



The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC): A Growing Resource for Understanding Child and Family Wellbeing



Overview

Illustrate –five examples of early findings from the LSAC data

Summarise the strengths and limitations of LSAC



The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children



- ✦ Initiated and funded by Australian Govt. Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) as part of the *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy*
- ✦ Being conducted by a research consortium led by Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) in partnership with FaCSIA
- ✦ Publicly available dataset for research use

www.aifs.gov.au/growingup/



Research Consortium

- ✦ Various members from:
ACER, ANU, Charles Sturt, Curtin, Macquarie, MCRI, QUT, U. Adelaide, U. Melb, U. Newcastle, UNSW, UNE
- ✦ Ann Sanson (Senior Scientific Advisor, U Melb.)
- ✦ Steve Zubrick (Chair, Curtin/ICHR)
- ✦ Design Teams:
Demographics, Education, Health, Child Care, Child Outcomes
- ✦ Family Functioning Design Team, includes:
Jan Nicholson (Griffith) Michael Bittman (UNE)
Bryan Rodgers (ANU) Ann Sanson (Melb)
Lyndall Strazdins (ANU) Steve Zubrick (Curtin)

Rationale

There is a lack of national data on the life courses of young Australian's and their families.

Life course data are essential for identifying the factors that put young people at risk or prevent them from harm in the long term.

Such data are fundamental for informing the development of services and policies, and for evaluating the impact of change.

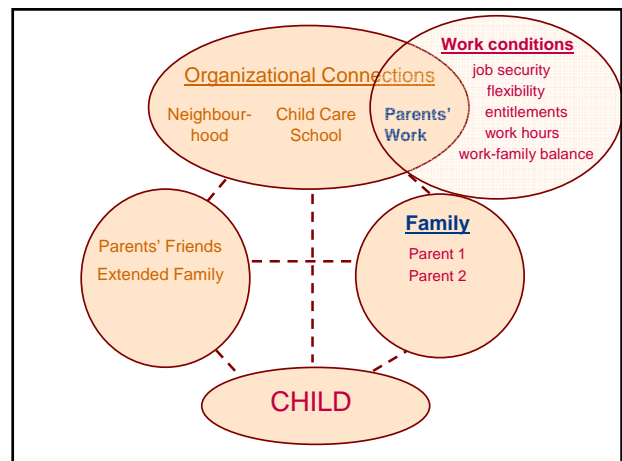
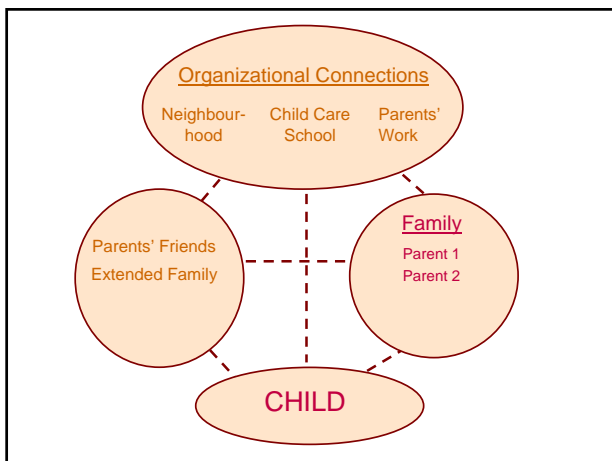
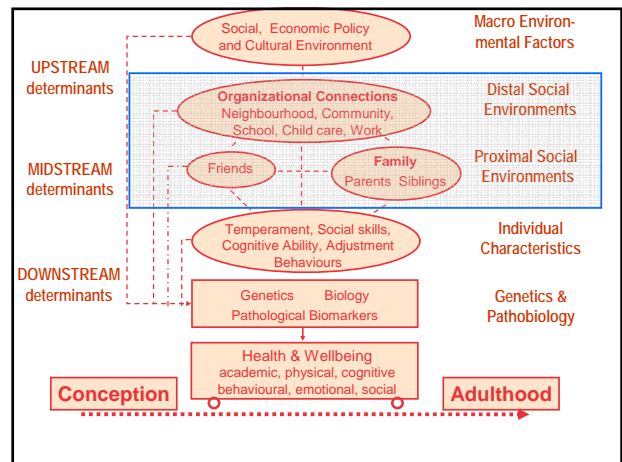
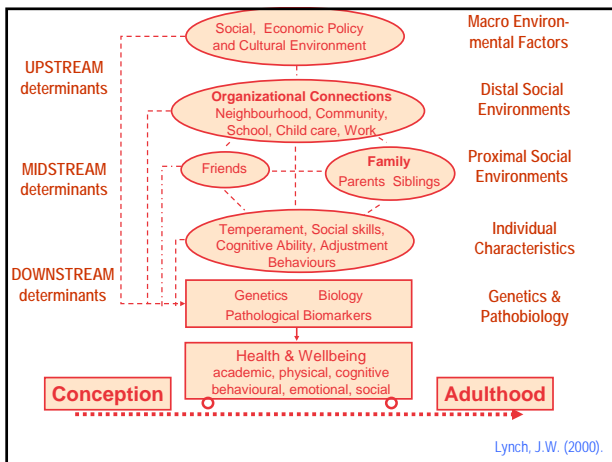
Nicholson & Rempel, 2004; Nicholson et al., 2003, 2002.

