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## Introduction



Children born in the early years of this millennium are growing up in an Australian society different to that experienced by any previous generation. In order to ensure that each child has every chance to experience a happy and healthy start to life, it is essential that policy makers and researchers have access to quality data about children's development in the current economic, social and cultural environment.

*Growing Up in Australia:* The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) is Australia's first nationally representative longitudinal study of child development. The study was initiated and is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) and is conducted in partnership with the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). A consortium of leading researchers and experts from universities and research agencies provide advice to the study.

LSAC provides valuable data about children, their families and their wider environments, and enables researchers and policy makers to have a comprehensive understanding of children's development within Australia's current social, economic and cultural environment.

LSAC has been recognised as a world-leading study of children's development. Alison W. Baulos, the Executive Director of the Centre for the Economics of Human Development at the University of Chicago, notes that:

*No other dataset in the world combines good information on time investments in children, frequent measurements of care settings, developmental outcomes, and the possibility to be combined with comprehensive external data sources.*

Since 2004, thousands of children, their parents and their teachers have been interviewed. The study has an accelerated cross-sequential design, with two cohorts of children:

- the B ('baby') cohort, who were aged 0–1 year at the beginning of the study (born March 2003–February 2004)
- the K ('kindergarten') cohort, who were aged 4–5 years at the beginning of the study (born March 1999–February 2000).

**Table 1.1:** Number of study children responding in each wave, B and K cohorts

	Wave 1 (2004)	Wave 2 (2006)	Wave 3 (2008)	Wave 4 (2010)	Wave 5 (2012)	Wave 6 (2014)
<b>B cohort</b>	Age 0–1	Age 2–3	Age 4–5	Age 6–7	Age 8–9	Age 10–11
<i>n</i>	5,107	4,606	4,386	4,242	4,077	3,764
<b>K cohort</b>	Age 4–5	Age 6–7	Age 8–9	Age 10–11	Age 12–13	Age 14–15
<i>n</i>	4,983	4,464	4,332	4,164	3,956	3,537

Source: LSAC Waves 1–6, B and K cohorts

The first wave of data collection was in 2004, with subsequent main waves every two years. The longitudinal nature of the study enables researchers to examine the dynamics of change as children develop, and to go beyond the static pictures provided by cross-sectional statistics. Table 1.1 summarises the ages and sample sizes for the two cohorts across the first six waves of the study.

This design means that from the third wave of the study, the children's ages overlap. That is, children are aged 4–5 years in the first wave for the K cohort and in the third wave for the B cohort.<sup>1</sup>

This is the eighth volume in the LSAC Annual Statistical Report (ASR) series. These reports are designed to promote the LSAC study and make its findings accessible to a range of audiences. The aim of the report is to showcase the LSAC data to policy makers, researchers and other interested readers.

The Annual Statistical Report:

- provides an overview of how the LSAC study children are faring across a range of developmental domains, with 'snapshots' of aspects of life, as experienced by Australian children and families, and information about how children's lives are changing as they grow up
- covers topics that are relevant to current policy development and social policy debates
- showcases the breadth of topics that LSAC addresses.

Together, the chapters in this report provide a multi-faceted picture of what is happening in the LSAC children's lives at particular points in time; and also of how the lives of the study children and their families are changing as children grow older. This report should be viewed only as 'selected findings'; a cursory indication of the vast potential of the LSAC data.

In covering the first six waves of the study, this report describes various aspects of children's lives – from their first year of life until age 15. Most of the analysis presented in this report consists of graphs and tables that are relatively easy to interpret. However, some tables contain estimates from regression models. These are less easy to interpret than the descriptive statistics but are included to provide a better understanding of the relationship between two factors, holding other factors constant. For example, in the chapter about housing experiences, estimates of the relationship between housing stress and housing tenure (whether the study child lives in a household where they have a mortgage or pay rent) are presented, holding constant other factors such as household structure and region of residence.

Various types of regressions have been estimated in this report, and while these models are not explained in depth, brief explanations of how to interpret these models are provided in the Technical Appendix (page 143). The Technical Appendix also provides details on the LSAC sample, respondents and collection methods, sampling and survey design and details of the weights supplied in the data to correct for non-response and attrition. Where appropriate, these weights are used in the analysis presented in this report.

## Reference

Soloff, C., Lawrence, D., & Johnstone, R. (2005). *LSAC sample design* (Technical Paper No. 1). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

<sup>1</sup> See Soloff, Lawrence, and Johnstone (2005) for more information about the study design.