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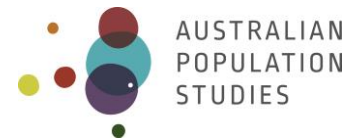
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Introductory Guide



Understanding survey data available for researchers working in ageing: the CEPAR Metadata Database on Ageing

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Abstract

Background

For researchers working in gerontology or the demography of ageing, knowledge of and access to population-based data, which includes mature age respondents, is critical. The collection of metadata (information describing data) supports researchers in their search for relevant data.

Aims

This proof-of-concept project seeks to develop a metadata database including metadata on Australian sample surveys relevant to ageing over the period 2010 – 2018.

Data and methods

We used a five-stage approach to create the Centre for Excellence in Population Ageing Research (CEPAR) metadata database on ageing: 1) identification of in-scope survey datasets; 2) indexing the in-scope surveys; 3) scraping metadata from publicly available sources; 4) appending metadata to a master database; and 5) creation of a webtool to enable users to search and export metadata and obtain contact details for the relevant data custodian.

Results

The CEPAR Metadata Database webtool is available from: <https://mspgh.unimelb.edu.au/centres-institutes/centre-for-health-policy/research-group/metadata-database>.

Conclusions

Metadata database collections can assist researchers to identify what data has been collected (for their specific research interest in ageing), how it was collected and how to gain access to the data.

Key words

Metadata; ageing; survey data; Australian Bureau of Statistics; data archive

1. Introduction

Evidence-driven gerontology and demography research relies on rigorous population-based empirical data. However, the Australian Association of Gerontology (2017) states there is no single national independent organisation that can collate, translate and identify gaps in evidence related to ageing with the aim of informing Australian policy. The collection of metadata (information describing data) can support important evidence-driven research. Mapping metadata is a preparatory step towards understanding what information is being captured, how it is captured, as well as improving data collection. Therefore, metadata can play a role in demonstrating the scope, foundations and gaps in current evidence-driven gerontology research which can inform future directions.

More generally, a key task that all social scientists face when beginning a new project is understanding the variety of data that exists in order to explore the underlying research question. Although excellent data archives are available in Australia, including the Australian Data Archive (ADA) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) microdata collections, there is currently no single point of metadata information specifically tailored to researchers working in ageing.

Our solution to this problem was to develop a metadata database as a proof-of-concept project. Our metadata database includes metadata on Australian sample surveys relevant to ageing (e.g., including data dictionary elements, variable names, data types and formats, and survey and sampling design) between the period 2010 – 2018. The scope further considers surveys collected by the ABS or deposited with the ADA, where metadata is publicly available. The metadata database webtool we developed enables users to search and export metadata and obtain contact details for the relevant data custodian. In the remainder of this paper, we outline components of metadata, the methodology employed to create the metadata database and provide a worked example of searching and extracting data from the provided webtool. We conclude with a summary of future uses and research priorities, as well as outlining the limitations to the approach employed.

2. What is metadata?

Metadata is data about data; it is information that describes other data. More precisely, it is the formalised structured description of content, quality, condition, or other characteristics of data. A principal purpose of metadata is to assist users in finding relevant information and discovering resources through bringing similar information together and providing the location of information. In addition, metadata provides access to information on the extent of completeness of the content; the context of the content; and structural relationships within and between information (Gilliland 2016). Metadata assists in identifying and organising electronic resources by relevant criteria, provides digital identification, and supports the archiving and preservation of resources (United Nations Statistical Commission and Economic Commission for Europe 1995).

Metadata can be stored internally, in the same file as the described data (also known as embedded metadata), or externally, in a separate file from the described data. A metadata repository generally stores the metadata separate from the data (NISO 2004). Many types of metadata exist including descriptive, structural, administrative, reference and statistical metadata.

Descriptive metadata describes a resource, typically to search and locate an object, such as title, author, subjects, keywords, or publisher (Gilliland 2016). For example, the survey name.

Statistical metadata describes information about statistical data and the processes of collection. Statistical data repositories have their own requirements for metadata to describe not only the source and quality of the data but also what statistical processes were used to create the data. This is of particular importance to both validate and improve the process of statistical data production (Gilliland 2016).

Reference metadata describes aspects of the contents of statistical data and includes explanatory information on the context of the data (Eurostat 2019). For example, a data item list, reporting on the representativeness of the dataset.