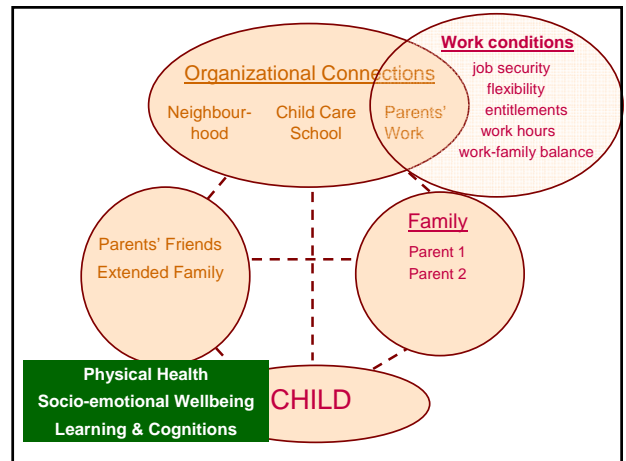
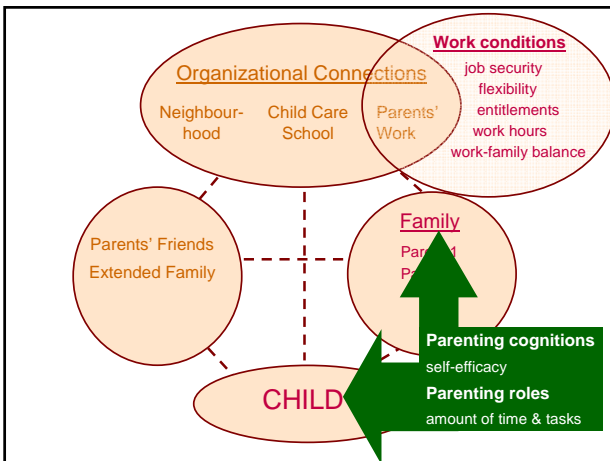
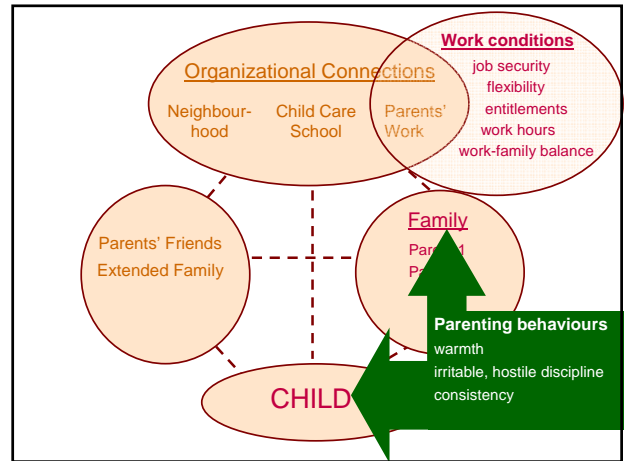
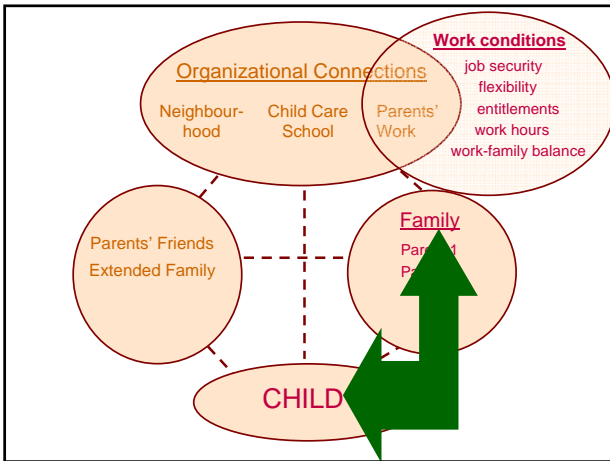
