EUCCONET SHORT VISIT GRANT

COMPARISON OF PUBLISHING FINDINGS FOR TWO COMPARABLE BIRTH COHORT FINDINGS

SCIENTIFIC REPORT

Carol Soloff, Australian Institute of Family Studies

INTRODUCTION

This report is to fulfil the requirements of the EUCCONET 10 day short visit grant that I received (Reference number 3533), covering my time at the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at the Institute of Education in London. A copy of the grant application is included in Attachment A.

PURPOSE OF VISIT

The aim of this short visit grant was to produce a working paper comparing findings so far from the UK Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), and *Growing Up in Australia*: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC). Data have been collected from children at comparable ages for both studies. The working paper was to be based on published, primarily descriptive research, in order to paint a picture of the similarities and differences between young children's lives in the UK and Australia at the beginning of the 21st Century.

WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE VISIT

The first task involved identifying appropriate sources for the comparison data. In the case of the MCS, this was straightforward, as a number of descriptive research reports have been published. We decided that the most appropriate first source was the three User's Guides to Initial Findings, though the two books that have been published could also be referenced (see Bibliography).

Identifying appropriate and easily accessible data for LSAC was not as obvious. Initially, the LSAC Annual Reports were used as a source of basic socio-demographic data, but as these data were unweighted it was necessary to obtain weighted estimates from the published frequencies.

Weighted frequencies are produced for almost all data items on the LSAC output file. These are currently only available to approved LSAC data users, however, it was decided to use these as the source of almost all the comparison data with MCS in this report, as locating published reports that contained equivalent data would have been a very time consuming process. This is because LSAC has not yet released equivalent compendium publications to the MCS guides to initial findings (the first such report is currently in production for Waves 1-3). Although some (weighted) descriptive data have been released in the Annual Reports and in other published documents, in the time available it was more convenient to obtain the information from the frequencies[1] as opposed to

[1] This wasn't always as convenient as it sounds. The relative proportions for provided with the frequencies use the full sample size for that wave as the denominator. This was fine where the data item had been responded to by all or almost all of the survey respondents. If this was not the case, however, the proportions had to be recalculated using the sample who had responded as the base. This was a tedious process, as the frequencies were only available as pdfs. This considerably slowed progress. Also in some cases, data had to be specifically extracted from the datafile.

searching through the Annual Reports and other published material to see what was available (and the Annual Reports contain only a small amount of data from each wave). There have been four major reports published from LSAC (see Bibilography), mainly using Wave 1 data. However, once a decision was made to use the frequencies, data from these reports were not used (but could be in future).

The process followed was to systematically work through each of the MCS publications, identifying information that was also collected in LSAC, and then manually enter these data into an Excel spreadsheet. Once this was done, the equivalent LSAC information was sought from the frequencies.

This process identified the following issues:

1. A number of data items did not have the same output categories. Some were very different, making comparison almost impossible. Some were only slightly different, but these could still mean that comparison may not be valid. In particular, where continuous variables had been grouped even in only slightly different ways (eg 21-30 compared with 20-29), this could still invalidate comparisons. The process for keeping a note of these differences was inadequate, and all items used in the comparisons will need checking so that appropriate footnotes can be made. This is being done as part of ongoing work on this project (being compiled as a "Glossary").
2. For each wave in LSAC, data items could appear in different instruments and in different parts of the instrument. Without hardcopies to hand, it sometimes made locating the relevant frequency quite time consuming (it would have taken longer to search the e-copies of the instruments to find the item and then look at the frequencies, as opposed to just doing a search on the frequencies).
3. It was a tedious process to search for the frequencies!

Using the data in the Excel document as the basis, I began writing a descriptive report that compares the results from the two studies, using text, tables and graphs.

During the time of my visit to CLS, I was also invited by the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) team to present a seminar on LSAC and asked if this could include some comparison between LSAC and their study for children aged (8-)9 years. I felt that it fell within the scope of this grant to include this comparison, so undertook a similar process – extracting data from the published GUI report and comparing with LSAC frequencies.

It had been hoped that this project would have included comparison between more substantive analytical reports from the studies. However, the time intensive nature of even the basic data comparisons has prevented this.

MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

The resulting Excel spreadsheet contained about 70 variables, although time did not permit extraction of relevant data for all waves for all variables. I would estimates that about 60% of the data were obtained where data were available from the identified sources, but I have been continuing the data extraction since my return to Australia and it is now about 80% complete. In a

number of cases, the MCS reports did not have a particular variable reported in each of the initial findings, and this information is being sought from CLS.

