

Keeping Track of Mobile Families: characteristics, attrition and bias in the British Birth Cohort Studies of 1970 and the Millennium.

Ian Plewis, Heather Joshi, Peter Shepherd, Andy Cullis

Centre for Longitudinal Studies, Institute of Education, University of London

Extended Abstract

Longitudinal datasets such as the British Birth Cohort Studies of people born in 1970 and 2000/1, potentially provide rich evidence about internal migration, though they are probably underutilized for this purpose.

One reason for this may be that the phenomenon of mobility, be it permanent long-distance migration, local moves of address, or temporary 'circulation' of subjects itself poses a major challenge to the task of finding them for follow-up. Because we are not always entirely successful in meeting this challenge moving addresses is a major cause of survey attrition the collectors of longitudinal data themselves have a concern to know as much as possible about who moves and why. We want know how movers differ from those who stay put, to help assess the extent of attrition bias. Both the 1970 and Millennium cohorts have encountered high mobility among families with young children, so this paper will focus on methodological and substantive issues about moving home at this stage of the life cycle. A similar battery of techniques are being used to find movers in both surveys, which will be described.

The British Cohort Study of 1970 was in the field in 2000 when its subjects were 30, and a study at age 34 is currently in the field., with a major operation being undertaken to locate a substantial number of families (ca 20%) who have since

moved. The data is expected to be available early in 2005 and the paper will present evidence from the 1970 cohort about mobility across Great Britain between the ages of 30 and 34 of cohort members with children across the age range, 0-18, mainly around age 5.

The Millennium Cohort conducted its first survey during 2001-2, in selected electoral wards across the whole United Kingdom, when the survey subjects were aged 9 months. We aware that around 7% of the target population were missed because of internal movement. (Plewis 2004) We have some evidence about the families who became ineligible because they moved out We are collecting new data, on families who were missed in the first survey because they are thought to have moved in. These families have subsequently been found in administrative records to have addresses in the target areas current at the time. This exercise was carried out for England only and has produced an unexpectedly high numbers (of hard to find) cases. This operation is part of the second survey of the Millennium cohort, in the field in 2004, with results also available for analysis in early 2005. The paper will also examine the cases in the main sample who have moved between the 2001 and 2004 Sweeps (again around one in 5) comparing the characteristics of the movers who have been interviewed with those movers who have not been followed up and with families who stayed put. We will also exploit the clustered nature of the Millennium sample to show how type of area relates to the mobility of families with young children. We will look at social deprivation indicators, rural-urban indicators,

ethnic composition, etc. We have preliminary evidence that a few places with high population turnover, including transient international migrants account for some of the original non-response in 2001.