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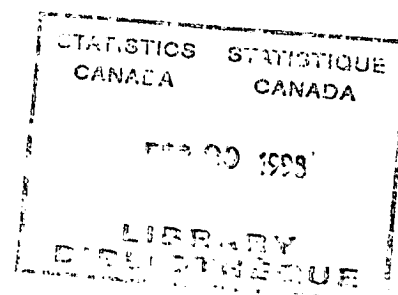
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National Longitudinal Survey of Children

Issues



Responses to Issues Raised during Provincial
and Territorial Information Sessions, Spring 1993

Project Team
"What Works for Children -
Information Development Program"

Social Program Information and Analysis Directorate
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INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1993, the Project Team for the National Longitudinal Survey of Children (NLSC) conducted information sessions with officials in each province and territory to provide them with an overview of the NLSC project parameters. Officials from various departments with child-related responsibilities (e.g., Education, Social Services, Health) attended the sessions and discussed the survey with Team members.

At the time of these information sessions, the NLSC questionnaires had not yet been developed. Therefore, it was not possible for the Team to respond to some of the issues and concerns which were raised. This document summarizes the concerns expressed during the information sessions, and outlines the actions taken by the Team, as the NLSC questionnaire development progressed, to address these issues.

Issues have been organized under the following headings:

1. CONTENT

(a) Social

- family
- child
- programs and services

(b) Health

(c) Economic

(d) Education

2. CONSULTATION

3. DEFINITIONS

4. ABORIGINAL COMPONENT

5. DESIGN/SAMPLE SIZE

6. TRACKING/RETENTION

7. INTERVIEW METHODOLOGY

8. OTHER

Issues

Action

1. (a) CONTENT - SOCIAL

Family

Inclusion of religious affiliation, spirituality.

The background questionnaire (NLSC-1A) contains two questions (A.12 and A.13) on religion covering denomination and frequency of attendance at religious activities. Spirituality is not covered.

Concerns raised about the lack of indicators of child abuse, and information about parental abuse of children.

The Project Team contracted with Dr. Tom Hay, former research director for the Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse, for advice regarding measurement of child abuse in the survey. On Dr. Hay's advice, we have incorporated some questions in the "parenting" section (Section F) of the draft age-specific questionnaires which are intended to gather information on extreme parenting behaviours. The Team is continuing to review Dr. Hay's recommendations. Further, it is possible that this subject could be dealt with in greater detail in subsequent survey cycles and/or a special study of a sub-sample.

Inclusion of parent-child modelling/relationships, time spent with child.
Need to measure parenting.

A group of specialists in issues related to infants and young children will be providing the Project Team with recommendations for measures of parent-child interaction. Also, the current "parenting" section (Section F) of the age-specific questionnaire is still under discussion with specialists in that field.

Inclusion of family dysfunction.

Section H of the background questionnaire is a family functioning scale provided by researchers at McMaster University. This measure has been widely used both within Canada and abroad; validity and reliability of this scale as a measure of family functioning is well documented.

Concern regarding reliability of self-reporting of alcohol use.

During focus testing, there were some problems with response by adults to the alcohol questions on the background questionnaire. This section was removed from the current version of the questionnaire; however the Team is investigating alternatives.

Issues

Are fostering and adoption included?

Child

Inclusion of life-events such as death of a close relative and children's birth order.

Inclusion of traumatic psychological events.

Will information be collected on a child's spending time with friends?

Inclusion of temperament across age groups.
Inclusion of "happiness" indicator for 3 to 5 year olds.

Action

The "Family and Custody History" section (Section A) of each age-specific questionnaire contains questions on the age at which children entered the household, including by foster or adoptive arrangements.

Certain life events such as death of a parent, addition of family members, family restructuring, etc., are covered in the survey. However, with respect to a more complete scale to assess a full range of life events, the Project Team has been advised that there is no concise measure.

The "health" section for children ages 4 to 11 currently includes a question (D.52) regarding any unusual event or situation that has caused the child a great amount of worry or unhappiness. However, it is not possible to measure the impact of the trauma in the NLSC.

The age-specific questionnaires for parents of children ages 4 and over contain several questions regarding relationships, including peer relationships.

A group of specialists in issues related to infants and young children will be reviewing the temperament measures for infants and toddlers up to age 23 months. The group will also be investigating possible temperament measures for 2 and 3 year olds. It is anticipated that behaviour measures, rather than temperament measures, will be used beginning at age 4 and continuing for older ages. The current behaviour section (Section D) of the age-specific questionnaires for 4 to 11 year olds includes a question on whether the child is happy and interested in life.