The descriptive report is currently over 20 pages and is reasonably "up-to-date" – that is, it includes a large amount of the 80% of data identified above. Work on this has continued since my return to Australia and is ongoing. I have included an extract from this draft report in Attachment B. I note that the ESF reserves the right to publish information from this report. I request that the data in Attachment B are not published without contacting me, as these data have not yet been checked.

Our intention is not to publish the descriptive report directly, but to use it as a source of information for other papers, posters and presentations. These papers etc will combine the data with the information from the Glossary, which will ensure that all issues associated with the comparisons are clearly identified.

FUTURE COLLABORATION WITH HOST INSTITUTION

I have been awarded "Visiting Fellow" status at the CLS, and hope that this ongoing relationship will mean that future collaborative work will be undertaken. The release of the initial findings from the fourth sweep of MCS data (child aged 7 years) could form the basis of another short collaboration within the next year, to compare data from children from LSAC Waves 2 and 4.

PROJECTED PUBLICATIONS RESULTING FROM THE GRANT

Lisa Calderwood and I will prepare a poster using some data from this comparison at the Society for Longitudinal and Life Course Studies conference in Cambridge this September.

We are exploring other suitable publication formats for these data – such as an article in the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) journal, Family Matters, or AIFS or CLS "facts" sheets. Conference presentations will also be undertaken where appropriate.

As mentioned, I have already presented a seminar featuring comparisons with GUI and LSAC (20 July in Dublin) to over 60 attendees, and presented a corresponding lunchtime seminar with MCS and LSAC presentations to a few CLS staff (22 July). I anticipate presenting a similar seminar to AIFS researchers.

The EUCCONET grant will of course be acknowledged in any publication.

OTHER COMMENTS

I appreciated the opportunity to work at CLS and have "time out" from my usual duties so I could concentrate on this research work, which has revealed interesting similarities and differences between Australia and the UK and Ireland. With the impetus that EUCCONET has provided to commence this work, I am now able to include some ongoing work on this project as part of my normal work program, and look forward to future EUCCONET collaborations.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

MCS initial findings reports

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HANSEN, K. and JOSHI, H (eds), Millennium Cohort Study Second Survey: A User's Guide to Initial Findings. London: Centre for Longitudinal Studies

HANSEN, K. and JOSHI, H (eds), Millennium Cohort Study, Third Survey: A User's Guide to Initial Findings. London: Centre for Longitudinal Studies2 MCS books

LSAC Annual reports

Australian Institute of Family Studies, Longitudinal Study of Australian Children Annual Report 2004, Melbourne

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GUI publication

Minister for Health and Children, Growing Up in Ireland, National Longitudinal Study of Children, The Lives Of 9-Year-Olds, 2009, The Stationery Office, Dublin

MCS books not yet used

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Attachment A

EUCCONET Short visit grant application

Comparison of published findings for two comparable birth cohort studies

Carol Soloff, Australian Institute of Family Studies

working with Lisa Calderwood, IoE Centre for Longitudinal Studies

The aim of this visit would be to produce a working paper comparing findings so far from the UK Millennium Cohort Study and Growing Up in Australia: the longitudinal study of Australian children. Table 1 below shows that there is considerable scope for comparable research between these two studies. Data have been collected from children at similar ages for both studies. The working paper would be based on published, primarily descriptive research, in order to paint a picture of the similarities and differences between young children's lives in Australia and the UK at the beginning of the 21st Century. This work would hopefully stimulate original comparative research between the two studies and provide a template that could be replicated for other EUCCONET studies.

Table 1: Comparability between MCS and LSAC

LSAC Cohorts		**Wave 1 2004**	**Wave 2 2006**	**Wave 3 2008**	**Wave 4 2010**	**Wave 5 2012**
B Cohort		0-1 years	2-3 years	4-5 years	6-7 years	8-9 years
K Cohort		4-5 years	6-7 years	8-9 years	10-11 years	12-13 years
MCS	**Wave 1 2001-2**	**Wave 2 2003-4**	**Wave 3 2006**	**Wave 4 2008**		**Wave 5 2012**
Cohort	9 month	3 years	5 years	7 years		11 years

Attachment B Extract from DRAFT descriptive comparative report2

OTHER KEY SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES OVER TIME

This section examples some key socio-demographic variables and how these have changed over time in the UK and Australia.

