Patterns of health and disease are largely a consequence of how we learn, live and work.

The Year 2000 Follow-up of the Ontario Child Health Study Cohort

Summary of Results

June 2003

Principal Investigator:
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Public Health Sciences
University of Toronto

Co-investigators:
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Funding provided by:
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* Dr Offord died in April 2004. The OCHS 2000 Follow-up Team will continue the project in his memory.
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Research Context

The Ontario Child Heath Study (OCHS) is made up of a community survey of 3,294 children aged 4–16 from 1,869 families. The survey was carried out in 1983, with an initial follow-up in 1987. This second follow-up study was a major research program within the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University, initially funded by the Medical Research Council (MRC), and supplemented by CPHI. The OCHS examines the distribution and determinants of children’s health, focusing on emotional and behavioural problems, chronic mental illness, functional limitations, and substance abuse.

Beginning in November 2000, a second follow-up survey of the original children in this study was conducted, with Statistics Canada providing field survey services. This survey looked at the possible influences of early experiences on important life transitions, such as joining the workforce, entering into a relationship with someone and becoming a parent. All of the original respondents, now between the ages of 21–33 years, were eligible to participate in this collection.

The research funded by CPHI focused on two main areas of the Year 2000 Follow-up: a) the interviewing of original OCHS respondents who have migrated out of the province of Ontario and b) the development of a longitudinal research database and supporting documentation to be made available to other research teams.

Research Results

Follow-up of OCHS Out-Migrants

In this part of the program, the team traced and interviewed the original OCHS participants who had migrated out of the province of Ontario over the period 1987–2000.

From the total number of successfully traced respondents (2,867 individuals, or 86.7% of the original OCHS cohort of 3,294), 305 individuals had migrated out of the province of Ontario. All interviews were completed with out-migrants who consented to participate (n = 260) and the information from these interviews is now being captured and processed by Statistics Canada.

There were three compelling reasons for tracing out-migrants:

1. It ensured that the representativeness of the original sample was preserved.
2. The additional respondents reached enhanced the statistical power of the study, which is especially important in a number of key sub-group analyses.
3. It provided the opportunity to explicitly examine the influence of household migration on the health and social role function of young adults.
Infrastructure Development and Dissemination

The objective of this component of the research program was to ensure that the longitudinal research database and supporting documentation could be accessed by other research teams. The documentation of OCHS objectives is complete. The research team tested the documentation with a small group of analysts over a period of three months and concluded that the material is well structured and facilitates the ability of well-qualified analysts to understand the structure of the OCHS database.

The research team also aimed to provide a series of recommended analytic procedures to guide analysts in the examination of the longitudinal relationships in the OCHS database. The OCHS data set lends itself to two basic analytical approaches: one arising from an epidemiological perspective and the other from a developmental perspective. The first concentrates on estimating functional outcomes at follow-up and evaluating their association with hypothesized risk factors; the second focuses on modelling change over time and testing causal theories.

The goal to attain public use access for this database has not yet been fully realized. Restrictions have been placed on the distribution of a public use dataset for reasons of privacy and confidentiality. The McMaster University-based research team has prepared a ‘dummy’ dataset that can be used by qualified researchers to prepare and debug analytic computer code. All analyses must be performed within the secure computing environment at McMaster University. Finally, the codebook and data dictionary is available, and is updated on a cycle of approximately six-month intervals.

Author-Identified Policy Implications

The authors identified the following knowledge gaps and policy implications:

- With three waves of data spanning some 17 years, longitudinal data from the OCHS is an important tool for expanding our knowledge concerning long-term influences of early risk factors and enhancing our understanding of processes that lead to successful or unsuccessful transitions into adulthood. This will also help to increase the capacity of the various partners in society to develop effective strategies, policies and programs that assist in the healthy development of our children and youth.

- The components funded by CPHI for interviewing provincial out-migrants and the development of longitudinal research database dataset were primarily infrastructure investments that will extend benefits to other researchers and policy-makers across the country. The extension of the tracing, recruitment and interviewing of provincial out-migrants ensures the generalizability of the study sample and will enhance the relevance of the study to a wide range of policy audiences.

- The development and documentation of a research database linking together the three waves of the OCHS longitudinal panel will ensure that a wider community of researchers can participate in the generation of policy-relevant research findings from this unique Canadian cohort.
This publication is part of CPHI’s ongoing inquiry into the patterns of health across this country. Consistent with our broader findings, it reflects the extent to which the health of Canadians is socially determined, interconnected, complex and changing. CPHI is committed to deepening our understanding of these patterns.