



WORKSHOP 1

Increasing Response Rates, Retention and Participant Engagement in Longitudinal Studies: A Practical and Developmentally Oriented Guide to Limiting Attrition

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SUMMARY

The Child to Adolescent Transition Study (CATS)¹ commenced in 2012 with 1,239 Australian children aged 8-9 years. Despite maintaining relatively high response rates, a gradual decline in participation – a common trend in longitudinal studies – was observed over the first 11 waves. Response rates exceeded 90% for the first three childhood waves in primary school, dropped to above 80% for the next three, and further declined to 67% by wave 10 in late secondary school. While these rates remain respectable for a longitudinal cohort study that straddles multiple developmental stages, the decline prompted a review of protocols, sample characteristics, and study documentation before wave 12.

Our review led to the development of additional processes and strategies for participant retention which were implemented in the subsequent two waves in 2023 (wave 12) and 2024 (wave 13). These strategies led to a notable increase in response rates, with participation rising from 67% in 2022 to 71% in 2023 and increasing again to 73% in 2024. This is an uncommon occurrence in longitudinal research.

This interactive workshop will provide an overview of CATS and examine the strategies used to sustain high response rates while tackling common barriers to participation in longitudinal studies. We will also highlight the strategies developed over the past two years to address specific challenges related to the developmental transitions within the cohort. A review of CATS data collection methods, participant correspondence, tracing procedures and protocol changes to improve retention and response rates will be discussed and evaluated, particularly as they relate to improving engagement with adolescent and young adult participants.

The workshop will be led by Dr. Carolina Murphy (Project Manager) and Lilli Nonneman (Re-engagement Coordinator), who will share their expertise in data collection methodology and cohort maintenance in longitudinal studies, particularly with cohorts transitioning through the lifecourse.

¹ Subsequently renamed the Child to Adult Transition study, after funding was secured to continue annual surveys into adulthood.