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SOEP Survey Papers
Series D - Variable Descriptions and Coding

SOEP-Core v36 – LIFESPELL: Information on the Pre- and Post-Survey History of SOEP-Respondents

Martin Kroh, Hannes Kröger, and SOEP Group

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Martin Kroh, Hannes Kröger, and SOEP Group

LIFESPELL: Information on the Pre- and Post-Survey History of SOEP-Respondents

by Martin Kroh and Hannes Kröger

Prospective panel surveys typically face the problem that no information is available on units of analysis after respondents have left the survey. The SOEP team therefore regularly conducts drop-out studies to identify the whereabouts of attriters. These studies draw on official register data and allow us to determine whether a person is still living in Germany, is deceased, or has moved abroad since the last SOEP interview. The information is combined in a spell file LIFESPELL. This dataset reports all available information on the pre- and the post-survey history of all persons who have ever been a member of a SOEP household. The LIFESPELL file lends itself particularly to mortality research, migration research, and non-response research. It extends the period under investigation from the last SOEP interview to the last drop-out study and thus reduces the problem of selective observational probabilities of units of analysis. For users less familiar with spell files, we also provide a Stata code for converting a spell file into a long format file (person x year) at the end of this chapter.

The file includes spells for every person ever living in a SOEP household. Each spell indicates one of the following states:

- Living abroad
- Living in Germany
- Living in Germany + part of a SOEP HH¹
- Deceased
- No information about status

The information comprised by the LIFESPELL file includes the following:

- Year of birth

¹ This code does not distinguish between active and inactive respondents, such as children and temporary non-respondents. As long as interviewers can contact the household (even though an interview might not take place), we have information on the vital status of respondents. Therefore, all HH members are coded as being in the SOEP until the HH finally drops out of the SOEP and is no longer followed up by the interviewer.

* indicates that the fact is only necessary for subgroups of the population

- Year of immigration *
- Year of entry into SOEP
- Year of exit out of SOEP
- Year of emigration *
- Year of death

* indicates that the fact is only necessary for subgroups of the population

The year of birth, and year of immigration are self-reported (retrospective) information from personal interviews (e.g., p-files). The year of entry and exit are taken from gross information reported by the interviewer (e.g., pbrutto-files). The year of emigration and the year of death can either come from related persons in the household (e.g., deceased-files), the interviewer (e.g., pbrutto-files), or, finally, from drop-out studies (i.e., population registers).

The following register-based drop-out studies have been conducted in the past:

- a) **1992 drop-out study** The study provides information about the dates of death or emigration, or one can infer that a person was still living in Germany until 1992.
- b) **2001 drop-out study** The study provides information about the dates of death or emigration, or one can infer that a person was still living in Germany until 2001. Additionally, the study allows us to analyze regional mobility within Germany. It includes HH drop-outs from 1985-1998.
- c) **2006 drop-out study** This study is not a register study, but a survey among non-respondents. Attriters were contacted by mail and responded by mail. It allows us to include the year of death for those whose letters returned by post with the mark “deceased” or whose letters were answered by relatives or friends. Those who answered themselves can also be assumed to still have been living in Germany in 2006. No information is available for cases where there was no response. No information about emigration is given. The study includes drop-outs from 2001-2004.

d) 2008 drop-out study The latest of the studies provides information about the year of death and those still living in Germany in 2008. Emigration is captured insufficiently. It includes drop-outs from 1985-2006.

Year of study	1992	2001	2006	2008
Population at risk				
Attriters between...	1984-1990	1984-1998	2001-2004	1985-2006
Overall	1,089	8,082	4,982	5,838
Identified	1,044	7,106	962	5,591
Information available				
Death	+	+	(+)	+
Emigration	+	+	(+)	(+)
Mobility within Germany		+		

LIFESPELL contains the following variables. Comments are added to clarify certain assumptions made when coding the variables.

SPELLNR

Var Label: SPELLNR **"Number of spell"**

Var format: SPELLNR (I2)

Comment: This variable indicates the spell number.

SPELLTYP

Var Label: SPELLTYP **"Type of spell"**

Value Label: SPELLTYP (1) "Living in Germany"
(2) "SOEP"
(3) "Living abroad"
(4) "Deceased"
(5) "Gap"

Comment: The variable gives information about the current residence and status of the person. "Living in Germany" means that the person lives in Germany, but is not yet or no longer part of a SOEP HH. Persons who are part of a SOEP HH are given the "SOEP" code on this variable. Note that the code refers to the person being part of the gross sample, which also includes children and covers periods of temporary drop-outs as well as the final year when respondents refuse to participate. If a spell is coded "Abroad," this means a person has not yet immigrated to Germany or has already emigrated. "Deceased" indicates the spell with the year of death and finally "Gap" means that for the time marked by the spell no information about the person's status can be determined.