Structural metadata describes information about the structure and interrelationships of data, such as types, versions, tables, columns, keys and indexes (Gilliland 2016).

Administrative metadata describes information that assists to manage a resource, such as when and how it was created, acquisition and location information, file type, and who has access rights. Two subsets of administrative metadata include Rights Management Metadata, which concerns intellectual property rights, and Preservation Metadata, which contains information needed to archive and preserve a resource (Gilliland 2016).

The creation and archiving of metadata are important as it ensures that information and resources will survive and continue to be accessible in the future. Archiving and preservation allow tracking the lineage of an object, detailing physical characteristics and documenting behaviour which can be mimicked in future technologies (Gilliland 2016).

In the CEPAR metadata database, we include components of descriptive, structural, and administrative metadata. The database also includes links to details on statistical and reference metadata. The metadata itself is external, i.e., detached from the underlying survey data.

3. Methods

We used a five-stage approach to collect and display the metadata (Figure 1). Ethics approval for this project was granted by the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health Human Ethics Advisory Group (HEAG) – Ethics ID: 1852885.2.

Stage one involved identifying relevant sample surveys to include. Stage two centred on indexing the survey data. Stage three comprised scraping the metadata for each survey in the index file. Stage four included appending all the metadata for construction into a database. Finally, in stage five, a webtool was developed to enable users to search key terms in the metadata database.

For stage one, public repositories of Australian sample survey data were searched with the following inclusion criteria: sample survey data, unit-record files, publicly available, collected in 2010 or later and data related to participants aged 45 years and over. Surveys were excluded if they contained qualitative or mixed-methods data or had no available details of the data custodian. The stage one search was carried out from 17th of July 2018 until 1st of November 2018.

