

LONGITUDINAL SURVEY OF IMMIGRANTS TO AUSTRALIA

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INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Immigration Research (BIR) is designing and testing a longitudinal survey of immigrants to Australia by conducting a prototype survey in late 1991. The main purpose of the longitudinal survey is to gather information on the performance of Government policies, programs and services that affect immigrants and on the settlement experiences of recent immigrants.

A full-scale longitudinal survey requires considerable financial and other resource input making the design stage one of major importance. Issues to be addressed include defining survey objectives, locating the population, selecting a sampling strategy, identifying data items, formulating a questionnaire, designing tracking and follow-up mechanisms, deciding on data collection and coding methods, and anticipating analytic techniques.

In the early stages of design the question of analytic techniques seems remote. However, it is exactly at this stage that many potential analytical problems can be either exacerbated or reduced.

The BIR is canvassing widely views on the structure and methodology for the longitudinal survey. As part of the consultative process a series of working papers is being produced: *Literature Review, Topics and Issues, Outline of Proposed Methodology, Survey Procedures and Operations, Questionnaire Specifications, Data Analysis, and Outcomes and Recommendations*.

Input from mathematicians and statisticians has been limited to date. Suggestions would be most welcome on how to improve the value of the longitudinal survey by gathering data in such a way that the use of the most appropriate analytical techniques will be facilitated.

PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY

The Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs (DILGEA) is responsible for the Federal Government's immigration and settlement policies and programs. Monitoring and evaluating these policies and programs is a fundamental part of the efficient and effective operation of DILGEA.

In the past, research undertaken for this purpose has been cross-sectional. However, with the affirmation of immigration research as a vital planning element and with widespread recognition that longitudinal surveys are needed to effectively analyse the immigration and settlement process, there is strong support for the implementation of a longitudinal survey in recognition of the technique's unique capabilities. Furthermore, although it is a sizeable single expenditure a longitudinal survey embodies many economies of scale.

As part of its charter the BIR seeks to add to knowledge about immigration and related issues by conducting and promoting relevant research. This aim and the Department's need to monitor and evaluate its policies and programs together form the fundamental justification for a longitudinal survey of immigrants to Australia.

THE TARGET POPULATION

Permanent immigrants to Australia are in one of three broad categories: as part of the Government's immigration program, as New Zealand residents, or as non-permanent arrivals in Australia who apply for and are granted permanent resident status while in Australia. The proposed longitudinal survey initially will sample only those in the immigration program (Table 1).

Table 1: Immigration Program - 1990/91.

<u>Category</u>	<u>Sub-category</u>	<u>Visas Issued</u>
Family Migration	preferential	38 760
	concessional	22 493
Skill Migration	employer nominations	7 532
	special talents	127
Humanitarian	business migration	6 975
	independent	35 128
Special Eligibility		11 329
		1 222
TOTAL		123 566

SURVEY DIMENSIONS

Principal applicants are the sampling unit although the person interviewed will not be the principal applicant in every case. An intake like that above represents about 50 000 principal applicants, the rest being their partners and dependants. It is proposed that the longitudinal survey comprise 2500 to 3000 principal applicants, this represents five to six per cent of the 1990/91 intake.

There are planned to be three major contacts; within three months of arrival, one year after the first interview, and one or two years after the second interview. It is possible that at least some of the sample will be contacted at later times, perhaps five years after arrival. Some lower level contact in the periods between major contacts will be necessary to gather specific information and to ensure a high retention rate for the sample.

A new group of 2500 to 3000 immigrants will be contacted each year. Anticipating a fairly high attrition rate due to return migration and non-contact, and assuming major contacts on arrival, one year after the first interview and one year after the second interview, the sequence of cohorts would be as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Sequence of Cohorts.

<u>Cohort</u>	<u>Year</u>					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
A	2500	2300	2200	-	-	-
B	-	2500	2300	2200	-	-
C	-	-	2500	2300	2200	-
D	-	-	-	2500	2300	2200

There will be scope for three types of inter-group analysis given the above structure: the same cohorts in different years; different cohorts in the same year; and different cohorts in different years but which have the same duration of residence in Australia (this is represented by the diagonals).

ISSUES

In the early stages of design major issues are those of sampling.

Given the sample size, stratification will be limited to a matrix of about 100-150 cells. Visa category (preferential family, concessional family, independent, other skill migration, and humanitarian) and country of birth form the core of the stratification matrix. Given the possibility of including a third stratification variable the choice would be geographic destination in Australia.

Having determined five visa categories, the stratification matrix can accommodate a 20-30 cell matrix defined by country of birth and possibly destination within Australia. Some further control over the sample structure can be exercised within the 100-150 cells in terms of age and gender characteristics, but only in the larger cells. Some of the smaller cells may be difficult to fill on the basis of visa category and country of birth alone.

Given that the sample is to be first interviewed within three months of arrival, the sampling and contact strategy must be continuous. Interviews will be conducted progressively during the year.

The characteristics of the population from which the sample is being drawn will not be known exactly until most of the sample has been selected. The sample frame will be formulated on the basis of a planned immigration program and will be adjusted as actual outcomes become more clear towards the end of each financial year.

Another category of issues that are of significance in the early stages can be described loosely as the definition of hypotheses and objectives. The survey is intended to monitor and evaluate the performance of the Government's immigration program, and services and programs for immigrants.

It is also useful to consider at an early stage the types of analytical techniques that could be applied to the data. Purposeful design will enhance the utility of the data not only in terms of the primary purpose for which it is intended but also for many other secondary purposes not yet identified. It is in this area that there appears to be a dearth of theory and practice. Most available longitudinal data sets are used mainly as cross-sectional ones and their full potential is not exploited.

Hopefully, by adopting an early and wide-ranging consultative process, the BIR will ensure most major and many minor problems have been anticipated and addressed, and that the longitudinal survey will be of significant and long-term value to a range of organisations and individuals.

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