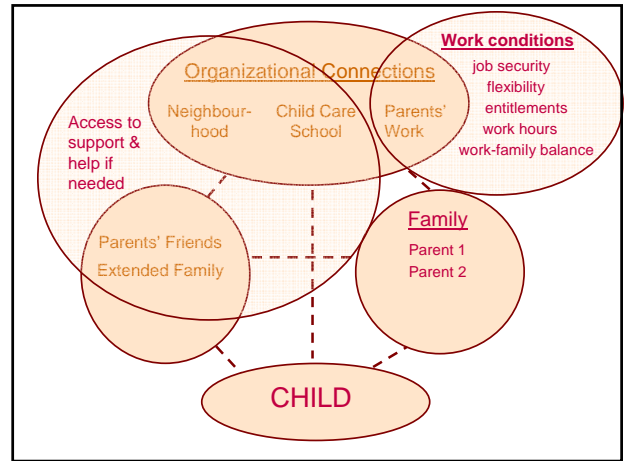
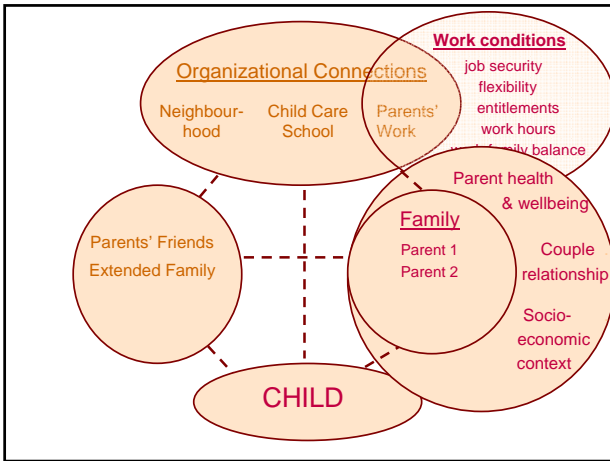
Study design
Sample
Data collection
Some information about conceptual framework and measurement

