



# Human Functioning in Longitudinal Perspective

Studies of Normal and  
Psychopathic Populations

EDITED BY

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National Institute on Drug Abuse



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# Preface

Life history research is concerned with the changes that take place in people over time in the course of development as a function of life experiences. Research designs are longitudinal and involve prospective or retrospective data collected in field rather than laboratory situations. Archival records are frequently used as data sources, as reflected in many of the contributions to this volume. This area is of interest to diverse researchers and practitioners in many fields, including psychiatry, psychology, sociology, and other specialties, both in terms of methodology and potential to investigate significant substantive problems.

The Society for Life History Research in Psychopathology has provided a unifying force for many medical and social scientists interested in developmental research as it relates to mental health and human adaptation. This volume consists of contributions presented at the 1976 meeting of the Society in Fort Worth, Texas, and is the sixth in a series. Studies in the present volume are mainly large-scale longitudinal investigations, both prospective and retrospective, and illustrate methodology and methodological issues encountered in different areas. Previous volumes in other formats illustrate related work in these areas (Roff & Ricks, 1970; Roff et al., 1972; Ricks et al., 1974; Wirt et al., 1975; and Strauss et al., 1977).

For each of the papers included, a critique was presented by an invited

discussant. The general discussion of each presented paper was recorded, but only selected comments and replies to questions could be included because of space restrictions.

Each of the papers in this volume was edited initially by one of the editors and the final editing of all papers was the responsibility of Drs. Sells and Crandall. Most of the papers have been condensed by the editors and we acknowledge our appreciation to the authors for their helpful reactions to our changes in their papers.

Finally, we wish to thank Carolyn Crandall, Martha Pagliuca, Bonnie Smith, and Lorraine Weaver for their expert technical assistance in the final preparation of this book.

## The Editors

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction and Overview

The 17 papers in this volume constitute contributions from many disciplines to the general areas of mental health and human adaptation, using longitudinal, life history data. The studies reported were based on subject samples representing different psychiatric histories, different age groups, different life situations and processes, and different cultures and include several based on random population samples. In some of the papers, mental health was conceptualized in terms of traditional diagnostic categories and in others in broader areas of life adaptation, such as stress, alcoholism, or drug abuse. School, patient, community, hospital, and military populations are represented. Many of the papers make methodological as well as theoretical and substantive contributions to several literatures.

Brief capsule summaries of the 17 studies included are given below. They all represent longitudinal studies, covering periods ranging from 3 to 37 years. The longer-term studies in particular tended to be based on samples selected from archival sources with various degrees of specification of selection criteria. For example, Watt, Schulsinger, Tsuang, Cadoret, Loney, Vaillant, McCord, Belmont, and Gunderson based their studies on samples of subjects meeting specified criteria for whom records were available to identify cases meeting their criteria. The archival sources included hospital or institu-

tional records (Watt, Tsuang, Cadoret, and Loney), research files (Schulsinger, Vaillant, and McCord), and military records (Belmont and Gunderson). Some of these studies located and evaluated subjects currently and related early data to current status; these represent a prospective orientation, from early records to current status. The studies by Belmont and Gunderson used military records for subsequent outcomes as well and were also prospectively oriented. Watt selected his subjects from records of hospital admissions, but obtained retrospective data concerning early experience in his current interviews; his is therefore a retrospective study.

The advantages of exploiting archival sources, as reflected in these studies, are exciting when one considers the alternative of starting *de novo* and waiting 10 to nearly 40 years for the current observations. At the same time there may be limitations in records completed at an earlier period, both in the detail and comprehensiveness of the information provided and in the comparability of terms used and measures recorded with those characteristic of contemporary practice. The potential of providing adequate data for future archival research should unquestionably be given serious consideration in the design of current hospital, institutional, and other record systems. It appears that limitations of records were not salient problems in the present studies,