

U.S. Department of Labor  
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

## NLSY79 Round 21 Main File and Work History Data Release

The main file and work history data for round 21 of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (NLSY79) are now available to researchers.

This latest survey round collected information from 7,661 members of the NLSY79 cohort, or 80 percent of eligible respondents. The round 21 release includes data from the 2004 interview and all public data collected during the previous 20 interviews of the cohort conducted since 1979. Since 1994, NLSY79 respondents have been interviewed every other year.

The work history data are created variables tracking respondents' employment status from January 1, 1978, through the most recent interview date. Data include each respondent's labor force status (including any military experience) during each week since January 1, 1978; the usual number of hours worked each week at all jobs; and additional details about respondents who worked for more than one employer simultaneously in any week. The data file also includes start and stop dates for the jobs and usual hours worked for each of up to five employers for whom the respondent worked during the survey period. Rate of pay, occupation, industry, and class of worker are also included. Dates of active military service and gaps in employment are provided.

The data set also includes constructed variables summarizing various aspects of respondents' labor force participation. These include the number of weeks spent working, unemployed, or out of the labor force and the number of hours worked, both during the previous calendar year and during the period since the last interview.

In addition, variables that summarize respondents' lifetime experiences in the labor force, such as the number of jobs ever held, are created. Formerly separate from the main data file, the work history data now are combined with the other data and identified under the work history area of interest.

### Round 21 questionnaire content

The round 21 questionnaire was similar to those used in previous rounds. It asked respondents about labor force behavior, educational attainment, training investments, income, health conditions, insurance coverage, and marital and fertility histories. The 2004 questionnaire also included some changes, which are outlined below.

*Additions to the survey:* With funding support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a new series of asthma-related health questions was added to the round 21 survey. Respondents were asked if they had ever been diagnosed with asthma, their age when diagnosed, whether they still had the disease, when they last had experienced symptoms, if there had been any episodes in the past 12 months, whether unscheduled medical care had been received in the past 12 months due to the asthma, what medicine they used for quick relief from asthma attacks, and whether they used a daily medication to prevent attacks. Respondents were asked how much the asthma limited their activities and whether their sleep was disrupted because of the illness. They were also asked whether they had smoked in the past 30 days, how often, how many cigarettes per day, whether anyone else had smoked in the house in the past 2 weeks, and whether they had been diagnosed with any other chronic lung diseases.

Female respondents were asked similar asthma-related questions about their children. Respondents reported whether any of their children had been diagnosed with asthma; at what age each child had been diagnosed; whether the child's father had ever been diagnosed with asthma; whether the child had experienced any episodes in the last 12 months; whether unscheduled medical care had been received for the child in the last 12 months due to asthma; how many school days had been missed due to asthma; whether any sleep had been missed or activities limited due to asthma; and whether asthma medications were taken.

A series of hypothetical questions about Social Security investment preferences was added in this round. Respondents were asked if, given a choice, they would opt to invest a portion of their Social Security taxes in a personal retirement account where they could control how the money was invested. If the respondents said yes to the option, they were asked whether they would invest in the stock market, in bonds issued by private companies, or in U.S. Federal Government bonds and what percentage they would designate for each option. Respondents were also asked to picture themselves at retirement age and to speculate whether, if they had the option, they would choose to take the Social Security money in monthly payments or in a lump sum. This same series of questions was asked in the young women survey in 2003.

Other pension questions were added in round 21 regarding the value of the respondents' savings-type pension plans, withdrawals from these plans, the respondent's intention to repay withdrawals, and the value of these accounts if withdrawals had been repaid at the time of the interview.

A personal finance series was added that included questions about the number of “maxed-out” credit cards a respondent had and whether or not a respondent had ever missed payments by at least 2 months. Several questions on bankruptcy followed, including whether the respondent or spouse had ever declared bankruptcy, the month and year of the most recent bankruptcy, what type of bankruptcy, whether the bankruptcy was related to a business failure, whether a respondent had applied for a loan or credit since the bankruptcy, and whether that application had been turned down.

