samples of individuals from populations over time, in specific geographical regions in Australia.

The case studies referred to here are works in progress and discussion will focus on design and preliminary work. The first study is called HABITAT, a large longitudinal survey which investigates How Areas in Brisbane Influence healTh and AcTivity in mid-aged adults. Adults aged 40-65 years were sampled in 2007, 2009 and will again be surveyed in 2011. I will discuss the design and purpose of the study and preliminary results on the association of physical activity with neighbourhood characteristics.

The second study refers to the investigation of a non-linear model for adolescent substance abuse. In several previous studies, researchers have proposed the use of catastrophe models to describe the sudden uptake of heavy drinking as a dynamic process. In this study we will use longitudinal data to explore the dynamics of peer and parent relationships and the effects on adolescent alcohol use. As this project is at a very preliminary stage I will provide an overview by describing the model as used in previous studies.