

THE HILDA SURVEY



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Last year we reported that the Australian Government had decided in 2007 to provide funding to extend the collection of HILDA Survey data for a further four years, that is to conduct waves 9 to 12. Subsequently the government conducted a tender for the right to manage the HILDA Survey contract over that period, which thankfully was won by the Melbourne Institute.

The decision to continue the survey is testimony of the value to the researchers, and to policy advisers, of the data generated by the HILDA Survey.

Welcome to Roy Morgan

One unexpected development during 2008 was the announcement by the Nielsen Company that it would cease its involvement as the fieldwork provider for the HILDA Survey on the completion of wave 8. The Melbourne Institute thus undertook its own tender during the first half of 2008 to find a replacement for Nielsen. The successful tenderer was Roy Morgan Research, which is particularly well known for its flagship survey vehicle — the Morgan Gallup Poll.

Roy Morgan will assume responsibilities for all data collection functions from wave 9 onwards. This includes all testing phases, which commenced in late 2008.

Transition to CAPI

A key feature of the Roy Morgan tender was a proposed change in data collection method. For waves 1 to 8 the primary mode of data collection has been personal interviews employing traditional pen-and-paper methods. For future waves we

will continue to rely primarily on personal interviews, but using computer-assisted methods (CAPI).

The shift to CAPI will reduce costs by eliminating the data entry stage. In addition, it is expected that the incidence of both recording and reporting errors will be reduced, given CAPI provides the ability to query internally inconsistent responses.

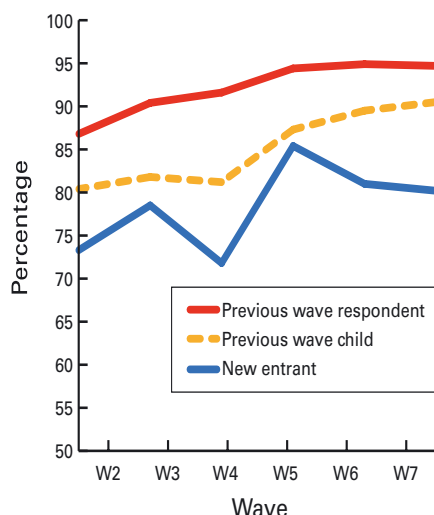
Nevertheless the change in collection mode, together with the change in data provider, has the potential to significantly disrupt data continuity, a particularly serious problem for a longitudinal survey. Overseas experience, however, indicates that if the transition is well managed, such discontinuities will be minimal if not avoided entirely. During 2008 we have thus designed and implemented a plan that we expect will ensure that the experience of the HILDA Survey is similar to its international counterparts.

Data Collection and Questionnaire Design

Wave 7

The main business of the HILDA Survey is the collection and dissemination of data, and collection of data for wave 7 was finalised in 2008. Rates of respondent participation remained high, with our headline rate — the proportion of respondents from wave 6 who also participated in wave 7 — again reaching almost 95 per cent.

HILDA Survey Response Rates Remain High



After the usual array of checks and edits and extensive value-adding enhancements — construction of derived variables, weights, and imputation of missing values — the unit record data from wave 7 will be released in February 2009.

Wave 8

In addition to the preparation of data release 7, the other major activity during 2008 was the testing of the wave 8 survey instruments and the commencement of the wave 8 fieldwork (from late August). Preliminary indications are that response rates will be similar to previous years.

The key feature of wave 8 is the repeat of the extension module on fertility and family formation previously included in wave 5. In addition, new question sequences on relationships with non-co-resident family members have been included for the first time.

Wave 9

Development work also commenced during 2008 on the wave 9 questionnaires, with skirmish testing of new content conducted in November.

The main innovation for wave 9 is the inclusion of a dedicated health module, expected to be included every four years. Among the topics being considered for inclusion are: child health, difficulties caused by health conditions, serious illness conditions, retrospective childhood health, health expectations, private health insurance, utilisation of health services, diet and physical activity.

Families, Incomes and Jobs: Volume 3

The HILDA Survey team also released its third statistical report during 2008. This report presents short articles analysing a range of issues informed by the first five waves of the HILDA Survey. The structure of the report largely mirrors the content of the survey, examining change in four key areas: family life, incomes, employment and joblessness, and life satisfaction and overall well-being.

The next statistical report (Volume 4), which will cover the first six waves of data, was also drafted during 2008 and will be released in 2009.

