

Measuring the Aging Life Course:
The Collections, Resources and Tools for Aging Research
Maintained by the National Archive of Computerized Data on Aging

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INTRODUCTION: Since the 1960's researchers have recognized the value of survey research data for the study of the aging life course. Across the past several decades survey approaches have become increasingly refined and current study designs seek to maximize research value for secondary analysis. As longitudinal studies of comparative aging have become increasingly multinational the opportunities for cross-national collaborations have grown exponentially. Due largely to the consistent preservation of research data within archives and national repositories, there is a growing body of publicly accessible information that allows researchers anywhere in the world to systematically examine the aging process across nations and across extended periods of time. NACDA's role within this research framework is one of preservation, integrating value-added information and facilitating the sharing of information across disciplines. In existence for over 35 years, NACDA preserves and distributes over 1,600 studies on the lifecourse and health of the elderly living in the United States and worldwide. Funded by the National Institute on Aging (NIA), NACDA represents one of the world's largest collections of research data on elderly populations. As similar systems of data preservation and research sharing continue to be developed and maintained worldwide, as has been the case in Europe for decades, and increasingly in Pacific Rim, Asian and African nations, opportunities for collaborative research continue to grow.

METHODS: The creation and maintenance of sustainable data archives can be challenging but it offers clear advantages for a national research strategy. Properly curated data can be used by multiple researchers, testing a variety of hypotheses and increasing the return on investment to the expensive process of data collection. Having an internally managed archival system also provides greater control and autonomy in the equitable distribution of data resources. A major concern in data sharing is that the primary investigator and the country of origin often fail to get full use of the data for original research, teaching and new directions once the data leaves the control of the local investigator's control. This poster reviews the advantages of having a local strategy geared toward the preservation and sharing of gerontological research data. Using the National Archive of Computerized Data on Aging (NACDA) as a working example, the poster offers an overview of collections at NACDA. Using our metadata tools and variable search database, NACDA can identify studies in its collections that examine aspects of aging and health among adults during their lifecourse. Many

of the studies are longitudinal or repeat measure cross-sectional studies. We are also able to identify studies which focus on aging that are not maintained by NACDA but which are available to interested researchers.

RESULTS: Within the NACDA collections we can identify studies on a variety of topics – from cognitive function to physical health to healthcare. All the studies are available for secondary analysis for any interested researcher. NACDA also maintains metadata on external studies such as the HRS, NHATS and SHARE which is useful in identifying data for original research frameworks. Using a strategy of archival preservation combined with a strong focus on productive research and outreach, NACDA has amassed data and metadata covering a wide array of studies worldwide that address the aging lifecourse. Because our collections are multinational, we share these data at no cost to interested users worldwide through the provision of a wide array of analysis and extraction tools that facilitate the research process for all users. Increasingly, NACDA's mission also seeks to focus on working with other universities, research organizations and federal agencies who are interested in developing internally managed repositories to ensure their researchers have access to data relevant to local research interests.

CONCLUSION: This poster presents an overview of the collections maintained by the NACDA Program on Aging to describe holdings, identify research applications and discuss emerging methodologies for the management, analysis and preservation of gerontological data. The NACDA Program on Aging offers a successful archival model that emphasizes preservation, research productivity and the recognition of primary researchers who share the innovative studies that make up our collections. The NACDA research staff will be available at the proposed poster to discuss the use of these data for research. The staff will assist researchers in identifying data useful in studying the aging lifecourse and demonstrate tools that identify studies in our collections and across other research facilities.