Issues

Inclusion of risk taking behaviour of children including alcohol and drug use, smoking and attitudes.

Inclusion of sexual behaviour.

Inclusion of time use for all ages.

Self-esteem is an important part of mental health of children.

Inclusion of concept of "feeling loved".

Programs and Services

Will information on licensed versus unlicensed child care be collected?

Action

The age-specific questionnaire for 10-11 year olds (NLSC-8), which is responded to by a parent, covers some antisocial and risk taking behaviours, including alcohol consumption/usage. There is still discussion regarding possible inclusion of such questions in the questionnaire for parents of 8 and 9 year olds (NLSC-7). The self-completed questionnaire for 10-11 year olds also covers alcohol, drug and cigarette usage, as well as other risk taking behaviours.

The self-completed questionnaire for 10 - 11 year olds includes several risk taking behaviours; however, sexual activity will not be covered in the 1994 survey.

The Expert Advisory Group has advised the Team that reading, TV watching and extra-curricular activities are the highest priority areas for "time use". Each age-specific questionnaire for ages 4 to 11 contains questions on reading and extra-curricular activities. TV watching is asked for 4 to 5 and 10 to 11 year olds. Also preschool activities questions (Section B) are included for 2-5 year olds.

A self-perception measure, designed by Dr. Susan Harter, will be included in the self-completed questionnaire for 10 and 11 year olds.

It was deemed that this issue would be too difficult to measure in this cycle via a parent respondent process. Perhaps in subsequent cycles children can self-report on this issue.

The "child care" section (Section B) of each age-specific questionnaire contains a question regarding licensed vs. unlicensed care.

Issues

To what extent will use of family counselling services and the child welfare system be measured?

Inclusion of preschool programs for children under 3 years of age.

(b) CONTENT - HEALTH

Suggested use of provincial medical records.

Inclusion of safety aspects such as use of bike helmets, seat-belts, and sunscreen.

Service usage is critical, including usage over time. Inclusion of intent of service usage.

Will periods of sickness be measured?

Action

The service utilization question, in the "health" section of each age-specific questionnaire (Section D), asks whether the parent has consulted a child welfare worker, children's aid worker or social worker about the child.

Preschool activities are included as part of Section B of the questionnaire for 2 to 3 year olds, as well as for 4 to 5 year olds.

The Project Team is continuing to investigate the use of administrative data linkages; we are working in consultation with the Team for the National Population Health Survey (NPHS) in this regard. NPHS has done some preliminary testing of respondents' willingness to provide health numbers - they will continue to test this for feasibility.

The Project Team, in consultation with the Expert Advisory Group, considers that "safety habits" are of a lesser priority than other subject areas. Therefore, "safety habits" will not be covered in the 1994 survey.

At present, Section D - "health" - of each age-specific questionnaire contains questions regarding service utilization; these questions may be asked for each cycle. Intent of service usage is not asked.

The "health" section of each age-specific questionnaire (Section D) contains questions regarding presence of chronic conditions and perception of overall state of health. Also, information is collected on overnight stays in hospital and, for children under 2 years the duration of stay in hospital at birth is collected. Additionally, it is planned that the "teacher questionnaire" will include questions on child absenteeism. At this time, no questions are planned on frequency of illness.

Issues

Inclusion of nutrition.

Collection of information on health and well-being.

Will biological measurements be done?

Will information on disabling conditions be collected?

Is participation in prevention and promotion programs included?
Effectiveness of intervention programs?

How will vision and hearing be measured?

Perinatal factors should be included in older age groups.

Inclusion of sleep patterns for older children.

(c) *CONTENT* - ECONOMIC

Will the survey cover basic needs met (food, shelter, clothing)?

Action

The Project Team is still investigating this issue with officials of Health Canada. It is not anticipated, however, that a succinct method of measuring of nutrition will be available. However, this could possibly be a special study in the future.

The Project Team is consulting with the Team responsible for the National Population Health Survey (NPHS), as well as with researchers to determine the most appropriate concepts and measures of "child health" for inclusion in the survey.

Parent report of child's height and weight will be collected, however no direct measurements will be taken.

The "health" section in all age-specific questionnaires contains questions regarding presence of chronic conditions, and activity limitations.

Participation in programs and effectiveness of intervention programs were determined to be beyond the scope of the survey.

The child health status index, of Section D in the age-specific questionnaires for ages 6 and up, includes questions on ability to hear and see.

Newborn indicators are collected for all children up to age 2; information on birth weight, length and gestational age is also collected for 2 and 3 year olds.