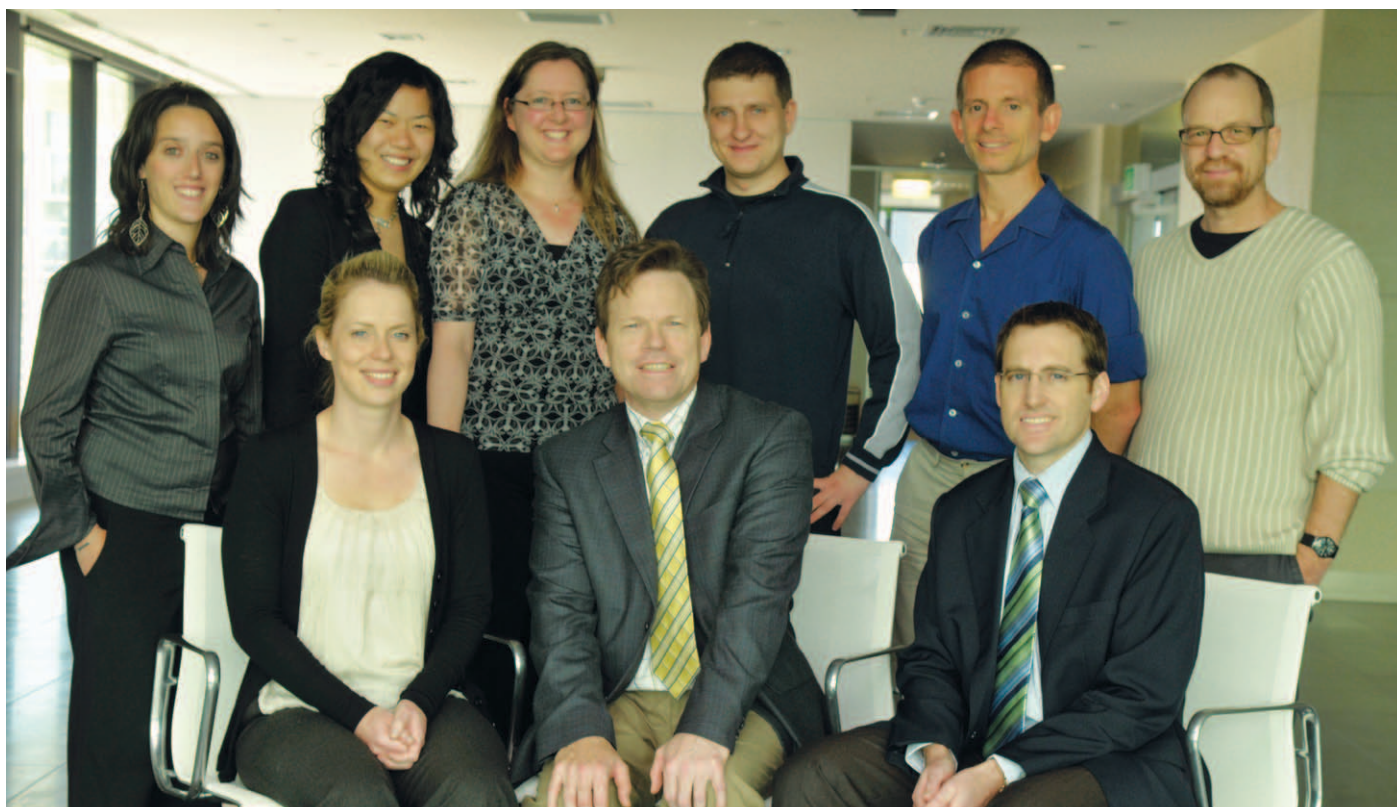
HILDA Passes the 1000th User Mark

One of the major successes of HILDA has been the uptake of the data within the research and public policy communities. As shown in the accompanying table, the number of approved users of the HILDA Survey data has gradually grown over time, and during 2008 the size of the community, in terms of heads, passed the 1000 mark. This is an impressive achievement given both the complexity of panel data and the relatively small size of the research community in Australia who possess the necessary skills to make use of the data.

Use of the HILDA Survey Data Continues to Grow

Release	Total data orders	Orders by new users	Cumulative number of users
Release 1 (Wave 1)	204	204	204
Release 2 (Waves 1 and 2)	265	167	371
Release 3 (Waves 1 to 3)	280	154	525
Release 4 (Waves 1 to 4)	329	170	695
Release 5 (Waves 1 to 5)	387	175	870
Release 6 (Waves 1 to 6)	400	175	1045

Of course, data orders do not necessarily imply effective data use. While it is virtually impossible to identify any simple metric for measuring data use within government, within academia it is relatively straightforward to identify publications that make use of the HILDA Survey data. The results of this monitoring exercise are reported on our website in the guise of the HILDA bibliography. At the end of 2008, HILDA had generated 149 papers published in scholarly journals (with a further 26 known to be forthcoming), and an even larger number of conference papers, working papers and publicly available reports. This is quite encouraging given the relatively short life of the survey.



Members of the HILDA team