... all been presented



**Underpinning Conceptual Model:
 Parents', Families' and Children's Wellbeing**





Measurement properties

Criteria for selection:

- ✦ demonstrated reliability and validity;
- ✦ previous use in population or longitudinal studies;
- ✦ represented the latest measurement and theoretical advances in the field;
- ✦ were sufficiently brief as to allow for inclusion.

Prior to each wave:

- ✦ pre-testing and dress rehearsal to assess wording, response formats, comprehension, flow, psychometric properties, completion times.



Parents' Wellbeing is Associated with Family Functioning

Funding

Australian Govt. Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA)
 Contract for a thematic report on Parenting and Family Functioning, awarded to Curtin & TICHR, 2005-2006

Acknowledge

Steve Zubrick, Grant Smith, Tanyana Jackiewicz
 Curtin & TICHR

Ann Sanson
 Uni Melbourne

LSAC Research Consortium & LSAC Project Operations Team (AIFS)

Aims

To provide an overview of the parenting and family functioning for the families of Australian infants and four-year old children.

Specifically, to report on:

- ✦ parenting styles and family functioning
- ✦ factors influencing parents' feelings about parenting
- ✦ relationship of parenting to children's outcomes
- ✦ family stress and sources of social support for parents
- ✦ roles and contributions of parents who do not live with their children

☞ 160pp report + 90pp appendices

Key dimensions of parenting

Children's health and wellbeing is strongly influenced by their interactions with parents:

- ✦ warm, affectionate interactions
- ✦ absence of coercive, angry, irritable exchanges
- ✦ clear, consistent rules and limits
- ✦ parental beliefs that they are competent, capable parents (parenting efficacy)

How are these interactions related to the health and wellbeing of parents?

Parent wellbeing and parenting

	Odds Ratios			
	Low warmth	Irritable, hostile	Low par'g efficacy	Low consistency
Infant Cohort				
Psychological symptoms	1.23	2.20	1.34	
More life difficulties	1.23	1.53	2.04	
Poor coping	1.00	1.42	4.05	
Child Cohort				
Psychological symptoms	1.33	1.83	3.00	1.85
More life difficulties	1.21	1.30	1.11	0.97
Poor coping	1.24	3.20	3.67	2.46

ORs >1: those exposed to the predictor (row) were at greater risk of the outcome (column) when compared to those not exposed

ORs <1: those exposed to the predictor (row) were at reduced risk of the outcome (column) compared to those not exposed



Parenting is Associated with Children's Wellbeing

Outcome Index

Infants

- ☛ physical (overall health, health needs)
- ☛ socio-emotional (approach, irritability, cooperativeness)
- ☛ learning/ cognitive (emerging social-communication skills)

Children

- ☛ physical (same plus BMI & motor skills)
- ☛ socio-emotional (SDQ)
- ☛ learning/ cognitive (language, literacy, numeracy & school readiness; direct assessment and teacher report)

☞ Overall Score across domains

Sanson et al. 2005.

Poor parenting and child outcomes

Odds Ratios

	Infant cohort Low Outcome Index Score	Child cohort Low Outcome Index Score
Parenting		
Low warmth	1.91	1.15
Irritable, hostile	1.70	2.51
Low parenting efficacy	2.18	1.74
Low consistency	-	2.04

ORs >1: those exposed to the predictor (row) were at greater risk of the outcome (column) when compared to those not exposed

ORs <1: those exposed to the predictor (row) were at reduced risk of the outcome (column) compared to those not exposed



Parent Involvement in Education (at home and school) is Associated with Children's Wellbeing

Donna Berthelsen and Sue Walker, QUT

Associations with family environment

After taking account of significant child (gender, liking of reading), parent (education, income) and family variable (no. siblings) ...

	Overall p-value
Home learning environment	
Days in past week someone read to child (0-2 days)	<0.001
Number of children's books at home (relative to 0-9)	0.002
Child visited library in past month	<0.001
Computer access and usage	<0.001
Parent involvement in ECE program	
Frequency of contact with teacher (not this year)	0.003
Times involved in class activities (not this year)	<0.001

N = 4,618; Adj R² = 18.6%



External Environments and Parents' and Children's Wellbeing



Analysis grants

Australian Rotary Health Research Fund (2005-06)

Work and mental health of parents and children
Strazdins, Nicholson, Bittman et al.

ARC-Linkage (2005-07)

Work and parental time/activities with children
Bittman, Nicholson, Strazdins et al.
HREOC, QLD Office for Women, Children's
Commissions NSW & QLD

ARC Discovery Grant (2007-2009)

Strazdins et al.

