The role of longitudinal surveys in welfare reform
The somewhat unfulfilled role of longitudinal surveys in welfare reform
Background

The 2015-16 Budget provides $33.7 million over four years to develop a new ‘investment approach’ to welfare reform and to fund longitudinal surveys to provide data to support the approach.

This includes $13.0 million over two years to maintain four longitudinal surveys

- Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA)
- Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)
- Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC)
- Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants (LSHM), and
- A review of future longitudinal data needs
Suggestions as to what this review could also cover

- Undertake a stocktake of recent longitudinal surveys amongst income support customers.
- Identify the collective learnings from these previous surveys.
- Explore making these data sets available for academic and policy use (now over a decade of survey data to be explored comprising over 250,000 interviews!).
- Develop a consolidated approach to undertaking longitudinal surveys of income support recipients.
- Establish a longitudinal survey of income support recipients as permanent feature of an income support surveillance system.
Selected longitudinal surveys of income support customers

(2002 – 2014)
A three cohort, two/three wave longitudinal survey of parenting payment new and existing claimants amongst approximately 7,000 Parenting Payment customers.

Between 2,000-2,500 initial respondents per cohort.

Retention high 80%s-low 90%s.

Approximately 15,000 interviews in total.
### Parenting Payment Longitudinal Survey

**FaCS (2002 – 2004) (cont’d.)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pre-intervention Cohort</th>
<th>Partial Roll-out of HPRTW Initiatives</th>
<th>Complete Roll-out of HPRTW Initiatives</th>
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Child Support Reform Longitudinal Survey
FaCS /ANU (2008 – 2011)

A three wave longitudinal survey which collected information prior to and approximately 12 months and 36 months after the introduction of the new child support formula on 1 July 2008.

The baseline study collected information from approximately 5,000 separated parents just prior to the introduction of the new formula.

Approximately 15,000 observations over three waves.
Child Support Reform Longitudinal Survey
FaCS /ANU (2008 – 2011) (cont’d.)
Longitudinal Pathways Survey
DEWR (2006-2008)

Four income support recipient groups were identified as priorities:
> People with disabilities;
> Parents;
> Mature age job seekers; and
> The very-long term unemployed

The design of the LPS was based on interviewing three separate cohorts of income support customers (approx. n=25,000) at six-monthly intervals for a maximum of five waves (a total of twelve surveys).

Nearly 67,000 interviews in total.
Longitudinal Pathways Survey
DEWR (2006-2008) (cont’d.)

WtW IMPLEMENTATION

1 JULY 2006

COHORT 1
Survey 1.1 Baseline
n=10,217

Survey 2.1
n=8,192

Survey 3.1
n=6,757

Survey 4.1
n=5,785

Survey 5.1
n=5,417

COHORT 2
Survey 2.2
n=5,416

Survey 3.2
n=4,507

Survey 4.2
n=3,796

Survey 5.2
n=3,372

COHORT 3
Survey 3.3
n=5,204

Survey 4.3
n=4,313

Survey 5.3
n=3,789

TOTAL
10,217
13,608
16,468
13,894
12,578

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Purpose of the survey:

- Monitor the transition from the Job Network to Job Service Australia
- Evaluate government-funded employment services
- Measure the sustainability of outcomes and barriers to participation
- Fill gaps in administrative data
- Policy and programme development

Tracked participation in employment services, the labour market and education and training over time, even after sample members left government-funded assistance

Four cohort, six wave longitudinal survey amongst almost 50,000 government income support / employment assistance customers.

Over 180,000 interviews across 12 waves
## Stepping Stones
### DEEWR (2009-2014) (cont’d.)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Wave 1</th>
<th>Wave 2</th>
<th>Wave 3</th>
<th>Wave 4</th>
<th>Wave 5</th>
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<th>Wave 7</th>
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<td>Survey 1.3</td>
<td>Survey 1.4</td>
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**FEB-MAY 2014**

**SEP-NOV 2014**

**MAR-MAY 2013**

**SEP-NOV 2013**

**SEP-NOV 2012**

**MAR-MAY 2011**

**SEP-NOV 2011**

**MAR-MAY 2010**

**SEP-NOV 2010**

**MAR-MAY 2009**

**SEP-NOV 2009**

**1/7/09 JSA BEGINS**

**1/03/10 DES BEGINS**
My Journey Survey
Department of Employment (2012-13)

The Building Australia’s Future Workforce (BAFW) package was announced as part of the 2011-12 Budget.

My Journey was a longitudinal survey that looked at the needs, opinions and experiences of Australians at different stages in their life. It followed the same group of people over a period of two years and provided information about the changes in work, study, social and other activities that can lead to different outcomes for people.

May / June 2012
Recently stopped receiving Parenting Payment Single.

September 2012
Recent DSP claimants
Job Seekers
Indigenous Youth Careers Pathways Programme.

April 2013
Apprentices and trainees who had just started their apprenticeships or traineeships.

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Features of these longitudinal surveys ...

- When done well these surveys enhance our appreciation of what it is like to be on income support and provide a much richer picture than can be gleaned from the administrative data alone.
- Enable us to infer causality (rather than just report on correlations).
- Evaluate the impact of ongoing changes to the income support system.
- Measure the sustainability of outcomes and barriers to participation.
- Enable us to examine attitudinal and behavioural change at an individual level not just a population level.
- Provide a complementary data source to existing longitudinal datasets which lack a specific focus on income support customers.
Features of these longitudinal surveys …

Our understanding of the following types of issues is enhanced by longitudinal surveys of income support customers:

- The episodic nature of employment
- Marginal nature of attachment to the labour force
- Self-reported and observed reasons for entries and exits from payments
- Barriers to participation
- The impact of other life events
- The primary importance of good health and other health-related issues (e.g. substance use)
- The role of education and training as a pathway to employment
- The role of support networks
- Protracted financial hardship and the erosion of one’s financial position over time
- Interaction with the employment services / welfare system
- Intersection of family and carer responsibilities
- Etc.
Features of these longitudinal surveys ...

Longitudinal surveys of income support customers can be designed to help us maintain a broader view of the social support system and the people involved rather than merely a transactional view (available from administrative data).

My personal view is that surveys such as these are enhanced if a complementary qualitative research panel is also maintained.

Establishing a broadly focussed ongoing longitudinal survey of income support customers (e.g. a General Social Survey among income support customers) would provide a better research and contextual framework for all the other ad hoc studies of income support recipients.
What these surveys lack ....

- An overarching organising framework / Central coordination / Belonging to a consolidated work program.
- Tend to be used more so for specific evaluation purposes which can sometimes limit their overall usefulness (e.g. only administered to sub groups of the income support population / used to measure specific interactions with the system).
- Certainty of funding.
Summing up

My contention is that, by and large, the data from these surveys have been underutilised. A review of the sector’s longitudinal data needs could include:

- Getting all of the data from these previous surveys together and getting it into the best shape possible.
- Making these data available to the research community using a restricted access model (within privacy and confidentiality constraints).
- Funding research to draw out appropriate lessons from the past to inform the present and future welfare reform agenda.
- Establishing a coordinated approach to the design, development and conduct of these surveys.
- Making a broad-based longitudinal survey of income support recipients a permanent feature of our income support surveillance system.
References


Thank you

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