BEGIN

Var label: BEGIN **"Year in which spell begins"**

END

Var label: BEGIN **"Year in which spell ends"**

Comment: Two consecutive spells may overlap for one year in individual cases. This happens, for instance, when refusal to respond coincides with emigration in the same year.

CENSORING

Var label: CENSORING **"Censoring: How and why"**

Value Label: CENSORING

- (10) "left censored"
- (11) "left censored: gap"
- (20) "right censored"
- (21) "right censored: gap"
- (22) "rc: no information after SOEP"
- (23) "rc: no information after 1992 study"
- (24) "rc: no information after study 2001"
- (25) "rc: no information after study 2006"
- (26) "rc: no information after study 2008"
- (27) "rc: end of survey"
- (40) "spell does not exist"
- (50) "not censored"
- (60) "right+left censored: gap"

Comment: The variable "censoring" gives information for each spell if all necessary information is available or if the spell is (left or right) censored, and why. If some information is missing, it is indicated by "Gap." There are several instances when one or several facts are missing. For example, not every person reports a valid year of birth and year of immigration. In addition, sometimes we are able to report that a person is deceased but not the year of death. In these cases, a spell called "Gap" is inserted between the last information which is certain (e.g., exit from SOEP) and the latest point in time by which the change in status must have happened. (For example, death must have occurred before the study was conducted, so the year of the study is the year of death; between the last SOEP participated in and the year of the study is the gap spell for which no information is certain except that the respondent's death must have happened during this period.)

INFO

Var label: INFO "Origin of information of spell"

Value label:

- (1) "SOEP survey"
- (2) "SOEP fieldwork"
- (3) "1992 study"
- (4) "2001 study"
- (5) "2006 study"
- (6) "2008 study"
- (7) "no info"

Comment: The variable indicates the information source for a spell. This can be a retrospective self-report (SOEP survey), fieldwork information provided by the interviewer (SOEP fieldwork), or a register-based drop-out study (1992, 2001, 2006, and 2008 studies).

STUDY\$\$\$\$

Var label: STUDY\$\$\$\$ "Study \$\$\$\$"

Value label:

- (1) "not in study"
- (3) "found in study"
- (4) "not found in study"

Comment: The variable indicates if a person was part of the drop-out study in \$\$\$\$. A further distinction is made whether or not the person could be identified in register data.

FLAG

Var label: FLAG **"Spell information deviates from other SOEP information"**

Comment: In case of conflicting information between the drop-out studies and SOEP-based information, we give higher priority to the information from the drop-out studies. If two or more studies provide different information, that from the latest study is used. In just a few cases (110), the data set includes spells that contain information deviating from other SOEP data ("flag"). This happens, for instance, if register information says persons emigrated one year prior to refusal to take part in the SOEP. In this case, both spells end/begin in the same year with the register information being corrected by one year. A change in the original register information is coded 1 on the flag variable.

The following two tables illustrate the data structure for two individuals in the SOEP. Both individuals were born abroad, moved to Germany, became part of the SOEP sample, refused to participate after several waves. The one individual finally deceased while the other re-migrated. While in the first case, full information is available (no censoring), in the second case the exact year of immigration and the exact year of emigration are missing and therefore "gaps" had to be added (left and right censoring).

persnr	spellnr	spelltyp	begin	end	censoring	info
7016603	1	Living abroad	1903	1989	not censored	SOEP survey
7016603	2	Living in Germany	1990	1993	not censored	SOEP survey
7016603	3	SOEP	1994	1999	not censored	SOEP fieldwork
7016603	4	Living in Germany	2000	2003	not censored	2008 study
7016603	5	Deceased	2004	2004	not censored	2008 study

persnr	spellnr	spelltyp	begin	end	censoring	info
515802	1	Living abroad	1949	1949	right censored: gap	SOEP survey
515802	2	Gap	1950	1982	right+left censored: gap	No info
515802	3	Living in Germany	1983	1983	left censored: gap	SOEP survey
515802	4	SOEP	1984	1985	not censored	SOEP fieldwork
515802	5	Living in Germany	1986	2001	right censored: gap	Study 2001
515802	6	Gap	2002	2007	right+left censored: gap	No info
515802	7	Living abroad	2008	2008	right+left censored: gap	Study 2008

Users less familiar with analyzing spell data can easily convert the file into a long-format file (person x year). This is an example of STATA coding:

```

use lifespell.dta, clear
gen spellduration=(end-begin)+1
expand spellduration
bysort persnr spellnr: gen n=_n
gen year = begin+n-1
move year spellnr
keep persnr year spellnr spelltyp zensor info study1992 study2001 study2006
study2008 flag
compress

save lifelong.dta, replace

```