Researching Cohorts in Mental Health:
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Objective
We review themes in rural mental health research, providing an overview of a set of two cohort mental health studies and one nationally representative cohort study encompassing the social determinants of health and wellbeing. We focus on climate and environmental adversity, socioeconomic and related factors and mental health, and consider how such cohort studies may be linked with existing other national and urban-based data sets.

Design
Rural regions are characterised by diversity in population characteristics, economic base, availability of services and exposure to environmental adversity, many of which have been subject to significant recent changes. Utilising existing large population datasets can assist in investigating the impact of these factors on rural mental health over time.

Our discussion will focus on how researchers are using four cohort studies to undertake longitudinal research aimed at better understanding what affects mental health in rural and remote communities. These cohort studies are the: 1) Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey; 2) Australian Rural Mental Health Study; 3) Hunter Community Study; 4) eXtending Treatments, Education and Networks in Depression. We will also outline some of the opportunities and challenges in undertaking longitudinal research studies across rural and remote regions, and in linking datasets.

Conclusion
Research into rural and remote mental health using cohort studies can assist in better understanding rural-urban differences in health and wellbeing, access to health services and mortality rates. This, in turn, may inform improvements in policy and service design.

Keywords: mental health, rural health, remote health, cohort, longitudinal research

Further relevant papers and websites:

For Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA):
HILDA website: http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/hilda/

For the Australian Rural Mental Health Study (ARMHS) (pdf from AJRH attached) ARMHS website: http://www.crrmh.com.au/research/current/armhs.html

For the Hunter Community Study
http://ije.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/extract/dyp343