Brand New U.S. Nationally Representative Data: Wave VI of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health)

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Extended Abstract

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health) is a longitudinal study of a nationally representative sample of 20,745 adolescents who were in grades 7-12 during the 1994-95 school year. These adolescents were chosen from a sample of 80 U.S. high schools and 52 middle schools which were selected with an unequal probability of selection. The use of systematic sampling methods and implicit stratification in the Add Health study design ensured that the sample is representative of adolescents in U.S. high schools and their related feeder schools in 1994-95 with respect to region of the country, urbanicity, school size, school type, and ethnicity. The Add Health cohort has been followed for five waves to date, most recently in 2016-18 (Harris et al. 2019).

Over the years, the Add Health study has collected rich demographic, social, familial, socioeconomic, behavioral, psychosocial, cognitive, and health survey data from participants and their parents; a vast array of contextual data from participants' schools, neighborhoods, and geographies of residence; administrative data linked to participants, including birth and death certificates; and in-home physical and biological data from participants, including genetic markers, blood-based assays, anthropometric measures, and medications. Ancillary studies have added more information, including epigenetic, gene expression, and microbiome data as well as many contextual data sets linked to the residential addresses of cohort members (Harris et al. 2019). Thus, Add Health is exceptionally unique because it has a rich, multi-level, longitudinal array of data from a large nationally representative cohort of Americans who are now in early midlife.

This poster reports on the innovative design and measurement of Wave VI of Add Health, conducted in 2022-24, and provides novel descriptive data from the data collection that will be complete in early 2025. In Wave VI, cohort members are 40-49 years of age (mean age 44); as such we term this sixth wave of data collection as occurring during "early midlife." The overall goal of Wave VI of Add Health is to provide the research community with the comprehensive data needed to understand the social, economic, psychosocial, contextual, and biological determinants of health and cognitive trajectories and disparities among this nationally representative cohort of Americans as they begin aging into midlife. Our poster will first provide a very brief history of Add Health. We will then spend considerable space providing an overview of our state-of-the-art Wave VI data collection design, which involves a multi-mode survey data collection, web-based and in-person cognitive assessments, a home exam with venous blood collection, and linked birth, death, and contextual data. We will then summarize measurement innovations developed for Wave VI, many of which were focused on the collection of cognitive, physical, and sensory functioning among this cohort of early midlife individuals. The poster will then include an overview of the health of the Add Health cohort at Wave VI; importantly, as this cohort moves into midlife, the new data will inform the research and policy communities on the health status of midlife Americans, who have been shown in other data sets to have quite poor outcomes in comparison to previous cohorts of Americans. Finally, we will also have information on hand to provide interested researchers with instructions about how to access the brand-new Wave VI data.