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## Introduction

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Children born in the early years of this millennium are growing up in an Australian society different to that experienced by any previous generation. 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 contemporary society.

*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 social, economic and cultural environment.

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).

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 seven waves of the study.

**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)	Wave 7 (2016)
<b>B cohort</b>	Age 0–1	Age 2–3	Age 4–5	Age 6–7	Age 8–9	Age 10–11	Age 12–13
<i>n</i>	5,107	4,606	4,386	4,242	4,085	3,764	3,381
<b>K cohort</b>	Age 4–5	Age 6–7	Age 8–9	Age 10–11	Age 12–13	Age 14–15	Age 16–17
<i>n</i>	4,983	4,464	4,332	4,169	3,956	3,537	3,089

Source: LSAC Waves 1–7

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 ninth volume in the LSAC Annual Statistical Report (ASR) series. This series is designed to promote the LSAC study and make its findings accessible to a range of audiences. The aim of the series is to be a key resource for policy makers, researchers and other interested readers by:

- providing 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
- covering topics that are relevant to current policy development and social policy debates
- showcasing the breadth of topics that LSAC addresses.

This volume presents initial findings on a number of key topics arising from the seventh survey (wave), carried out when B and K cohort children were 12–13 and 16–17 years of age, respectively. This volume also features the Child Health CheckPoint, a special one-off physical assessment offered to the B cohort children at 11–12 years. 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 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.

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. Brief explanations of how to interpret the models are provided in the Technical Appendix. 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 analyses 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.