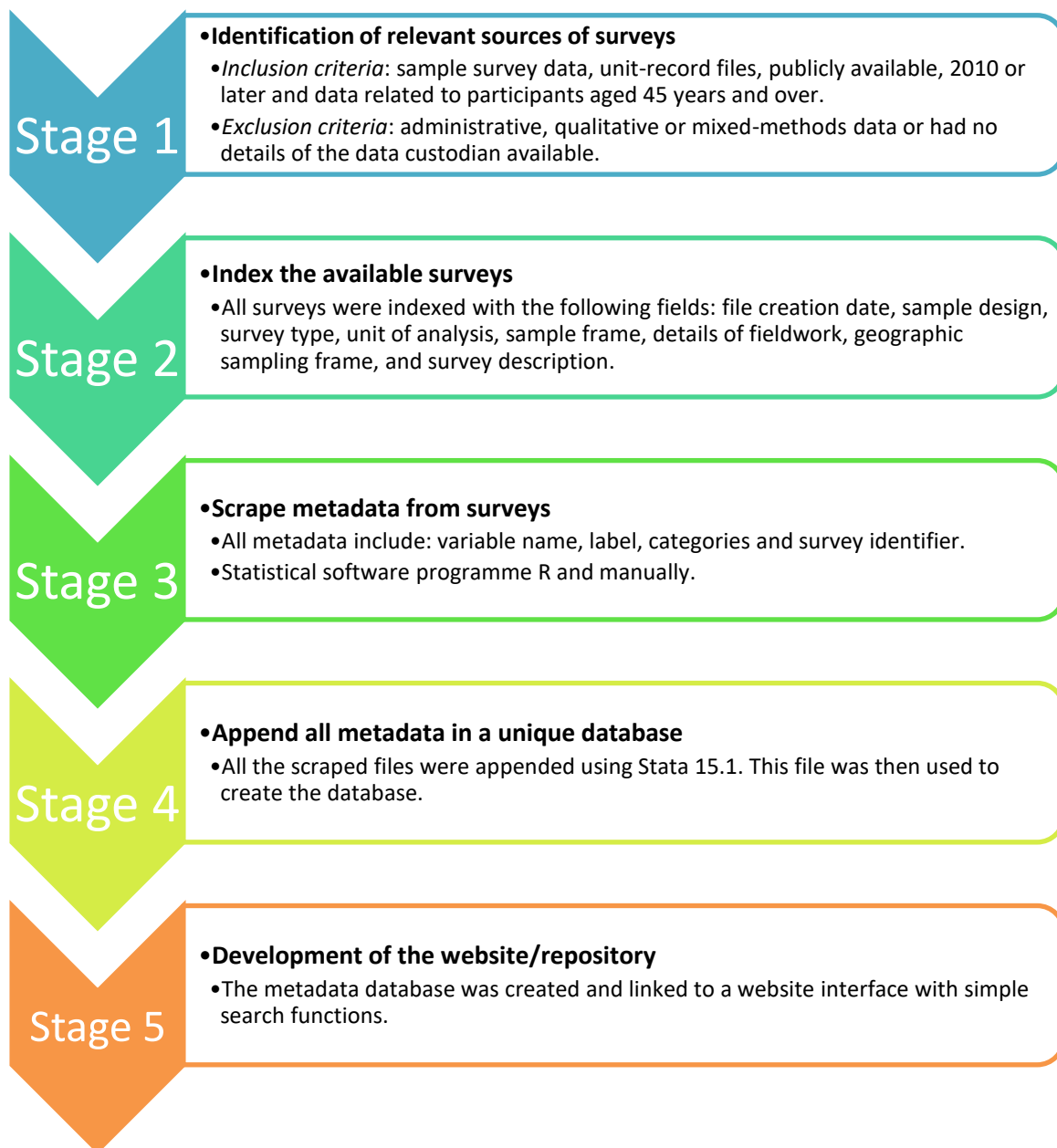


Figure 1: Process to develop the CEPAR Metadata Database

In stage two all files that fulfilled the inclusion criteria were indexed with the following fields: file creation date, sample design, survey type, unit of analysis, sample frame, details of fieldwork, geographic sampling frame and survey description.

During stage three, each survey was scraped for the following metadata: variable name, label, categories, and survey identifier. Where possible, surveys were scraped using the statistical software programme R. Surveys were manually scraped if they could not be scraped by R. Selected .xml files were also made available from the ADA.

In stage four, all the scraped files were then appended using Stata 15.1. This file was then used to create an exportable CSV file. Finally, in stage five, the CSV file was uploaded to <https://mspgh.unimelb.edu.au/centres-institutes/centre-for-health-policy/research->

[group/metadata-database](#). This simple webtool developed by the University of Melbourne allows users to search and export the metadata.

The principal repositories identified during stage one of this study were:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The ABS holds a very detailed collection of microdata, spanning microdata datasets from the 1970s through to the present day. Microdata can be accessed as a basic CURF (Confidentialised Unit Record File) through ABS microdata download, or more detailed microdata can be obtained through the ABS Datalab. Selected microdata can also be analysed through the ABS TableBuilder product. However, for the metadata database, the scope includes only CURF and Datalab products (or former RADL – Remote Access Data Laboratory products). TableBuilder was excluded, because although the product is built from microdata, routine procedures used by researchers (e.g., regression models), are not possible with this product. The URL for ABS microdata collections, including details for access is: <https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/d3310114.nsf/home/microdata+entry+page>.
- Australian Data Archive (ADA). The ADA, situated at the Australian National University, holds over 6,000 datasets from 1838 onwards. Over ,1500 datasets are available within the ADA Dataverse for users to apply for access. The data collections cover a range of topics including health, social attitudes, and electoral and opinion surveys among others. The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) and Ten to Men surveys are also available through the ADA. The URL for ADA data collections, including details for access, is: <https://ada.edu.au/>.

Included surveys from the ABS repository had a minimum of ‘expanded CURF’ or ‘microdata’ available and totalled 46 surveys and 14,011 variables. Thirty-five surveys were extracted from the ADA repository, totalling 10,457 variables. HILDA (71,014 variables available) and Ten to Men surveys were included in the ADA repository. HILDA metadata were sourced from the publicly accessible HILDA Data Dictionary (<https://www.online.fbe.unimelb.edu.au/HILDAodd/Default.aspx>). The Australian Longitudinal Study on Women’s Health (ALSWH) included 13,174 variables from 8 waves.

Details of the repositories, including the number of sample surveys (upper panel) and variables (lower panel) can be found in Table 1. From 86 indexed files, 49.4% were cross-sectional, 29.4% repeated cross-sectional and 11.8% longitudinal surveys. Thirty-five (39.3%) surveys have ‘individual’ level as the unit of analysis and almost all were ‘national’ level surveys.