Sleep patterns for children below age 3 only are currently included.

The survey collects some information on the dwelling and on the respondent and household income. At the present no other questions on basic needs are included.

Issues

Inclusion of housing conditions and money spent on housing.

Will information on income and labour force be measured?

Will employment and unemployment history be measured?

(d) CONTENT -EDUCATION

Will education information be collected?

Concerns raised about the validity of cognitive assessments.

Action

The background questionnaire includes a "housing" section (Section J) which covers information regarding the dwelling, ownership or rental, subsidization and crowding. No household expenditure or housing conditions data will be collected.

There is a relatively detailed section on both labour force activity and income in the background questionnaire (Section F). The labour force information is collected for both parents; the income data are collected for both the household and respondent.

A history of employment over a two-year period is collected for both parents.

The age-specific questionnaires cover "education" for all school-age children (Section C). In addition, the self-completed questionnaire for 10 and 11 year olds and the proposed teacher questionnaire will collect information on the child's school achievement and experiences. The background questionnaire (Section E) collects educational attainment and current attendance in an education program for both parents and children over 12 years.

The Project Team is consulting with specialists in this field to determine which concepts are critical, as well as appropriate measures for cognitive development. Information on the development of children under 4 years will be collected from the parent; this includes different aspects such as cognition. Due to time constraints it is anticipated that only children ages 4 and 5 will be assessed directly for cognitive development in the first cycle.

Issues

Will parent and teacher expectations for the child(ren) be measured?

Will you ask about learning difficulties in a "special education" section?

Approval considerations regarding the teachers' questionnaire.

How will teachers assess the children?

Gather data directly from daycare workers or caregivers of pre-schoolers in addition to teachers.

2. CONSULTATION

Request to have input on questionnaire before focus test.
Desire to see final questionnaire.

Action

The age-specific questionnaires for ages 10-11 years contain a question (C.13) regarding parent's expectations of how far the child will go with her/his education; the self-completed questionnaire for 10 and 11 year olds also covers this issue.

The "special education" section of the age-specific questionnaires for children aged 4-11 contains questions regarding the child's type of special need and the type of program being used.

Statistics Canada will work with the Council of Ministers of Education and the Teachers' Federations to develop appropriate approval processes.

At a minimum, the teacher will be asked to assess child academic performance regarding reading, writing and arithmetic in relation to other students in the class.

The Project Team recognizes the utility of gathering information directly from child care providers; however, it was not deemed feasible to include this type of collection, at least not during the 1994 cycle of the survey. This does not preclude such a component for future cycles, nor does it preclude buy-ins or a specialized study or research effort on a sub-sample. Overall feasibility would need to be examined for some types of child care arrangements.

Due to time constraints, it was not possible to consult further with other federal departments or provincial governments prior to testing draft questionnaires in focus groups during June and August, 1993. The complete set of draft questionnaires will be available to both federal and provincial officials in the fall of 1993. This will allow an opportunity for input before the content is finalized. A representative from each jurisdiction will meet with the Project Team in Ottawa in January 1994 to discuss any comments. A meeting of the federal interdepartmental committee will also be held.

Issues

Why is there no formal provincial involvement in project structure?

Consultation with non-governmental organizations.

Action

The Project Team for the NSC is made up of officials from Statistics Canada and Human Resource Development (formerly Health and Welfare Canada). The Team has been consulting with other federal departments, provincial officials and researchers in developing the survey parameters and content.

The Project Team has discussed the survey with certain national non-governmental organizations.

3. DEFINITIONS

What is considered as an institution?
Is a group home an institution?
Will institutions be included in the survey?

For the Labour Force Survey (LFS), an institution is a collective dwelling which exists primarily to provide short term or long term custody or medical care, for example, nursing homes, convalescent or rehabilitation homes, hospitals, penitentiaries and detention centres. If ten or more unrelated persons live in a dwelling, it is classed as an institution, and this household is excluded from the LFS sampling frame. A group home of less than ten occupants would be included in the frame. Since the NLSC is using the LFS sampling frame, this definition applies to the NLSC as well.

Inclusion of Armed Forces.

Those households living in barracks are excluded from the LFS sampling frame. For dwellings other than barracks, if there is at least one member of the household over the age of 15 and not belonging to the Armed Forces, the household will be included.

Childhood injuries.

Section D of the age-specific questionnaires defines injury as one which has occurred in the past 12 months and was serious enough to limit normal activities.

Issues

4. ABORIGINAL COMPONENT

Why a separate aboriginal survey?