Acknowledge

Lyndall Strazdins ANU



Michael Bittman UNE



Jude Brown UNE

Emma George ANU

Grant Smith TICHR

Parental employment in Australia

Policy context that emphasises the importance of workforce participation

- ✦ partly reflects notions of social responsibility and mutual obligation
- ✦ partly reflects evidence that children fare better when raised in homes where there are greater economic resources available

Being applied within Australia in the form of policies that encourage parents' participation in the workforce

Parental employment & parenting

Raising children requires a commitment from parents of **time** and **money**

But a gain in one, may result in a decrease in the other

Increasing the money available, can be achieved by working longer hours

Working longer hours, means a reduction in the time available

Parental employment & parenting

Additionally, not all jobs are equal.

Certain jobs have an adverse impact on worker's health and wellbeing

- ✦ high demand
- ✦ low flexibility
- ✦ low control
- ✦ low security

Which in turn may impact on parenting

And consequently on children's wellbeing

Aims

To examine the relationships between mothers' employment and parenting.

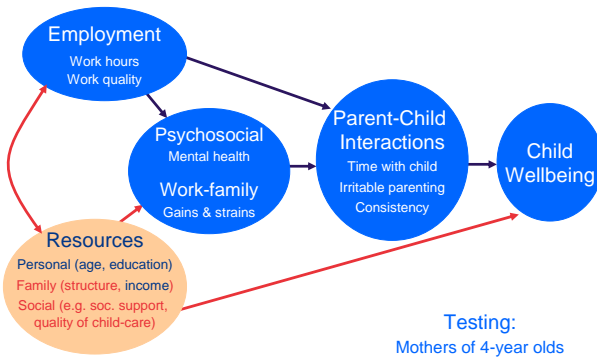
To look at the associations between mothers'

- ✦ hours of work
- ✦ conditions of work

AND

- ✦ mothers' perceptions of the benefits and stressors associated with balancing work and family (work-family gains, work-family strains)
- ✦ mothers' time and activities undertaken with children
- ✦ mothers' parenting behaviours.

Impact of parental employment on children's wellbeing



Measures of employment

Hours worked

- ✦ not employed; 1-15; 16-24; 25-34; 35+ hrs

Job Quality

- ✦ **Access** to family-friendly provisions
- ✦ **Flexibility** in start/stop times
- ✦ **Control** over how job is done
- ✦ **Security** – perceived security of employment

Combined into the **Job Quality Index** (Strazdins et al., submitted)

- ✦ 0 = non-optimal conditions on all four;
- ✦ 4 = optimal conditions on all four dimensions.

Parent wellbeing measures

Mother's mental health

- ✦ K6: Kessler psychosocial screener, common symptoms

Coping & life difficulties

- ✦ "how well do you think you are coping?" (rated 1–5)
- ✦ "how difficult do you feel your life is at present?" (rated 1–5)

Descriptive analyses

Work hours

Job quality

Work-related mental health

Time with children
Activities with children
Parenting

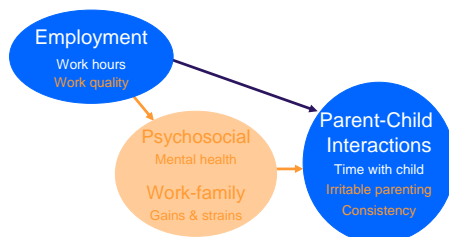
controlling for mother's age, income, education & general mental health

Very early explorations of the data = a work in progress!

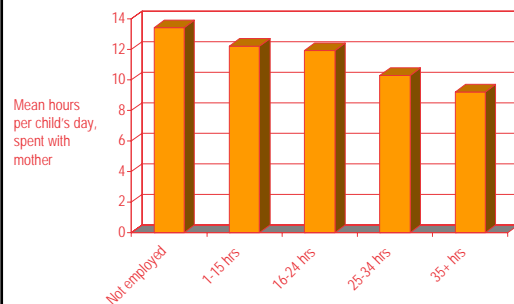
Findings so far ...