4. Example of the Database

In this section we detail a simple example from the metadata database. The landing page for the metadata database is found here: <https://mspgh.unimelb.edu.au/centres-institutes/centre-for-health-policy/research-group/metadata-database>. From the landing page (Figure 2), users can access information on: (1) all surveys included in the metadata database (Click on Data Sources); (2) the research team (Click on About Us); (3) outputs arising as part of this project (Click on Outputs); (4) details on funders of the project (Click on Supporters). By selecting ‘The Database’ button, users can choose to download a user guide (this paper) or launch the database.

Table 1: Summary of ageing metadata

	Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)	Australian Data Archive (ADA)	Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) ¹	Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (ALSWH)	Ten to Men ¹	Total
Number of surveys						
# Surveys/files	46	35	1	1	2	85
# Waves	-	-	17	8	2	-
Survey type						
Census	8 (17.4%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (9.4%)
Cross-sectional	11 (23.9%)	31 (88.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	42 (49.4%)
Longitudinal	2 (4.4%)	4 (11.5%) ²	1 (100.0%)	1 (100.0%)	2 (100.0%)	10 (11.8%)
Repeated Cross-sectional	25 (54.4%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	25 (29.4%)
Survey unit of analysis						
Business	6 (13.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (7.1%)
Individual	1 (2.2%)	33 (94.3%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	35 (41.2%)
Individual and other levels	4 (8.7%)	2 (5.7%)	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (8.2%)
Household	1 (2.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (100.0%)	3 (3.5%)
Private dwellings	34 (73.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	34 (40.0%)
Number of variables						
# Variables	14,011	10,457	71,014	13,174	1,645	110,301
Survey type						
Census	1,837 (13.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1,837 (1.7%)
Cross-sectional	3,666 (26.2%)	7,923 (75.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	11,591 (10.5%)
Longitudinal	128 (0.9%)	2,532 (24.2%) ²	71,014 (100.0%)	13,174 (100.0%)	1,645 (100.0%)	88,493 (80.2%)
Repeated Cross-sectional	8,380 (59.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	8,380 (7.6%)
Survey unit of analysis						
Business	484 (3.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	484 (0.4%)
Individual	105 (0.8%)	7,704 (73.7%)	0 (0.0%)	13,174 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	20,983 (19.0%)
Individual and other levels	2,584 (18.4%)	2,756 (26.3%)	71,014 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	76,351 (69.2%)
Household	780 (5.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1,645 (100.0%)	2,425 (2.2%)
Private dwellings	10,058 (71.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	10,058 (9.1%)

Notes: (1) 'Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey – HILDA' and 'Ten to Men survey' were available in ADA's repository. (2) The 3 waves of the "Building a New Life in Australia (BNLA): The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants" are available in 4 files at ADA.