Why are off-reserve families included in the NLSC, rather than the Aboriginal Component of "What Works"? Will off-reserve children be identified in the main survey? Will the NLSC sample of off-reserve children be large enough to make meaningful statements?

Would like information on progress of Aboriginal survey. Who will the Team be working with on the Aboriginal survey?

Why is the Aboriginal survey not going out at the same time as NLSC?

Core NLSC elements should be on the Aboriginal survey.

How many children will be sampled in the Aboriginal survey?

Possible to connect with the next post-censal survey of aboriginal people?

Action

The project team has determined that the Labour Force Survey sampling frame is the most cost efficient method of sample selection for the main survey. As the frame does not currently include the on-reserve population, a separate Aboriginal survey was deemed necessary in order to provide data on this portion of Canada's children; this will cover Aboriginal children living both on and off reserves. As well those living off-reserve will be included in the NLSC.

Off-reserve families' households are part of the LFS sampling frame and therefore will be included. The background questionnaire will collect information for all household members on the ethnic or cultural origins of ancestors. There is also a question regarding registered Indian Status, as defined by the federal Indian Act. However, the representation of the off-reserve Aboriginal population is too small for a reliable measurement of its characteristics in a general population survey.

The Project Team is working in conjunction with Statistics Canada to develop a preliminary report on the Aboriginal component of "What Works". It is anticipated this report will be completed by December 1993. The developmental process for this component has not yet been established. The potential for integration with other planned Aboriginal surveys is being investigated.

There is a need for extensive consultation with the Aboriginal communities.

This is the aim of the Project Team.

This has not yet been determined.

This possibility is being investigated.

Issues

5. DESIGN/SAMPLE SIZE

Why is the LFS frame being used for the study?

Over-sampling high risk groups such as low income families, and single male parents versus single female parents.

Concern that the sample size for the provinces will not be sufficient for age-specific and regional analysis.

Representation of high risk groups and remote areas, different geographical areas.

Will the same questionnaire be repeated over the years?

High risk groups will refuse to participate.

Insufficient sample size for analysis of zero year olds.

Action

The LFS is a representative sample of dwellings in Canada. As the composition of dwellings in the sample is known, it is possible to go directly to those with children under 12 years of age, thus minimizing screening costs. Therefore, this frame is considered to be the most efficient frame for selecting dwellings with young children, across Canada.

No over-sampling is planned in this survey. Buy-ins to over-sample certain populations will be examined individually.

The sample will provide data for each age group at the national level on characteristics present in at least four to five percent of the population. At the provincial level, the sample will provide data, on various characteristics but not for each age group. The sample size for some provinces may be too small to release some estimates.

These groups are represented, in the LFS sampling frame, in the same proportion in which they appear in the general population.

It is intended that subject areas will be tracked over time, and that, generally, the same questions will be used. In some cases, such as family custody and history, where retrospective information has been collected, these sections will not be repeated with each cycle. It is also anticipated that subsequent cycles might contain specific subject areas of interest to policy and program developers.

Refusal rates to the LFS and to general population household surveys are relatively small.

In order to have larger cohort of infants, newborn and one year olds will be kept as separate groups.

Issues

Will NPHS and NLSC samples overlap?

Concern about response burden, e.g., family already in other surveys, and those households with large families.

If the father is raising the children, will the mother be interviewed?

Rationale for age groupings.

Confidentiality of responses.

Subsequent cycles will fill in information gap between cycles?

Action

The Project Team is continuing to investigate, with the NPHS Project Team, how the two surveys will be integrated. It has not yet been determined how the samples would be structured.

Other similar surveys of children have indicated that response burden does not appear to be an issue and that interviews can be extended. Parents enjoy talking about their children. In the event that a parent does not have sufficient time to complete the interview in one time frame, the interviewer will arrange another time to complete it.

Only the parent in the sample household who is most knowledgeable about the children will be interviewed.

Originally the age groupings were formulated according to developmental stages, and over-sampled 0 and 1 year olds. Based on recommendations of the Expert Advisory Group (EAG), the age groupings have been revised to simplify data analysis. Under the current design, the survey sample will be divided into two-year age groupings (of approximately 3,500 children per grouping) since survey cycles will occur biennially. The sample is now composed of 0-11 month, 12-23 month, 2-3 year, 4-5 year, 6-7 year, 8-9 year, 10-11 year age groups.

Under the Federal Statistics Act, all information collected is strictly confidential. Statistics Canada employees are subject to severe penalties if they release information about particular individuals. Statistics Canada only releases summary information so that the identity of individuals can never be revealed.

It is anticipated that future cycles will only collect information subsequent to the previous data collection period. Retrospective information on some topics will have already been collected.