Table 1. Key characteristics of study child's family at each data collection wave/sweep

Characteristics	MCS1	LSACB1	LSACB1	MCS2	LSACB3	LSACK1	MCS3
	2001-2	2004	2006	2003-4	2008	2004	2006
	9 month	0-1 years	2-3 years	3 years	4-5 years	4-5 years	5 years
FAMILY TYPE							
Couple family (a)	84.3??	89.6	86.8	86.8	85.8	86.0	80.7
Both biological parents	85.8	88.9		82.0		82.9	77.0
Lone mother	13.7	10.5	13.0	14.9	14.0	14.4	17.2
SIBLINGS							
Only child (b)	42.1	39.1	19.9	25.0	11.4	11.5	16.7
One sibling	36.3	36.4	47.3	47.7	46.3	47.5	49.2
Two siblings	14.8	16.4	22.5	18.4	28.7	26.8	23.1
Three or more siblings	6.8	8.1	10.3	8.8	13.6	14.2	11.0
RESIDENT FATHER							
Employed	90.9	92.6	93.0	92.4	93.3	92.4	91.1
RESIDENT MOTHER							
Employed	51.2	47.6	55.4	54.3	60.7	55.3	57.8
- full-time		10.6	16.7	13.2	21.1	19.4	14.3
- part-time		28.1	35.3	41.1	37.9	35.0	43.5
- on maternity leave (b)		8.9	3.4		1.7	0.9	

(a) LSAC includes all families with a Parent 2. In a few cases Parent 1 and parent 2 are not in a "couple" relationship.
(b) MCS mothers on leave – numbers included in full/part time figures

Family type

At the first wave of data collection, 84% of UK children and 90% of Australian children were living in couple families, with almost all of these comprising both biological parents (See Table x). Between the first two sweeps, the proportion of couple families *increased?* for the UK families to 87%, and then decreased substantially by the third sweep to 81%. In contrast, the proportion of couple families in Australia decreased each wave but to a lesser extent overall, to 86% when the children were aged 4-5 years.

These trends are of course matched by those for lone mothers, with the 18% of UK children living with a lone mother when they are aged 5 years, compared with 14% of Australian children.

Number of siblings

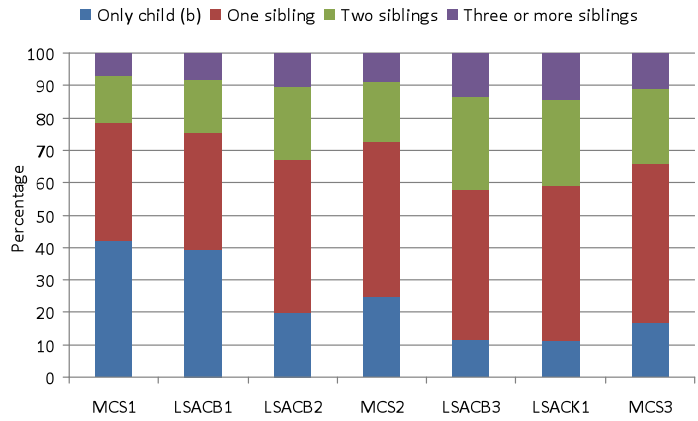
A slightly smaller proportion of Australian children were an only child (Aust 39%; UK 42%), and slightly more had three or more siblings (Aust 8%; UK 7%) at the time of the first data collection. This

[2] Data have yet to be double checked

difference widened over time – by the time the children were aged (4-)5 years, 11% of Australian children were still an only child, compared with 17% of UK children, and 14% of Australian children had three or more siblings, compared to 11% of UK children.

Having only one sibling is the most common situation for children aged (4-)5 years, with just under half of children in this situation in both countries (UK 49%; Aust 46%). However, almost as many children in Australia had two or more siblings (42%), compared with only 33% of UK children.

Figure 1. Number of siblings



Employment status of parents

Over 90% of resident fathers were employed in both countries at each wave of data collection, with employment rates reasonable stable in both countries but slightly higher in Australia than in the UK. For mothers, UK employment rates were higher than in Australia at the first data collection (51% compared with 48%), however by the time the children were (4-)5 years old, 61% of the B cohort Australian mothers were employed, compared with 58% of UK mothers. However, it can be noted that the employment rate for K cohort Australian mothers was only 55% when their child was aged 4-5 years. This may be explained by the different demographics of the B and K cohorts, and also by changes in the economic environment over the 4-year period between the two cohorts.

Figure 2. Employment status of parents