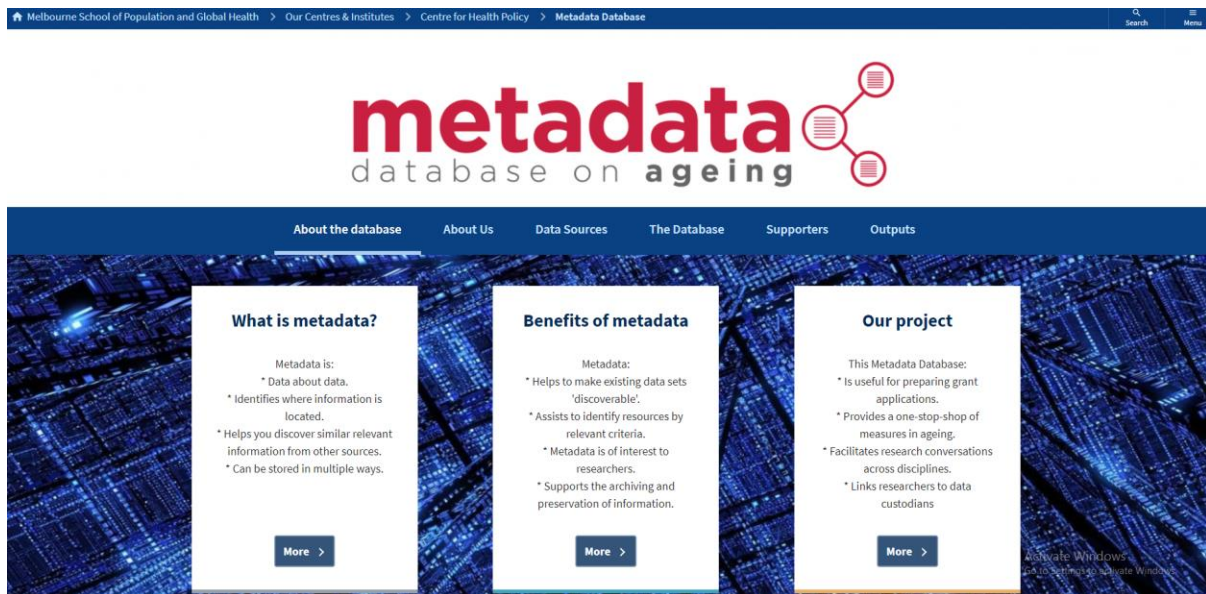


Figure 2: Metadata database on ageing landing page

When the 'Launch the Database' option is selected, the following screen of the webtool is loaded as a new tab (Figure 3). The key variables included in the database are as follows:

Variable: The original variable name provided in the source documentation.

Label: The description of the variable provided in the source documentation.

Categories: The items available in categorical variables.

DS_label: Name of the dataset.

DS_format: Dataset format.

DS_link: URL to find further information about the dataset, including contact details for the data custodian.

DS_design: The type of survey sampling design, e.g., stratified, random sample.

DS_type: Whether the survey is cross-sectional, repeated cross-sectional, or longitudinal.

DS_unit: Unit of analyses of the survey instrument, e.g., individual, households.

DS_samp: Details of the survey sampling design.

DS_desc_fw: Simple fieldwork details where available.

DS_source: Where the survey is sourced from, e.g., ABS, ADA.

110203 results were found. Clear search
Alternatively, you can download all matched results in a csv file.

Variable	Label	Categories	Surveyident...	variable_ID	wave	DS_label	DS_desc	DS_or_file	DS_structure	DS_format	DS_link	DS_date	DS_design	DS_typ
WKLYNCND	Weekly person	01. First decile	ABS_106	WKLYNCND		Participation in		file106		Expanded CUF	http://abs.gov.a	3/16/2011	Multi-stage	Repeated i
SPCLUB	Whether sport?	0. Not applicab	ABS_106	SPCLUB		Participation in		file106		Expanded CUF	http://abs.gov.a	3/16/2011	Multi-stage	Repeated i
DURENEC	Duration of unemp	0. Not applicab	ABS_108	DURENEC		Work-Related I		file108		Expanded CUF	http://www.abs.	3/24/2011	Multi-stage pro	Cross sect
SEX	Sex of person	1. Male 2. Fer	ABS_108	SEX		Work-Related I		file108		Expanded CUF	http://www.abs.	3/24/2011	Multi-stage pro	Cross sect
ALINSCU (A-F)	All sources of f	0. Not applicab	ABS_108	ALINSCU (A-F)		Work-Related I		file108		Expanded CUF	http://www.abs.	3/24/2011	Multi-stage pro	Cross sect
OCCWRJUC	32 Occupation	00. Not applica	ABS_108	OCCWRJUC		Work-Related I		file108		Expanded CUF	http://www.abs.	3/24/2011	Multi-stage pro	Cross sect
WRIPPOP3	Persons aged		ABS_108	WRIPPOP3		Work-Related I		file108		Expanded CUF	http://www.abs.	3/24/2011	Multi-stage pro	Cross sect
NOAPPLWC	43 Main reason	0. Not applicab	ABS_108	NOAPPLWC		Work-Related I		file108		Expanded CUF	http://www.abs.	3/24/2011	Multi-stage pro	Cross sect
CURJOBHC	Hours usually v	0. Not Applicab	ABS_108	CURJOBHC		Work-Related I		file108		Expanded CUF	http://www.abs.	3/24/2011	Multi-stage pro	Cross sect
MFLDHATC	Main field of hi	0. Not applicab	ABS_108	MFLDHATC		Work-Related I		file108		Expanded CUF	http://www.abs.	3/24/2011	Multi-stage pro	Cross sect
LOCATWRI	50 Location wh	0. Not applicab	ABS_108	LOCATWRI		Work-Related I		file108		Expanded CUF	http://www.abs.	3/24/2011	Multi-stage pro	Cross sect
WRFINAS	40 Whether rec	0. Not applicab	ABS_108	WRFINAS		Work-Related I		file108		Expanded CUF	http://www.abs.	3/24/2011	Multi-stage pro	Cross sect
DUWRJUC	34 Duration of	0. Not applicab	ABS_108	DUWRJUC		Work-Related I		file108		Expanded CUF	http://www.abs.	3/24/2011	Multi-stage pro	Cross sect
IND06CF	Industry of curr	0101. Agricultu	ABS_108	IND06CF		Work-Related I		file108		Expanded CUF	http://www.abs.	3/24/2011	Multi-stage pro	Cross sect
WHENWRI	44 Whether mc	0. Not applicab	ABS_108	WHENWRI		Work-Related I		file108		Expanded CUF	http://www.abs.	3/24/2011	Multi-stage pro	Cross sect
WRIPPOP2	Persons aged		ABS_108	WRIPPOP2		Work-Related I		file108		Expanded CUF	http://www.abs.	3/24/2011	Multi-stage pro	Cross sect
WKLYNCH	Total gross wee	-977777777 to	ABS_108	WKLYNCH		Work-Related I		file108		Expanded CUF	http://www.abs.	3/24/2011	Multi-stage pro	Cross sect
C_DATADECFI	Feedback from	0 = No 1 = Ye	ABS_12	C_DATADECFI		Management a		file12		Expanded CUF	http://www.abs.	2/26/2018	Stratified by inc	Cross sect
C_FOCKPIQU	Quality measur	0 = No 1 = Ye	ABS_12	C_FOCKPIQU		Management a		file12		Expanded CUF	http://www.abs.	2/26/2018	Stratified by inc	Cross sect
C_SCAFFNON	None of the ab	0 = No 1 = Ye	ABS_12	C_SCAFFNON		Management a		file12		Expanded CUF	http://www.abs.	2/26/2018	Stratified by inc	Cross sect

