Aboriginal life pathways through multiple human service domains; administrative data linkage for policy

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DOI https://doi.org/10.23889/ijpds.v3i5.1087

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Abstract
Aboriginal children and families face the highest levels of disadvantage of any population group in Australia across health, education, child protection, justice and other human service domains, but longitudinal data to inform policy is scant. The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS) is a population representative cross-sectional child development study of over 5,000 randomly selected children aged 0-17 years, plus their families and schools, conducted between 2000 and 2002. This project seeks to leverage the WAACHS by linking the survey data for all participants with State administrative human services data registers from the previous 30+ years, to develop a major program of work in Aboriginal Human Development that would be unique in the world. This presentation describes the project history, novel survey linkage methodology, and project aims in the policy domain.

Comments
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ADRF Conference: Innovations in Administrative Data
Washington DC, 14 November, 2018
Francis Mitrou
Moving beyond indicators to understanding the life course

Aboriginal children and families face the highest levels of disadvantage of any population group in Australia. Evident across multiple domains of human service:

- **Health** (smoking, mental illness, diabetes, cancer, RHD, life expectancy, etc....)
- **Education** (low school readiness, higher school absence, lower NAPLAN scores)
- **Child protection** (52% of children in out-of-home care in WA, around 8-times over-represented)
- **Justice** (Approx. 3% of the Australian population, but 27% of the adult prison population)

We don’t need more rate and prevalence data to know the situation must be addressed
Aboriginal children and families face the highest levels of disadvantage of any population group in Australia. Evident across multiple domains of human service:

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**People tend to have multiple disadvantages**

**The mix of disadvantages can vary by life-stage, gender and geography**

**Improving life outcomes means moving beyond point estimates to understanding the complexities of the life course**
What would it take to address these issues?

We’re developing a research project that addresses these measurement problems by having the following properties:

• Longitudinal
• Multi-dimensional
• Multi-generational
• Privacy preserving – no identifying information
• Community driven
• Supports program evaluation
• Policy relevant – past, present, future
Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS) is a Telethon Kids legacy resource

- Random population representative sample across WA
- Collected 2000/01. Households with Aboriginal children aged 0–17 years
- High statistical power (N = 5,289 children, 11,400 family members in total)
- Comprehensive child development and family circumstance data
WAACHS – Locations of survey sample
WAACHS History – The Original Research

• Multiple informants (carers, children themselves, teachers, principals) and settings (urban, rural, remote, discrete communities)

• Developed in collaboration with Aboriginal leaders, communities, funding agencies and experts in health, education and human development

• Evidence base
  • Life stress, forced separation, maternal smoking, mental health, school attendance, housing circumstances, community capacity
Current WAACHS Project

Linking WAACHS to administrative data will deliver life course information

- Human services data is longitudinal, some from pre-1980 to 2018
- Children aged 17–36 years at December 2018, plus their families
- Multi-generational lens
- Non-Aboriginal control groups for comparison
- Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee (WAAHEC) approved our request to link all WAACHS participants to the WA Data Linkage System in November 2015
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**Longitudinal administrative data domains support policy evaluation**
- Health (including mental health)
- Housing
- Education and Training
- Transport and Licensing
- Child protection and family support
- Justice (Police, Courts and Corrections)
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Children of the original children; Pending ethics approval – Phase 2 of project

- Original children now too old to be affected by current child policy
- WAACHS children will have children of their own who are in-scope for recent government programs
- Value of WAACHS is brought up-to-date by including children of original children
- Makes WAACHS relevant to current child and family policy
WAACHS and Linked Administrative Data Overview

TKI WAACHS (Children aged 0-17 in 2000-02) – data from parents, teachers, & young people
Family & Community environment (e.g. carer health, cultural factors, forced separation; socioeconomic wellbeing, family functioning, parenting, stressors/supports, housing)
Physical health (e.g. nutrition, infections, chronic conditions, oral health, disability)
Social and emotional wellbeing (e.g. emotional/behavioural difficulties, substance use, health risk behaviours, physical activity, self-esteem, suicidal behaviour, resilience)

WA Govt. Child Protection (e.g. Maltreatment and Out of Home Care)

WA Govt. Education (School Attendance, Achievement and Completion): Vocational training

WA Govt. Health (e.g. Birth characteristics, disability, physical & mental health (ED & hospitalisations, MH services),

WA Govt. Human Services (e.g. Housing, Birth registration, Driving licence)

WA Govt. Justice (Police, Courts, Prisons) e.g. offending, detention, community corrections, diversions, adult prisons; victimisation

Infancy  Early Childhood  Middle Childhood  Adolescence  Adulthood
Non-Aboriginal control groups selected from Midwives Notification System (ratio 10:1) and other systems
Children of WAACHS Children born since the survey
Parents/carers and other family members
State Government Department policy (Justice, Education, Health and Housing) from pre-2000 to current
Why does Australia need this project?

- Closing the Gap style policies are not working, despite decades of trying
- Identification of intervention opportunities is difficult with other available data sources
- Evaluation of policies and programs requires longitudinal data
- Longitudinal data about Aboriginal life trajectories across human service portfolios is rare
- Including *children* of the children ensures current policy relevance for child domains
- Multiple disadvantage for individuals and families, community disadvantage, and service access disadvantage are not adequately captured in another similar dataset

This project can deliver the **life course information** so desperately needed to both inform and evaluate interventions.
We last saw WAACHS children and families in 2000/01. Original WAACHS children are now aged 17 – 36 years. What pathways have these children taken across their life course?

What about *their* children?

Linked human service data can help inform these questions
Acknowledgements

Stephen Zubrick (The University of Western Australia and TKI); Glenn Pearson (Telethon Kids Institute); Anna Ferrante (Curtin University); Melissa O'Donnell (The University of Western Australia and TKI); Sarah Johnson (Telethon Kids Institute); Helen Milroy (The University of Western Australia); Ngiare Brown (South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute); Katrina Hopkins (Telethon Kids Institute); Jonathan Carapetis (The University of Western Australia and TKI).

Our co-sponsors –
Aboriginal Legal Service (WA)
Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service

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This project is supported by the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Children and Families over the Life Course (CE140100027). The Centre is administered by the Institute for Social Science at the University of Queensland, with nodes at the University of Western Australia, The University of Melbourne and the University of Sydney.