

BARC Policy and Practice on Ageing Colloquium, Canberra, 4-5 July 2006

ARC/NHMRC Research Network in Ageing Well Research Theme Workshop 4 – Population Research Strategies

Presentation Slides

ARC/NHMRC Research Network in Ageing Well

POPULATION RESEARCH STRATEGIES

www.ageingwell.edu.au

BARC Colloquium,
Canberra
5 July 2006

Key issues

- Making better use of existing data and supporting existing longitudinal studies
- Understanding the baby boom cohort
- Does Australia need a health and retirement study?

Theme activities to date

- ANU hub committee (Judith Healy, Kaarin Anstey, Heather Booth, Marc Budge)
- Archive on Ageing at ANU
- Longitudinal methods workshop (Scott Hofer & Lesa Hoffman, 10-14 July, ANU)
- AWAP application led by Kaarin Anstey 'Learning how to age well from Australian longitudinal studies'

Self-Rated Health, Age and Gender in Longitudinal Ageing Studies in Australia: A demonstration Project from the Population Strategies Theme of the ARC/NHMRC Ageing Well Network

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Purpose

1. To demonstrate the value of examining variables across multiple Australian Datasets
2. To describe the process and issues arising in combining datasets

Workshop Summary

Workshop Chairs

Dr Judith Healy (Theme Convenor)

Senior Fellow, Research School of Social Sciences, Australia National University

Professor Hal Kendig (Network Convenor)

Research Professor of Ageing & Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Sydney

Rapporteur

Dr Matthew Carroll, Senior Project Officer, ARC/NHMRC Research Network in Ageing Well

Discussion topics:

1) Making better use of and support for existing studies

National Treasures – the group agreed that longitudinal studies are national treasures and that their value should be made clearer to policy makers and other constituencies in order to ensure that existing studies are continued and funding is made available to for further waves of data collection and analysis.

The value of longitudinal data over cross-sectional data was discussed and it was agreed that many questions could be addressed using less expensive and time-demanding options but that any analysis of change over time, such as the effect of policy changes on workplace transitions or the recent finding from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health on the effect of transitions in drinking behaviour on health, can only be done using longitudinal data.

It was noted that a longitudinal study represents a framework that can be used to analyse any number of factors that were not considered at the time that the study was started – such as the effect of the current changes to superannuation on retirement decisions. It was also suggested that a cost-effective approach is to convert existing large-scale cross-sectional studies to longitudinal platforms by seeking further waves of data from the participants.

Network Advocacy on the value of secondary data analysis – the value of analysing secondary data was discussed and it was agreed that this was generally seen as somehow less scientifically pure than collecting and analysing new data (the “do it yourself” approach). The funding of the ANU-led the “Learning How to Age Well From Australian Longitudinal Studies of Ageing” Study under the Ageing Well Ageing Productively scheme was seen as evidence that the value of longitudinal studies and making use of existing data is starting to be recognised.

Participants noted that there is a wealth of data from many studies that has yet to be analysed and that the Network should advocate for greater access to data, either through the lodging of datasets on the Ageing Well Data Archive or through the Network acting as a connection point between researchers. One way of facilitating this would be for the Network to provide an up to date listing of longitudinal studies which would include a brief overview of the measures taken and the key contacts so that researchers can locate the data they need.

The specific example of promoting secondary data analysis to Students was discussed and it was agreed that this represented a cost-effective way of making use of an existing resource and to build research capacity. It was noted that many large-scale projects have far more data than the investigators can possibly analyse and so would be receptive to approaches from students and early career researchers. The Network agreed to advocate to students and academics on this issue.

2) Baby Boomer Study

The group expressed a lot of interest in the possibility of a study on the baby boomer cohort. It was agreed that there was a considerable amount of data available on both the older and younger generations but that the baby boomers had largely been missed in terms of health and retirement data.

It was noted that the baby boomer generation were different from their predecessors and the generations to follow and the possibility of making valid generalisations was brought into question. The participants agreed that there were generational differences but noted that all generalisations between generations involved differences so this did not invalidate the proposed study. It was agreed, however, that such a study should only go ahead if it was clear that there were key research questions that could not be address in any other way.

3) Health and Retirement Survey

Participants were very interested in the possibility of an health and retirement survey (HRS) and it was noted that similar surveys had taken place in the US, UK, Israel etc and that negotiations were underway for an HRS in New Zealand. It was agreed that there would be value in conducting an Australian HRS as it would provide a greater understanding of regional differences including migration patterns, policy differences etc as well as address questions of local relevance. Participants agreed that this possibility should be discussed further and that the next step would be to carefully consider what the key questions would be and to map the variables used in the overseas HRSs in order to identify common themes and gaps in the data.

4) Follow-up workshop

In the discussion for both the baby boomer and HRS studies it was agreed that careful consideration was needed regarding identifying key questions which could not be answered using existing data sources and which could only be answered using longitudinal data. It was proposed that a workshop take place with representation from key organisations and studies to discuss the possibility of setting up a baby boomer study and/or an HRS. The workshop would consider the following:

- a. identify key questions requiring longitudinal data
- b. funding possibilities
- c. next steps etc.

5) Current developments:

During the course of the workshop the following developments were mentioned

- The Victorian Health and Retirement Study is being continued and will become a pseudo longitudinal study with a research focus on aspirin.
- The Health 2000 cohort study led by Professor Graeme Giles has received an enabling grant in order to make the data more available to researchers
- The AIHW is currently involved in a number of longitudinal projects including a major project with La Trobe linking 7 aged care program datasets to follow the services path and the flow from hospital to residential aged care.
- The Department of Veterans' Affairs has set up the Departmental Management Information System (DMIS) which is integrating DVA datasets from which data can be extracted and made available for research.
- A 5% sample of the 2006 Census will have their data carried forward and probabilistically matched to 2011 data and linked to births, deaths and marriages, and maybe the National Health Survey etc. This will become a powerful longitudinal tool for the future.

6) Network actions:

Based on the above discussions, the following Network actions were suggested

1. A follow-up workshop re baby boomer study and/or an HRS.
2. Provide an up to date listing of longitudinal studies listing on the Network website.
3. Advocate for
 - a. Continued funding for existing studies
 - b. The use of secondary data by students
 - c. Facilitating access to data