Subject: IPUMS-DHS Tip #4: Take advantage of already merged files
Posted by kingx025 on Mon, 09 Jul 2018 20:48:26 GMT

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Many of the questions on The DHS Program User Forum relate to merging files, including merging separate child height-weight files with KR child data and merging KR and PR child data to combine household information with child health data. IPUMS-DHS is making researchers' lives easier by doing much of this file merging behind the scenes, so researchers can get all the variables they need without merging files themselves.

For some of the earliest DHS samples, child anthropometric variables and wealth index variable data were stored in separate files that had to be merged with the IR (women), KR (child), BR (birth), or PR (household member) files. IPUMS-DHS staff has done this file merging, so when you go to www.idhsdata.org and select variables you need for your customized data file, you will find the household wealth index and child biometric variables available for all samples for which these data were collected. For example, if you choose children as your unit of analysis (KR data), you can select the biometric variables for all samples (including those that originally included those data in a separate file) with no difficulty or further work.

IPUMS-DHS has also merged household (HR) files with individual women's (IR) files, so you can get all summary information about household characteristics when you choose women as your unit of analysis, without doing file merging. Furthermore, IPUMS-DHS has merged the mother's record (and her household record) with each child in the KR file and each birth in the BR file. This means that you can get variables on ALL the mother's characteristics (including characteristics not copied over to the original KR file) through IPUMS-DHS for children and births. You can also get summary characteristics for the mother's household for children and births, without doing merging yourself. Many researchers try to get household characteristics by merging KR and PR files, but this is 1) not always possible for older files and 2) unnecessary if you just need household characteristics for children. As an easy alternative, select children as your unit of analysis in IPUMS-DHS and choose any household characteristics of interest from the drop-down menu of variables.

Here are a few examples of how the pre-merging of files for IPUMS-DHS can save you time:
1) You need a variable related to the mother's experience that isn't part of the original KR DHS file. For example, maybe you want to see if children whose mother has experienced domestic violence in the past year are more likely to be stunted and less likely to get medical care when ill. All the mother's characteristics (including her experience with domestic violence) are available as variables when you choose children as the unit of analysis in IPUMS-DHS. To do this analysis with the original DHS files, you would need to merge the KR and IR files yourself.

2) You want to replicate a table in a DHS Final report that breaks down some child health characteristic (say, recent experience of diarrhea or acute respiratory illness) by household characteristics, such as type of toilet facility, source of drinking water, and wealth quintile. Instead of trying to merge children from the KR and PR files, which isn't always possible, you can just choose children as your unit of analysis and select the household characteristics of interest (available because IPUMS-DHS staff merged the mother's record and her household record with the child record). Now, by just a few mouse clicks, you can create a customized data file with child health variables AND variables related to household characteristics, no merging required.

Anyone who has been approved to access DHS data can log in to the IPUMS-DHS website and create a customized data extract with the variables and samples they need, with variables taken originally from the mother's, household, and child files together, as needed.

Start your next research project with IPUMS-DHS rather than with merging files!

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