A section on attitudes toward women in the labor force was also included and can be found under women’s roles. These questions previously appeared in the NLSY79 in the early 1980s. Respondents were asked to rate to what degree they agreed or disagreed with the following series of statements about women’s roles: “A woman’s place is in the home, not in the office or shop”; “A wife who carries out her full family responsibilities doesn’t have time for outside employment”; “A working wife feels more useful than one who doesn’t hold a job”; “The employment of wives leads to more juvenile delinquency”; “Employment of both parents is necessary to keep up with the high cost of living”; “It is much better for everyone concerned if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family”; “Men should share the work around the house with women, such as doing dishes, cleaning, and so forth”; and “Women are much happier if they stay home and take care of the children.”

Several questions on debts and assets now are asked in the NLSY79 every other round. Because they were omitted in round 20, these questions were asked in round 21. The series included questions about the value of and debt for vehicles; checking, savings, and money-market account balances; the worth of certificates of deposit, government bonds, mutual funds, pension plans, and insurance policies; real estate holdings, including residences, farms, and businesses; loans held; and net worth. Also added was a series of questions regarding collections worth \$1,000 or more.

Finally, within the series of questions for teachers that was added in round 20, a new question was added about the number

of separate courses taught in the past calendar year.

*Deletions to the survey:* In the family background section, survey administrators deleted two questions included in 2002, one asking respondents whether they were of Hispanic or Latino or Spanish descent, the other asking them to identify their race. Also omitted from this round was a series of alcohol consumption questions asked in 2002 and intermittently in other years.

#### NLSY79 data and documentation

The NLSY79 main file and work history data are available, free of charge, through Web Investigator on the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Web site at [www.bls.gov/nls](http://www.bls.gov/nls). Researchers interested in acquiring the data through this method should go to “General Overviews,” select “National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979” and then “NLSY79 Investigator,” and click on the link to Web Investigator. Much of the supporting documentation is also available for download from this Web site, including the *NLSY79 User’s Guide*. This guide explains the selection of the NLSY79 sample, describes the content of the data set, and provides helpful information for researchers using the data. The data are also available on CD-ROM for a \$20 fee. Users with questions and those interested in purchasing the data CD-ROM should contact NLS User Services. (Contact information appears on the back of this newsletter.)

The online and CD-ROM versions of the data are the same and contain data collected from each of the 21 rounds of the survey, as well as created variables. The inclusion of data from all rounds allows researchers to easily examine the longitudinal record of a respondent. □

### Spotlight: Benefits Variables

The quality and availability of benefits can be significant factors in determining whether a worker accepts a position, stays in a job, and maintains job satisfaction. The NLSY97, NLSY79, young adult, and all but one of the original cohort surveys offer benefits variables in selected survey years. NLS benefits data complement BLS National Compensation Survey data ([www.bls.gov/ebs](http://www.bls.gov/ebs)), which many research-

ers use to track national trends in the amount and type of benefits given to employees. NLS data give researchers the opportunity to link benefits to specific workers and jobs over time. A summary of NLS variables follows.

#### Benefits variables in the NLSY97

Questions on benefits are asked each survey year of NLSY97 respondents age 16 and older who report being employed at a job lasting at least 13 weeks. For each of these jobs, the interviewer hands the respondent a card listing typical benefits and asks him or her to state the benefits available. These benefits include the following:

- Medical, surgical, or hospitalization insurance that covers injuries or major illnesses off the job
- Life insurance that covers death for reasons not connected to job
- Dental benefits
- Paid maternity or paternity leave
- Unpaid maternity or paternity leave that allows employees to return to the same job or one similar to it
- A retirement plan other than Social Security
- A flexible work schedule
- Tuition reimbursement for certain types of schooling
- Company-provided or subsidized childcare
- Employee stock ownership plans

If an employer offered a benefit that the respondent chose not to take, the benefit was still considered available. Benefits available to other employees at the company but not to the respondent at the time of the survey were not included.

In addition to these benefits, the survey questioned respondents on the number of paid vacation days and paid sick or personal days per year to which they were entitled, or to which they had been entitled when the job ended.