Select columns

Figure 3: Metadata database webtool

A number of placeholder variables (e.g., DS_name, _merge) are included for administrative purposes or for potential updates in the future. To simplify the display, click 'Select Columns'. Ensure Variable, Label, Categories, DS_label and DS_link are selected (highlighted in blue). The remaining variables should be deselected or highlighted in grey (Figure 4). Click 'Apply'.

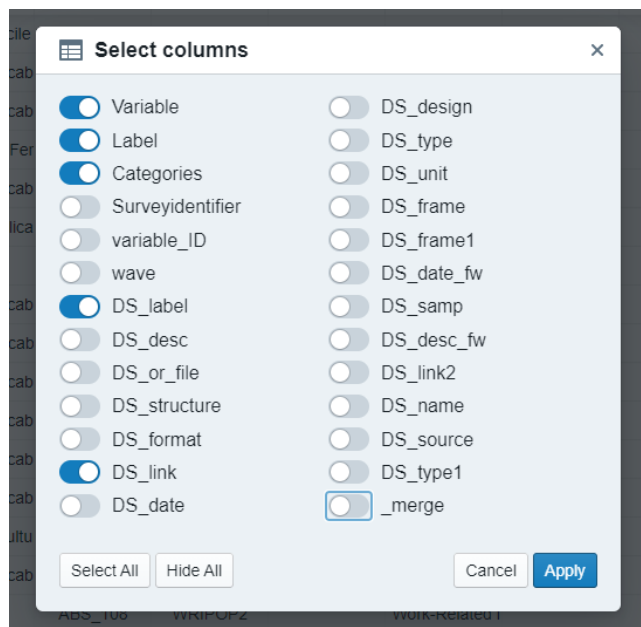


Figure 4: Selection of variables in the Metadata database webtool.

For the purposes of this example, let us imagine a researcher is interested in investigating measures related to disability. The user can either select 'Global Search' or 'Field Search'. A global search will search for the term across all variables in the database. A field search enables the user to specify the search term for single or multiple variables in the database. To conduct a global search, simply enter

‘disability’ in the text box and click the magnifying glass icon. This produces 3,496 records containing disability (Figure 5). As an example, the first record is from the Disability, Ageing and Carers survey, with variable name DISBSTAT, variable label ‘Disability status’ with the link to dataset information provided in the DS_link column. As this variable is a categorical variable, the column ‘Categories’ shows each category of disability considered. If the user wishes to download the results of the search, simply click ‘Download all matched results in a CSV file’.