.. hours of employment & time and activities with child

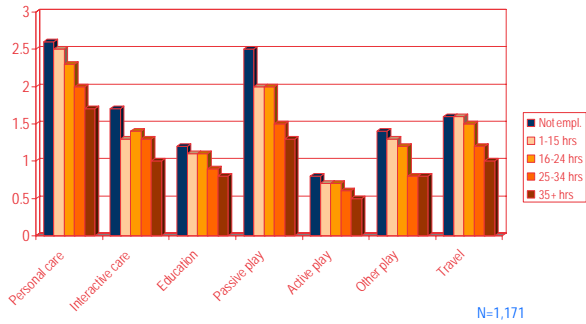


Mean time (hours per day) child spent with mother by mother's hours of work



N=1,171

Mean time (hours per day) in activities, child spent with mother by mother's hours of work



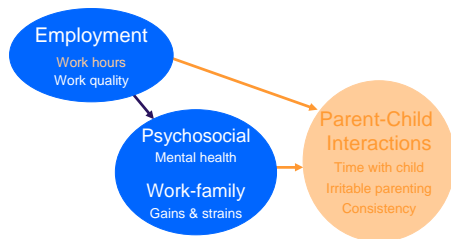
Are mother's hours of employment associated with time and activities with children?

Yes:

- ✦ for each hour of employment, time with child was reduced by ~1/2 an hour
- ✦ mother's time in all activities tended to decrease with increasing hours of employment



Findings so far work quality & psychosocial factors



Mean mother's psychosocial symptoms score by mother's work quality



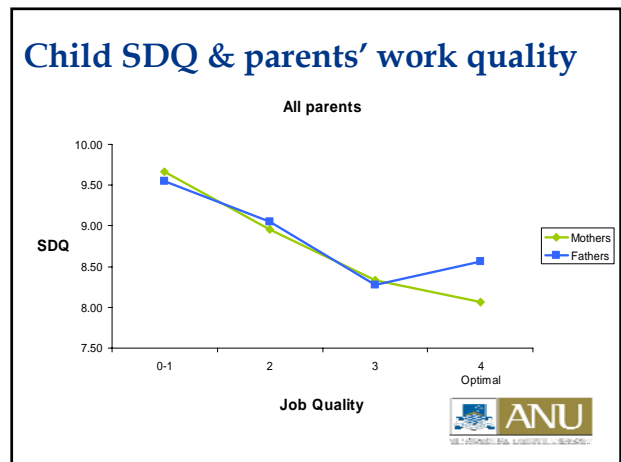
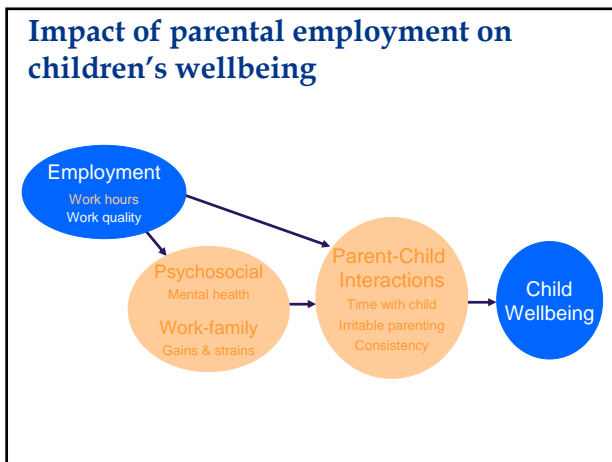
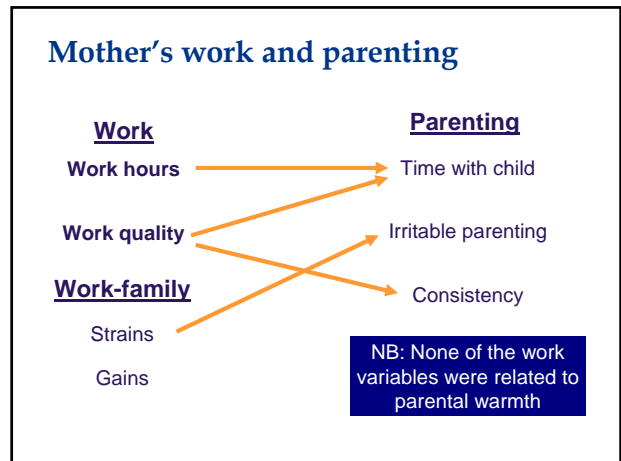
Mean mother's ratings of coping and life difficulties by mother's work quality