#### Benefits variables in the NLSY79

Data on the availability of benefits provided by employers of NLSY79 respondents have been collected during each survey year except 1981. The benefits series was administered, from 1980 to 1992,

to those respondents who worked 20 hours or more a week at their current or last job and who were not self-employed in an unincorporated business or enlisted in the military. From 1993 to 2004, those working fewer than 20 hours a week were asked if their employer made available any benefits. Respondents replying in the affirmative were then asked the detailed benefits series. Benefits questions were asked only about the main job from 1979 to 1993; since 1994 they have been asked about all jobs. The types of benefits about which information has been gathered vary across the years.

Questions on medical, surgical, or hospital insurance, life insurance, and paid vacation were included in every survey year except 1981; questions on sick days, dental benefits, and maternity or paternity leave were asked beginning in 1985; and questions on retirement plans, profit sharing, training and educational opportunities, and subsidized childcare were asked since 1988. A question on flextime was added in 1989. Other benefits variables were collected intermittently.

#### **Benefits variables in the young adult survey**

Respondents to the 1994-98 young adult surveys were asked about the standard benefits made available to them for all jobs at which they worked more than 10 hours per week for more than 9 weeks. Beginning in 2000, respondents were asked about the benefits of only their main job.

#### **Benefits variables in the original cohort surveys**

Benefits data were collected in 1977, 1982, 1987, 1989, and 1995-2003 for the mature women cohort, while benefits information was collected in 1978 and in the 1983-2003 surveys for the young women cohort. In each survey, information was gathered about medical, surgical, and hospital insurance; life insurance; a retirement pension program; paid sick leave; paid vacation; training and educational opportunities; profit sharing; and stock options. In addition, selected surveys collected data on the availability of paid and unpaid maternity leave, flexible work hours, child daycare, paid personal time, time off for childcare, time off for eldercare, a flexible menu of ben-

efits, free or discounted meals or merchandise, and dental insurance.

For the young women cohort, the 1987 survey asked respondents to rank the most important benefits they were receiving and the ones they would most desire but were not yet receiving. In 1991, the collection of benefits data was broadened for the young women cohort to include data on actual coverage by a health or retirement plan provided by the respondent's employer. Information was also collected on specific types of health insurance coverage—for example, medical, surgical, or hospital care; dental services; vision care; or prescription drugs.

Questions about basic benefits were also asked of the younger men cohort in 1976 and 1981.

#### **Research on benefits**

Researchers who are interested in issues related to benefits are encouraged to visit the *NLS Annotated Bibliography* at [www.nlsbibliography.org](http://www.nlsbibliography.org). □

#### **Looking for Data Documentation? Check Online**

Because of the complex nature of the many surveys known collectively as the NLS, researchers are encouraged to consult cohort-specific questionnaires and supplements, users' guides, and errata lists as they work with the data. Together, these documents can make the data more understandable and usable. Documentation for each survey can be found online at [www.bls.gov/nls](http://www.bls.gov/nls): click on "General Overviews," then on the general overview of the desired cohort to find links to the documentation. A documentation link is also available within Web Investigator at the same Web site. □

#### **Frequently Asked Questions**

The NLS staff encourages researchers to contact NLS User Services with questions and problems encountered while accessing and using NLS data or documentation. Every effort is made to answer these inquiries. Some recent questions and answers of interest to NLS users are listed below.

*Q1. I'm using NLS young women data, and I'm wondering about the online survey instruments for the 1995-2003 surveys. Since these were CAPI surveys, do I, for example, use the document called "1999 Young Women Questionnaire" as the questionnaire, even though this document looks like a codebook (not a survey instrument) when opened?*

A1. By design, the CAPI questionnaire does look like the codebook. Elements of the questionnaire become fields in the codebook. To make a complete codebook, frequencies, variable titles, and other notes are added. In essence, a CAPI questionnaire is a stripped-down version of the codebook.

*Q2. Is the grade information (A, B, C, GPA, etc.) in the NLSY97 surveys self-reported or gathered through each respondent's school?*

A2. Grade information is available in the NLSY97 both through self-report and through transcripts. Variable names beginning with "TRANS" signify that data were obtained through the respondent's school transcripts; variable names beginning with "YSCH" indicate that the data came directly from the respondent.