Variable	Label	Categories	DS_label	DS_link
DISBSTAT	Disability status	0. Not applicable 1. Has disability and profou	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2015	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
DISBSTAX	Disability status of the recipient(s) of care	1. Has disability and profoundly limited in core	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2012	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
DISBSTAX	Disability status of recipient of care	0. Not applicable 1. Has disability and profou	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2015	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
DISBSTAT	Disability status	1. Has disability and profoundly limited in core	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2012	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
FAMDISPR	Whether family with children aged 14 years or	0. Not applicable 1. No parent in the family h	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2015	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
FAMDISPR	Whether family with children aged 14 years or	0. Not applicable 1. No parent in the family h	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2012	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
MRCDSONE	Disability status of UR main recipient of care	0. Not applicable 1. Has disability and profou	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2015	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
POPFARD	Whether family has a parent with a disability	0. Not applicable 1. No parent in the family h	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2015	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
DISAPP	Whether used disability specific 'apps' to acce	0. Not applicable 1. Used disability specific 'a	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2015	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
TRCR1P	Persons aged 16+ with disability or 65+, who r	1. Persons aged 16+ with disability or 65+, wh	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2015	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
TRCR1P	Persons aged 16+ with disability or 65+, who r	1. Persons aged 16+ with disability or 65+, wh	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2012	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
MRCDS1C	Disability status of main recipient of care	0. Not applicable 1. Has disability and profou	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2012	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
WTHROIS	Whether has a disability	1. Has a disability 2. Does not have a disabil	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2015	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
WTHROIS2	Whether has a disability (using 2012 criteria)	1. Has a disability 2. Does not have a disabil	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2015	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
WTHROIS	Whether has a disability	1. Has a disability 2. Does not have a disabil	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2012	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
MOSTPROB	Whether this disability causes the most proble	1. This disability causes the most problems 2	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2015	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl

Figure 5: Example global search for the term ‘disability’

To clear the search, click ‘Clear Search’, delete the ‘disability’ text in the Global Search text box and click the magnifying glass icon. This will reload the full database. The user may only be interested in measures which include disability in the ‘Label’ and ‘Categories’ column. To complete this search, type ‘disability’ in the Field Search text box. Select ‘Label’ from the adjacent combo-box. Next, click ‘Add Field’. Again, enter ‘disability’ in the new Field Search text box. Select ‘Categories’ from the adjacent combo-box. Clicking ‘search’ narrows the number of records from 3,496 to 146 (Figure 6).

Variable	Label	Categories	DS_label	DS_link
WTHROIS	Whether has a disability	1. Has a disability 2. Does not have a disabil	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2015	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
DISBSTAT	Disability status	1. Has disability and profoundly limited in core	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2012	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
WTHROIS	Whether has a disability	1. Has a disability 2. Does not have a disabil	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2012	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
DBNORC	Disability Support Pension	0. Not Receiving Disability Support Pension B-	Australian Census Longitudinal Dataset, 2006	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
DISBSTAT	Disability status	0. Not applicable 1. Has disability and profou	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2015	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
WEDURST	Whether has education restriction due to disat	Has an education restriction due to disability	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander S	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
athwgs00gd_vr1	WGDS Disability Score (a lot of difficulty cut-o	0 Without disability 1 With disability	The Australian Longitudinal Study on Male Hei	https://dataverse.ada.edu.au/dataset.xhtml?pe
WTHROIS2	Whether has a disability (using 2012 criteria)	1. Has a disability 2. Does not have a disabil	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2015	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
bhwgs00gd_vr2	WGDS Disability Score (a lot of difficulty cut-o	0 Without disability 1 With disability	The Australian Longitudinal Study on Male Hei	https://dataverse.ada.edu.au/dataset.xhtml?pe
DISAPP	Whether used disability specific 'apps' to acce	0. Not applicable 1. Used disability specific 'a	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2015	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
POPDISAB	Persons with a disability	1. Has a disability 2. Not in this population	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2015	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
POPDISAB	Persons with a disability	1. Has a disability 2. Not in this population	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2012	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl
MOSTPROB	Whether this disability causes the most proble	1. This disability causes the most problems 2	Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2015	http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nswfl

Figure 6: Example field search for the term ‘disability’ in ‘Label’ and ‘Categories’ columns