Issues

It would be interesting to follow children in blended/shared custody families. How will children be followed after a family break-up?

6. TRACKING/RETENTION

Will disabled children be followed if they enter institutions?

Who is included in the planned additional sample? (See the "N" sample in "Sample Design" diagram in the "Overview document") It would be desirable to follow this sample over time.

Concern about how children who emigrate/die/drop-out will be replaced. Concern about attrition/drop-out rate after five years.

Will new children in a family be included in the longitudinal sample?

Procedure for tracking children over time - especially Aboriginal children and children in care.

7. INTERVIEW METHODOLOGY

Concern about face-to-face interview, rather than written or telephone for sensitive data.

How will the questionnaire be administered to 10 and 11 year olds?

Action

The child is the primary sample unit. Therefore after separation or family break-up the child will be followed. In the case of shared custody, for the first cycle at least, the information collected will concern the selected dwelling only.

If the children are living in the family we originally sample, we will select them and follow them into any institution they may enter.

The current plan is to upgrade the sample in age groups no longer covered by the longitudinal sample. With regard to other types of upgrading, it will depend on the observed attrition rate. If non-response is concentrated in a particular population, replacement will then be considered. The Project Team has been advised by others who have conducted similar longitudinal research that attrition has not been a major problem. The Project Team is continuing to investigate the optimum methods of retaining of original sample. At the present time new children will not be followed in the longitudinal sample.

The survey will gather information to facilitate follow-up of the respondents. We will ask for addresses of a contact person who is familiar with the family in order to ensure ongoing contact in case the respondents move.

Statistic Canada and others who have conducted longitudinal research have advised that a personal interview builds a stronger relationship with the respondent, which will assist in retaining the respondent in the long term as well as providing the highest response rates.

The survey includes a self-completed questionnaire for 10 and 11 year olds which may be done in a room separate from the parents. Younger children will not be interviewed; the person most knowledgeable about the children will provide information concerning each child.

Issues

Interviewers' training is critical - topics such as cultural sensitivities, abuse disclosures and retention of high risk groups are important. Concern about interviewer bias. Concern about problems in the inner city - sense that interviewers look down on respondents; cultural differences; language.

Concern about local interviewers known to the family.

Concern about lay interviewers conducting assessments.

Are LFS interviewers experienced in interviewing children?

Concern regarding time involved with a busy mother.

Will questionnaires be translated?

8. OTHER

Use of raw data to do own research.

Is the funding secure? For what period?

Action

The Project Team agrees that interviewer training is a critical component of the survey. The Team is investigating the types of training materials used in other longitudinal surveys of this type, and is developing training materials. The LFS interviewers are experienced and are involved in surveys every month. Concerns expressed here are everyday concerns in their work.

There is no evidence that this is necessarily a negative factor. All interviewers are sworn to secrecy under the Statistics Act.

Cognitive development will be directly assessed only for 4 and 5 year olds in 1994. The instrument chosen will be one previously used by lay interviewers. Extensive interviewer training will also be done.

Children will not be interviewed. The 10 and 11 year olds will fill out a self-completed questionnaire on their own.

If necessary, the interviewer will arrange a convenient time to complete an interview.

Questionnaires will be available in French and English. Statistics Canada will arrange, where possible, to have interviewers who speak other languages available to carry out interviews in households which do not speak English or French.

A public use microdata file will be available for general use. Discussions are continuing regarding format, layouts, etc.

The survey received initial funding under "Brighter Futures" for the period from 1992-1993 to 1996-1997, with provision for ongoing funding thereafter.

Issues

Who gives permission if child is in foster care?

Will a child in care of provincial child welfare authorities be included as part of his/her natural family?

How will community information be produced?

Need to leave families "better off".

How will we deal with disclosure of abuse?

Action

The issue of inclusion of foster children and children in care is still being investigated.

The Project Team is investigating whether the respondent data files can be linked to administrative small area data. It is planned that data outputs will be at the national and provincial levels only.

Interviewers will be sensitive to respondent reactions to the survey. The Team is currently investigating materials which may be given to respondents who participate in the NLSC. For example, a booklet "For the Love of Kids" will be left with respondents during the November test. Respondent reaction will be noted.

The Team is aware that legal requirements regarding the reporting of suspected child abuse vary by jurisdiction. Statistics Canada is consulting with a specialist in this field to determine the most appropriate policy to ensure the best interests of respondents and their households, and Statistics Canada employees. For the November test, interviewers will have phone numbers for local social service agencies which will be provided to respondents.

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