Wisconsin Longitudinal Study
Center for the Demography of Health and Aging
University of Wisconsin-Madison
with support from the National Institute on Aging since 1991
what the WLS offers

- **public** longitudinal survey data following a cohort of Wisconsin high school graduates from ages ~18 to ~65 (and beyond)
- survey data from multiple respondents
- diverse administrative record data
- information about many domains of respondent lives, and those of other family members
- high response rates
- small grants for new research (wls@ssc.wisc.edu)
- however: WLS respondents are all high school graduates and almost all whites (rather like 2/3 of Americans of their cohort, but *not* like everyone)
a who’s who of the WLS

- J. Kenneth Little – led initial survey for the State of Wisconsin
- William H. Sewell – directed WLS from 1962 to 1980
- Robert M. Hauser – investigator/director, 1969-
- Tess Hauser – survey and data manager, 1970-
- Since 2001, Jeremy Freese, and a cast of dozens in sociology, demography, epidemiology, economics, social and cognitive psychology, industrial engineering, neuroscience, social work, psychiatry, law, nursing, and medicine
relational structure of data in the WLS
April 1957: in-school questionnaire of all Wisconsin seniors (1/3 become WLS sample, N=10,317)
the 1957 WLS survey

- social background
- courses taken in high school
- social influences (teachers, parents, peers)
- educational and occupational plans
- military and marriage plans
- parental support for college expenses
1964: short mail survey of parents, 87%
the 1964 WLS parent survey

- education (college and vocational)
- military status in 1964
- 1964 occupation
- marital status in 1964
- women’s husband's occupation in 1964
education by gender

Men

Women

High school  Some college  College degree

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
1957 graduate

parents

sibling

children

hs friends

wife or husband

1975: telephone interview with graduates, 89%
V = Mother's educational attainment
M = Father's educational attainment
X = Father's occupational status
I = Parents' average income
Q = Measured mental ability
G = Rank in high school class
F = Friends' college plans
P = Parents' encouragement to attend college
T = Teachers' encouragement to attend college
E = College plans
J = Occupational aspiration
U = Educational attainment
W = Status of first job
Y = Status of current job
the 1975 WLS telephone survey

- social background
- education and training update
- military history
- job history and characteristics
- earnings
- marital and childbearing history
- sibling roster and characteristics
- religion and church attendance
- social participation
1977: subsample of 2000 randomly selected siblings surveyed by telephone, 80%
X1, X2, X3 = Father's educational attainment
X4, X5, X6 = Father's occupational status
X7 = Number of siblings
Y1, Y2 = Graduate's mental ability
Y3 = Sibling's mental ability
Y4, Y5 = Graduate's educational attainment
Y6, Y7 = Sibling's educational attainment
Y8 = Graduate's occupational status
Y9, Y10 = Sibling's occupational status
1992-94: telephone and mail surveys of graduates (85%) and (more) siblings (80%)
the 1992-94 WLS telephone and mail surveys, 1

- social and economic variables
  - family variables and marital history
  - child roster (and selected child)
  - sibling roster (and selected sibling)
  - educational history
  - occupational history and job characteristics
  - wages, income, and assets
  - interhousehold transfers
  - insurance and pension coverage
  - retirement plans
the 1992-94 WLS telephone and mail surveys, 2

• early family relationships (abuse, encouragement)

• current social relationships
  – closeness
  – contact
  – comparison
  – caregiving
  – social exchange
the 1992-94 WLS telephone and mail surveys, 3

- psychological variables
  - basic personality variables (Big Five)
  - cognition (WAIS abstract reasoning)
  - depression (current and lifetime)
  - psychological well-being
the 1992-94 WLS telephone and mail surveys, 4

- health and health practices
  - general health
  - exercise and self-care
  - smoking and alcohol use
  - symptoms
  - medical conditions
  - menopausal experience

- social security numbers (graduates, selected siblings, [parents])
where were WLS graduates in 1992-93?
where do WLS graduates live?


Educational attainment and year:
- 12, 1975
- 13-15, 1975
- 16+, 1975
- 12, 1993
- 13-15, 1993
- 16+, 1993
- 12, 2003
- 16+, 2003

Wisconsin
Other
in the field: telephone (~83%) and 50+ pp. mail surveys (88%) of graduates,
in the field: spouses (for the first time), ~70%+
*The module or some section of the module will be subsampled.

NOTE: Each box represents one Q-file and an associated audio recording.
1957 graduate

parents

siblings

husband or wife

children

starting shortly: surveys of siblings and their spouses
the 2003-2005 WLS telephone and mail surveys, 1

- education, employment and retirement, work activities and conditions, earnings, income, wealth, and economic transfer
- family structure, family relations, and stressful life events, coping behavior
- health, illness, psychological well-being, and mental disorder, health-related behaviors
- cognitive functioning
- circumstances of birth and upbringing
the 2003-2005 WLS telephone and mail surveys, 2

- social and civic participation and exchange relationships
- intellectual and social engagement and social isolation
- child disability, severe mental illness, and early death
- health insurance, access to health care, and pension coverage
- medical, legal, religious, and psychological preparation for the end of life
plus: much non-survey data:

- high school standardized test scores (Henmon-Nelson Test in freshman and junior years)
- high school class rank
- parents’ occupation and income (tax records), 1957-60
- college and employer characteristics
- biomedical data for pilot sample
- social security earnings (men only, blind link)
- links to National Death Index
- geocodes of addresses
- high school resources (from state archives)
- high school yearbooks (for ~75% of Rs)
some domains where WLS data are especially strong

- social/family background
- educational history
- employment history
- job characteristics
- marital history
- children
- physical/mental health
- income and wealth
- retirement and pensions
- cognitive performance
- leisure time activities
- stressful life events
methodological features

- interviews by random replicates
- bracketing amounts with random anchors
- selecting special children (supplemental interview and survey)
- cognitive measurement
- health vignettes (WHS)
- DRQ/ERM (Kahneman)
- recording interviews
women’s obesity by education and year

Educational attainment and year

- Obese
- Overweight
- Normal
- Underweight
Mortality by general health in 1993

- VERY POOR
- POOR
- FAIR
- GOOD
- EXCELLENT

Mortality by 2004
availability/access of wls data

- commitment to easy public availability of all permissible data
- cross-reference tables on web to facilitate use of WLS codebooks
- longitudinal data with a large sampling fraction provides particular challenges for maintaining confidentiality
- CDHA at UW has and is continuing to develop a strong system for secure data analysis
levels of access to WLS data

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WLS websites

• respondent web
  – http://wisls.org

• public data users
  – http://dpls.dacc.wisc.edu/wls/index.html
  – documentation
  – bibliography
  – variable search aids
  – downloadable data

• private web
  – proposals, instruments, manuscripts
WLS support

• Questions?
  – email wls@ssc.wisc.edu
Wisconsin Longitudinal Study
University of Wisconsin-Madison
1180 Observatory Drive
Madison, Wisconsin  53706

• small grants program
  – short applications
  – two meetings in Madison (fall and summer)
  – modest honorarium
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