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MIDUS Geo-coding README

Linking External Contextual Variables to MIDUS Datasets at Different Geographical Levels

This document outlines the process by which MIDUS samples can be merged with geographic based contextual data from external sources. The MIDUS Admin Core aims to facilitate those endeavors while maintaining established practices regarding data security and the protection of respondent identity.

Some examples of geographic based contextual data:

- Census or Current Population Survey
- American Community Survey
- Area Deprivation Index
- Childhood Opportunity Index
- Racial Segregation Index
- Rural-Urban Continuum Codes
- Social Deprivation Index

All the above examples mentioned involve data from multiple waves. Some of the index construction methods also evolve over the years. These dynamics must be considered along with the dynamics of MIDUS (multiple waves, multiple samples). It is the requestor's responsibility to decide what year or version of the contextual data to use as well as to provide the chosen contextual data to the Admin core for the linkage.

Before making such a request, please think through the following questions:

- What contextual data do you wish to append, including which year or which version?
- What is the geographic level of the contextual data, e.g., county, census tract?
- To which MIDUS sample(s) do you wish to add the contextual variables, e.g., MIDUS 2, MIDUS Refresher 1?

The standard MIDUS Geocoding process is as follows:

1. The Requestor contacts the MIDUS Admin Core (midus_geocoding@aging.wisc.edu) to obtain a Research Plan and Data Use Agreement form;
2. MIDUS Admin Core sends the Research Plan and DUA form to the Requestor;

3. The Requestor submits a completed Research Plan and DUA form and the contextual data they wish to append to MIDUS;
4. Upon approval, MIDUS Admin Core links the external contextual data the Requestor has provided to the MIDUS sample(s) specified, and swaps out actual geographic information with noise-added variables that maintain the categorical integrity of the geographic levels while masking their actual location;
5. MIDUS Admin Core sends the linked data back to the Requestor.

NOTE: The MIDUS data are NOT geocoded. MIDUS does not provide actual geographic identifiers per se to researchers, nor are geographic variables of any kind included in publicly available MIDUS datasets. This policy protects participant identities against deductive disclosure. Deductive disclosure is the identification of an individual's identity using known characteristics of that individual. Even when direct identifiers (e.g. name, address, geographic information) are removed from a dataset, it may be possible to identify respondents with unique combinations of characteristics.¹ A number of features of MIDUS make the study susceptible to such risk:

- The sheer number of variables on each MIDUS participant, covering multiple aspects of their lives.
- The comprehensive nature of the variables collected through the different MIDUS projects, which contain personal, cognitive, biological, neurological, and genetic information.
- The potential for small cell counts produced by cross-classifying different domains of data (note, this concern is also monitored by ICPSR when MIDUS submits data for public release).
- Among MIDUS projects with smaller Ns (biomarker, neuroscience) there may be very few people represented in specific geographic locations (e.g., a given state).
- The sensitive nature of biomarker and clinical data that are protected under HIPPA guidelines.

Please note that MIDUS IRB protocols have assured respondents that the information they provide will remain confidential and will in no way be associated with their names. The MIDUS Admin Core cannot emphasize enough how important it is to the respondents, to the study itself, and to the survey research field at large that all precautions be taken to preserve this confidentiality.

The purpose of linking MIDUS data to external contextual variables (e.g., census tract data about neighborhood characteristics) is to allow analyses that examine the characteristics of places of residence ***while not revealing actual geographical location***. The MIDUS geo-coding procedure is performed on a case-by-case basis for individual researchers using a specific process that protects the identity of MIDUS respondents. The process links external contextual data arrayed at different geographic levels (see example below) but swaps out actual geographic information with noise-added variables that maintain the categorical integrity of the geographic levels while masking their actual location. This allows investigators to distinguish contextual data at different

¹ <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/content/DSDR/disclosure.html>

geographic strata without divulging the geographic location or potential identity of the respondents.

In short, *MIDUS does not provide any geographical identifiers* for analysis, but authorizes approved users to attach contextual variables at the level of these geographical strata. MIDUS can append contextual data at the following geographic levels:

- FIPS State Code: 2-digit
- FIPS Code: 5-digit, 2-State + 3-County
- Census Tract Code: 11-digit, 2-State + 3-County + 6-Tract
- Census Block Code: 15-digit, 2-State + 3-County + 6-Tract + 4-Block

Examples.

Suppose a researcher wishes to examine how the variation in state-level clean air policies affects the reported incidence of asthma among MIDUS respondents who completed the baseline survey. The following is an example of how the process works, in this instance by appending three air-quality variables from the ACS Survey (via the Census Bureau) to the MIDUS data at the State level. *All data shown are bogus* and used only to illustrate how contextual data are appended to MIDUS datasets. Table 1 shows the M2ID and State for participants in the MIDUS Core sample.

M2ID	STATE
1	CA
2	DE
3	AZ
4	MA
5	TX
6	CT
7	NY
8	PA
9	CA
...	...

Table 2 shows Census data provided to the MIDUS Admin Core by the researcher who is requesting additional contextual information. Note that it is the researcher’s responsibility to provide data at the appropriate geographical level, and variables that adhere to Admin Core specifications and formats.

Table 2. Contextual Census Data Provided by Interested Researcher.			
STATE	Census variable 2003	Census variable 2004	Census variable 2005
AK	17.2500	17.9004	6.7908
AL	18.0784	18.1456	6.8509
AR	19.2000	19.1601	6.8800
AZ	19.2281	19.2500	6.9002
CA	19.2761	19.3990	6.9233
CO	19.3866	19.6231	6.9900
CT	19.4321	19.6338	7.0225
DC	19.4837	19.7503	7.0330
DE	19.5443	19.7567	7.0561
...

Table 3 shows the results of the final match of MIDUS data and Census variables – this is the final data product delivered to the researcher. Note that while the Census variables are appended at the individual case level, the actual geographic identifier is coded to limit disclosure of location and potential participant identity.

Table 3. Final Product: Contextual Census Variables Appended at the State Level.				
M2ID	STATE (Noise Added)	Census variable 2003	Census variable 2004	Census variable 2005
1	3	19.2761	19.3990	6.9233
2	15	19.5443	19.7567	7.0561
3	62	19.2281	19.2500	6.9002
4	12	19.6543	19.6542	6.9990
5	90	19.8756	18.9978	7.0651
6	5	19.4321	19.6338	7.0225
7	22	19.5465	19.3344	6.5498
8	88	19.7871	19.5789	6.0321
9	3	19.2761	19.3990	6.9233
...

After reviewing this README, researchers interested in pursuing this process must contact the MIDUS Admin Core to (midus_geocoding@aging.wisc.edu) to request a Research Plan and Data Use Agreement. The standard MIDUS Geocoding process is described earlier in this document.