

Attachment 4

Description of Deductive Disclosure Risk from the Fast Track Project

Restrictions on the use of data from the Fast Track Project stem from the level of sensitivity of the data, where "sensitive data" are defined as any data from a research project that may compromise the anonymity or privacy of respondents. Fast Track Project staff has taken all appropriate steps to remove direct and indirect identifying information from the data files. In order to further safeguard the privacy and anonymity of respondents, plans for use of Fast Track data must address the risk of deductive disclosure—the discerning of individual respondent's identity and responses through the use of known characteristics of that individual. The problem of deductive disclosure is not unique to Fast Track; this has become a major concern of federal agencies, researchers, and Institutional Review Boards in the recent past. If a person is known to have participated in a study or survey, then a combination of recorded characteristics may permit identification of a particular respondent. The Fast Track data are more sensitive than many other datasets to deductive disclosure, for the following reasons:

- The Fast Track project has as its primary aim to evaluate the effects of study interventions on a sample of children who are at high risk of severe conduct problems from early childhood through adolescence. By definition, inclusion in the study sample places participants in a behavioral category that may carry negative connotations. Therefore, privacy protections must extend not only to the contents of data records for respondents, but also to their actual participation in the study.
- The subject selection process used in the study increases the number of persons aware of the study and of the criteria for inclusion in the sample. The sample selection pool was established through application of a screening instrument on behavior problems as observed in the kindergarten year of each of three successive cohorts of children. The in-school procedure for sample selection involves the participation of persons outside of the project staff (teachers and, indirectly, school administrators), thus presenting further issues of respondent anonymity.
- Given that behavior problems in young children and adolescents are multiply determined, Fast Track involves a multicomponent preventive intervention program. Over the study period, the interventions have included: classroom-administered curricula, parent/child group meetings, individual tutoring, home visits, and sessions with school guidance counselors and peer mentors. Thus, the intervention study, by design, increases the pool of persons who are aware of the study and have had some contact with its participants.
- The multisite and longitudinal design aspects of Fast Track increase the sensitivity of the data to deductive disclosure. Within the four sites, schools were selected according to demographic characteristics of the school populations and the neighborhoods they served. Therefore, the study involves a potentially identifiable subset of schools. Over the years the study has collected detailed demographic and descriptive information for individual participants, including race, ethnicity, family composition, employment, and attributes of parents and siblings. School records included in the Fast Track data provide information on characteristics such as retention and self-contained classroom placement, which involve a relatively small numbers of students.
- Privacy issues stem also from the content of some of the data collected by Fast Track. Highly sensitive data include health conditions, sexual activity, family information, and illegal behaviors. Fast Track data also include information about substance abuse and psychological adjustment.

Involuntary disclosures could expose subjects and their families to adverse economic, legal, psychological, and social consequences.

Given the large number of contacts with and among study participants, as well as the sensitive nature of the data, researchers who use the Fast Track data must protect respondents from deductive disclosure risk by taking extraordinary precautions to protect the data from non-authorized use. These precautions include using the data solely for statistical purposes, signing pledges of confidentiality, and fully abiding by the terms established in the Data Use Agreement and Data Security Plan.