



Carolina Population Center

In 1966, the Carolina Population Center was founded at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. To celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2006, a project was conducted to document the history of the Center. This transcript is an excerpt from an oral history interview.

Interviewees: David K. Guilkey and John S. Akin

Interview conducted by: Grace Camblos

Interview date: February 21, 2006

David K. Guilkey has been a CPC Fellow since 1981 and a Statistical Core Consultant since 1984. John S. Akin has been a CPC Fellow since 1978.

DG: When we came over here, we were doing stuff that I don't think hardly anybody else in the Center considered "population research." Because we were looking at the effect of the School Lunch Program on the nutrition of kids. And we were looking at the effect of the Food Stamp Program. I don't think many people considered that really population research.

JA: Well, not mainstream. They let us in so, yeah! There was some debate on whether to let us come around.

DG: And there was, and then actually, right when we started doing the work on breastfeeding, breastfeeding was considered pretty peripheral to population research, and not really mainstream population research.

JA: A lot of the stuff I've been involved with has been sort of big survey data collection analysis kind of projects. And a big part of what made them interesting was that we were working across disciplines. The Cebu data, for instance, one of the most important people involved was - what's his name...John...the engineering, environmental engineering...John Briscoe.

DG: John Briscoe.

JA: John Briscoe was doing a very detailed look at water supplies. And part of what made the study interesting and useful was that we were looking at not only "Were kids breastfeeding?" but what other kinds of water they were getting, and whether the water was good. So we had surveys and actual physical testing of all the wells. And where people lived relative to the wells. So you started to get into geography, environmental engineering, economics, everything. It's just one example, and that study, no way it could have been that good without having a whole set of disciplines involved in that one.

DG: The other big thing about that survey is it was one of the first ones where we got community-level data. People didn't gather community-level data attached to surveys. So we

had, you know, we talk about whether or not a mother feeds a kid formula, well, the price of formula's important, and people weren't *getting* that type of information. That's one of the first surveys - and that was the economists, actually, thinking that you need prices. And we got prices. So that's one of the reasons that survey's become fairly famous and is still used extensively today. Because it was one of the few surveys that really got all the data you really needed to analyze a problem. And then the fact that we had so many different groups working on it from different disciplines has allowed it to be used by a lot of different disciplines.

JA: In a practical sense, a big part of what was important was just coming up with the questionnaires, knowing what questions to ask. Because different disciplines wanted different things. And it made it much more useful.