*Q3. In the round 7 NLSY97, I can find race of new household members (YHHI-50900.01, etc.), but not the roster race variables (HHI\_RACE). Do the roster variables on race exist?*

A3. When the race variable was transformed into a mark-all-that-apply variable in round 6, race was no longer maintained as a preloaded variable for the next round of data, in part because "mark-all" variables in large rosters take up a great deal of space. Because of this change, it became necessary to create these variables in future rounds. This task was overlooked in round 7 until it was too late to add these variables to the release. The variables are now available and will be included in the next NLSY97 data release later this year.

*Q4. How do I track down those respondents in the NLSY79 who would qualify for a valid skip for AFDC and welfare questions?*

A4. Respondents are asked if they have received welfare payments or Aid to Families

with Dependent Children (AFDC) since the last interview. If not, they skip the followup questions. There have been changes in the way this information has been collected over the years. In the 1979-92 surveys, respondents were asked if they had received income from these sources in the calendar year preceding the interview. If so, the months during which this income was received were recorded, along with the usual amount. Since 1993, respondents have been asked about income from welfare, AFDC, and other transfer payments in an event history format—that is, in terms of spells. Respondents are asked about the first spell they received income from these sources, second spell, and so forth, until all spells have been covered.

It can be difficult to use these variables from the income area of interest. One alternative would be to use the variables in the recipient month and recipient year areas of interest, which track monthly and yearly payments, respectively.

*Q5. Is the exact date of birth of children available in the NLSY79 child data set? From the questionnaire, it looks like day, month, and year of birth are collected for each child, but in Web Investigator I've only been able to find month and year.*

A5. The month, day, and year of birth were collected, but only the month and year are publicly released. Date of birth is considered a confidential variable for all NLS cohorts and is available only on the restricted geocode data set. For more information about applying for access to geocode data, go to the "Obtaining NLS Data" link at [www.bls.gov/nls](http://www.bls.gov/nls). □

## Completed NLS Research

The following is a listing of recent research based on data from the NLS cohorts that has not appeared in its current form in a previous issue of the *NLS News*. See the *NLS Annotated Bibliography* at [www.nlsbibliography.org](http://www.nlsbibliography.org) for a comprehensive listing of NLS-related research.

Aizer, Anna and McLanahan, Sara. "The Impact of Child Support Enforcement on Fertility, Parental Investments, and Child Well-Being." *Journal of Human Resources* 41,1 (Winter 2006): 28-45. [NLSY79]

Averett, Susan L.; Gennetian, Lisa A.; and Peters, H. Elizabeth. "Paternal Child Care and Children's Development." *Journal of Population Economics* 18,3 (2005): 391-414. [Children of the NLSY79, NLSY79]

Berger, Lawrence Marc. "Children Living Out-of-Home: Effects of Family and Environmental Characteristics." *Children and Youth Services Review* 28,2 (February 2006): 158-79. [Children of the NLSY79, NLSY79]

Bray, Jeremy W. "Alcohol Use, Human Capital, and Wages." *Journal of Labor Economics* 23,2 (April 2005): 279-312. [NLSY79]

Bronars, Stephen G. and Oettinger, Gerald S. "Estimates of the Return to Schooling and Ability: Evidence From Sibling Data." *Labour Economics* 13,1 (February 2006): 19-34. [NLSY79]

Carlson, Marcia J. "Family Structure, Father Involvement, and Adolescent Behavioral Outcomes." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 68,1 (February 2006): 137-54. [Children of the NLSY79]

Coffman, Donna L. and Millsap, Roger E. "Evaluating Latent Growth Curve Models Using Individual Fit Statistics." *Structural Equation Modeling* 13,1 (2006): 1-27. [Children of the NLSY79]

DellaVigna, Stefano and Paserman, M. Daniele. "Job Search and Impatience." *Journal of Labor Economics* 23,3 (July 2005): 527-88. [NLSY79]

Fairlie, Robert W. "Entrepreneurship and Earnings among Young Adults from Disadvantaged Families." *Small Business Economics* 25,3 (October 2005): 223-36. [NLSY79]

Falci, Christina. "Family Structure, Closeness to Residential and Nonresidential Parents, and Psychological Distress in Early and Middle Adolescence." *Sociological Quarterly* 47,1 (Winter 2006) 123-46. [Children of the NLSY79]

