SESSION 1835 (SYMPOSIUM)

RETENTION AND ATTRITION: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS FOR LONGITUDINAL STUDIES
Chair: R.A. Pruchno, Rowan University School of Osteopathic Medicine, Stratford, New Jersey

Longitudinal studies have the power to document change over time. Yet, when participants are lost to follow-up, generalizability of findings is limited. Retention efforts are time consuming and expensive. In order to build retention science and bring the challenges of retention to the attention of gerontological researchers, this symposium brings together scholars from longitudinal studies that include the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study, MIDUS, ORANJ BOWL, the National Alzheimer’s Coordinating Center, and the Harlem Life Review & Health in Later Life Study to discuss: (1) characteristics associated with attrition and (2) retention strategies. Distinctions will be made amongst people who attrite from studies for known reasons (e.g., death, illness, lack of interest), and those lost to studies because study personnel are unable to locate them. Panelists will discuss the variety of innovative retention strategies, including extended interviewing hours, use of commercial databases and social media, door knocking, incentives, networking, and unique approaches developed by researchers to retaining participants. Panelists will address questions including: How much staff time should be committed to retaining a given respondent? How should privacy and persistence be balanced? and When should retention activities stop? The efficacy of targeting known barriers among populations most likely to attrite from longitudinal studies (e.g., poor, minorities) will be examined. Discussion will center on common and unique characteristics of people who attrite from these longitudinal studies and will highlight innovative strategies that are being used to retain or re-engage study participants.

UNDERSTANDING ATTRITION AND BOLSTERING RETENTION IN A LONGITUDINAL PANEL STUDY: ORANJ BOWL
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Attrition from longitudinal studies can affect generalizability of findings. Using data from a 10-year panel of 5,688 older people, we compare active participants with individuals lost to follow-up. Results indicate that active participants are older, less likely to be Black, more likely to be married, have higher income, greater education, more likely to have been working full time, have fewer depressive symptoms, pain and chronic illnesses, and greater subjective successful aging and functional ability at baseline than those lost to