Clicking ‘Reset Field’ followed by ‘Search’ will once again reload the full database. With the full database reloaded, the user can click ‘Download all matched results in a CSV file’ to download the full database. The ‘Select Columns’ option may need to be reset if the user wishes to download all variables in the database, by clicking ‘Select All’ followed by the ‘Apply’ button. To exit the metadata database, simply close the tab.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, we have reported on our proof-of-concept project to develop a metadata database for researchers working in the field of ageing. Our tool, alongside other metadata collections as they become more comprehensive, will assist with:

- making unknown datasets 'discoverable' by researchers;
- linking researchers to data custodians to facilitate data access;
- increasing researcher productivity by providing a one-stop-shop to understand measures collected of interest to researchers in ageing;
- assisting with the preparation of grants by pointing to all existing data on a specific topic in a very efficient manner;
- assisting with understanding the potential for data linkage (when legal and/or feasible); and
- facilitating new research conversations across disciplines.

In short, metadata transparency can help empower researchers to identify what data exists around a given topic (e.g., a specific research interest in ageing), how the data was collected, and how to gain access to the data. Understanding the structure, limitations, definition, and description of data also serves to protect against misinterpretation or misuse, thereby ensuring the integrity of the research output. Metadata itself may also be of interest to academics, as a means to understand the historical evolution of these measures and point to gaps in our knowledge. Understanding data collections requires analysis of taxonomies of variables and their inter-relationships, theoretical frameworks, and research methodologies employed in ageing research. Thus, collecting metadata can help inform an epistemological map of the 'state of play' in Australian gerontology. In doing so, the extraction and analysis of metadata can play a critical role in the evolution of measures relevant to ageing research. With an increasing ageing population and reliance on data, metadata on ageing has growing relevance now and into the future.

5.1. Limitations

Our project considered a very specific scope of data for inclusion: sample survey data available at two major data repositories between the period 2010 to 2018. Many other datasets are likely to be of interest to researchers in the field of gerontology and the demography of ageing. For example, large administrative datasets, surveys held by research institutions or researchers, qualitative or mixed-methods data, spatial databases as well as vital statistics. These important data sources are omitted from our project. Moreover, our search was carried out from 17th July 2018 until 1st November 2018. Other datasets housed at both the ABS and ADA are likely to be in-scope but published online after November 2018 and therefore not included in the metadata database for this study.

A second major limitation of this project relates to data quality. Collating even this range of metadata was a considerable task, with data dictionaries available in different formats (Excel, word processing documents and PDF files). Although our procedures automated through R and Stata helped to streamline the process, many errors had to be manually corrected. Given the size of the database, errors are likely to remain and users of the metadata database should note this limitation. A further limitation is that the webtool is a relatively simple search tool. Nonetheless, users are given the option to download the full database as a *.csv file to use with other software.

Finally, a limited number of variables have been added to the database. Curating the metadata to include conceptual, theoretical or analytical methodologies would greatly improve the coverage of the database. For example, tagging variables from each survey which are of use to researchers working on particular ageing theories, or tagging variables with key areas of thematic interest from domestic and international conferences.

5.2. Summary and future research

In this paper we have described a proof-of-concept project which seeks to develop a metadata database including metadata on Australian sample surveys relevant to ageing. We have outlined our five-stage approach to create the CEPAR metadata database on ageing and provided a webtool for users to interrogate the data, or to export the data for further use. Nonetheless, improvements can be made with regard to coverage of data sources (to include for example administrative data), temporal coverage (increasing the time period and spatial heterogeneity of data collections), and procedures to improve the underlying data quality of the database – when for example, only PDF or word processor documents are the only public source of microdata data dictionaries.

Beyond these improvements, research using the metadata database itself has strong academic merit. Using metadata, such queries may include:

- The availability of measures of interest to gerontologists in Australian datasets.
- The complementarity of evolving theories and conceptual frameworks with data availability.
- The historical evolution of measurement.
- The strengths of current data collections.
- Identification of weaknesses and how they can be improved in future data collections.

Improving our knowledge through metadata can limit misinformation and misuse of data, avoid duplication of research effort while simultaneously enhancing reliability and integrity of research outputs. Such important and wide-reaching outputs include the creation of informed social policy to improve the lives of older Australians, both current and future.

Key messages

- This introductory guide explains the concept of metadata and its utility to researchers specifically in the field of ageing.
- The methodology for creating the metadata database is described and explained.
- An example of searching and extracting data using the CEPAR metadata database webtool is described.
- Researchers are provided with full access to the underlying database and a webtool to interrogate the database.

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