Gibbons, Robert; Katz, Lawrence F.; Lemieux, Thomas; and Parent, Daniel. "Comparative Advantage, Learning, and Sectoral Wage Determination." *Journal of*

*Labor Economics* 23,4 (October 2005): 681-723. [NLSY79]

Gennetian, Lisa A. "One or Two Parents? Half or Step Siblings? The Effect of Family Structure on Young Children's Achievement." *Journal of Population Economics* 18,3 (September 2005): 415-36. [Children of the NLSY79]

Groves, Melissa Osborne. "How Important Is Your Personality? Labor Market Returns to Personality for Women in the US and UK." *Journal of Economic Psychology* 26,6 (December 2005): 827-41. [Young Women]

Grunow, Daniela; Hofmeister, Heather; and Buchholz, Sandra. "Late 20th-Century Persistence and Decline of the Female Home-maker in Germany and the United States." *International Sociology* 21,1 (January 2006): 101-31. [Young Women]

Koch, Steven F. and McGeary, Kerry Anne. "The Effect of Youth Alcohol Initiation on High School Completion." *Economic Inquiry* 43,4 (October 2005): 750-65. [NLSY79]

Lopoo, Leonard M. "Maternal Employment and Latchkey Adolescents." *Social Service Review* 79,4 (December 2005): 602-23. [Children of the NLSY79, NLSY79]

Mroz, Thomas A. and Savage, Timothy H. "The Long-Term Effects of Youth Unemployment." *The Journal of Human Resources* 41, 2 (Spring 2006): 259-93. [NLSY79]

Nievar, M. Angela and Luster, Tom. "Developmental Processes in African American Families: An Application of McLoyd's Theoretical Model." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 68,2 (May 2006): 320-31. [NLSY79]

Pinkston, Joshua C. "A Test of Screening Discrimination with Employer Learning." *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 59,2 (January 2006): 267-84. [NLSY79]

Reagan, Patricia Benton and Salsberry, Pamela J. "Race and Ethnic Differences in Determinants of Preterm Birth: Broadening the Social Context." *Social Science and Medicine* 60,10 (May 2005): 2217-28. [Children of the NLSY79, NLSY79]

Spivey, Christy. "Time Off at What Price? The Effects of Career Interruptions on Earnings." *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*. 59,1 (October 2005): 119-40. [NLSY79]

Weden, Margaret M.; Astone, Nan M.; and Bishai, David. "Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Differences in Smoking Cessation Associated with Employment and Joblessness

Through Young Adulthood in the US." *Social Science and Medicine* 62,2 (January 2006): 303-16. [NLSY79]

Wells, Samantha; Graham, Kathryn; Speechley, Mark; and Koval, John J. "Do Predisposing and Family Background Characteristics Modify or Confound the Relationship Between Drinking Frequency and Alcohol-Related Aggression? A Study of

Late Adolescent and Young Adult Drinkers." *Addictive Behaviors* 31,4 (April 2006): 661-75. [NLSY79 Young Adult]

Wichman, Aaron L.; Rodgers, Joseph Lee; and MacCallum, Robert C. "A Multilevel Approach to the Relationship Between Birth Order and Intelligence." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 32,1 (2006): 117-27. [Children of the NLSY79]    □

### Are You Working With NLS Data?

If you are, we are interested in your work!

- Have you received funding to sponsor a project using NLS data?
- Are you working on a paper that uses NLS data?
- Have you published a recent paper using NLS data?

If you have received funding on a project, are working on a paper, or published a recent paper that uses NLS data, please contact: NLS User Services, Center for Human Resource Research, The Ohio State University, 921 Chatham Lane, Suite 100, Columbus, OH 43221; (614) 442-7366; e-mail: [usersvc@postoffice.chrr.ohio-state.edu](mailto:usersvc@postoffice.chrr.ohio-state.edu). Or use our online submission form—just go to [www.nlsbibliography.org](http://www.nlsbibliography.org) and click on "Submit Citation."

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*NLS News* is published quarterly by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. It is distributed both nationwide and abroad without charge to researchers using NLS data, as well as to other interested persons.

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