Is work quality associated with mother's mental health?

Yes: with increasing work quality

- ✦ declining depression
- ✦ increasing coping
- ✦ declining life difficulties



Growing Up in Australia

What about Fathers?

Mothers' parenting & child obesity

Rhee et al., 2006

- ✳ weight of 4-5 year olds
- ✳ mother's Authoritarian style of parenting (low warmth, low control) was related to child weight (Body Mass Index)
- ✳ problems: methods of measurement, lack of control for mothers' weight

-> replicate and extend – include parental BMI, and fathers' parenting

Results in press: Wake, Nicholson, Hardy & Smith (2007) *Pediatrics*.

NHMRC funding: project grant and 2x CDAs

Results: parenting & child weight

Substantial proportions of young children were overweight

Even larger proportions of their parents were overweight

Mothers' parenting was unrelated to child weight

Fathers' parenting was related, even after adjustment for a range of factors

- ✦ fathers higher consistency associated with healthier child weight.



LSAC as a Resource for Assessing Family Wellbeing

Sampling strengths

Final Sample

Excluding non-contacts:

- ✦ 64% of selected infants
- ✦ 57% of selected 4-year olds (Soloff et al, 2005).

Comparisons with Census data:

- ✦ broadly representative of the target population on most demographic characteristics
- ✦ over-represented families where either parent had completed Yr 12 high school
- ✦ under-represented lone parent families, child cohort
- ✦ under-represented those with no siblings, infant cohort (Gray & Sanson, 2005).

Design strengths

Broad range of measurement domains covered

- ✦ determined by policy interests of government
- ✦ informed by previous scientific evidence
- ✦ Wave 1 dataset released May 2005
 - ✦ 1836-1933 data items per child, plus 3750 for TUD

Designed to enable data-linkage opportunities

- ✦ provide high-quality data not available or accurately reported by individual informants
 - ✦ Health Insurance Commission (all attendances);
 - ✦ Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (prescribed medications);
 - ✦ National Child Care Accreditation data (standardised quality indicators)

Measurement strengths

High quality measures

- ✦ supported by psychometric analysis of parenting and family functioning

Collection of data from multiple sources

- ✦ mothers and fathers
- ✦ non-resident parents (fathers)
- ✦ child self-report
- ✦ carers and teachers
- ✦ direct assessments
- ✦ Time Use Diary

Quality

LSAC has passed rigorous peer-review

Funding for specific analyses, granted by:

- ✦ Australian Rotary Health Research Fund (2)
- ✦ ARC Linkage (1) and Discovery (1)
- ✦ NHMRC (2 grants, 1 CDA)

Limitations

Designed as a study of children, not a study of families

- ✦ nonetheless, contains considerable amount of data about families

Lack of physical measurements

- ✦ genetic data
- ✦ physiological indicators
- ✦ physical functioning

Summary

Truly multi-disciplinary collaboration

- ✦ both in design of LSAC and now in its analysis
- ✦ enabling innovation in our research questions

Practical and policy relevance to families

Value will increase exponentially with subsequent waves of data collection

- ✦ Wave 2 (2006) release due later this year
- ✦ Wave 3 (2008) planning is well-advanced
- ✦ planning for Waves 4-8 has commenced

