

# NLS News



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## NLS Celebrates Its 40th Birthday

The original NLS cohorts first were interviewed starting in 1966. Over the past 40 years, more than 49,500 respondents have taken time to answer detailed questions about their work, income, education, marital status, health, and more. Using these data, researchers have produced over 5,100 articles, papers, dissertations, and presentations worldwide.

### A short history of the NLS

The earliest National Longitudinal Survey (NLS) interviews began in 1966 under the sponsorship of the Office of Manpower, Automation, and Training (now the Employment and Training Administration). The older men cohort (initially ages 45 to 59) and the young men cohort (ages 14 to 24) first were interviewed in 1966. The mature women (30 to 44) first were interviewed in 1967, and the young women (14 to 24) in 1968. These four nationally representative groups, known as the original cohorts, were chosen in an effort to understand labor market issues such as retirement, the return of homemakers to the workforce, and the school-to-work transition.

High retention rates for and widespread research interest in these four cohorts motivated investigators to continue the surveys far past the initial 5-year plan. The success of the original cohorts also led to the inception of a new longitudinal study of a panel of young men and young women ages 14 to 21, which debuted in early 1979. Known as the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79), this cohort provided a replication of the 1960s young men and young women cohorts and at the same time helped evaluate expanded

youth employment and training programs legislated by Congress in the mid-1970s. The sample included an overrepresentation of blacks, Hispanics or Latinos, and economically disadvantaged nonblack, non-Hispanics, providing researchers with expanded information on these groups. With funding from the Department of Defense and the Armed Services, an additional group of young persons in the military was selected to be interviewed.

Next on the scene came the Children of the NLSY79 survey, which began in 1986 and now is celebrating its 20th year. With funding from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and other government agencies and private foundations, this survey has collected detailed information on the development of children born to NLSY79 women. During the years when the NLSY79 survey takes place, child assessments are administered to NLSY79 mothers and their children (see related article in this newsletter). Besides these assessments, the children also are asked a number of questions in an interview. Beginning in 1994, children 15 and older (known as young adults) have replied to a separate survey with questions similar to those asked of their mothers.

In 1997, another longitudinal survey was started, as the respondents in the 1979 youth cohort had by then progressed into their 30s and no longer were facing transition-to-adulthood issues. The NLSY97 collects information on the circumstances that influence or are influenced by the labor market behaviors of youths who were ages 12 to 16 as of December 31, 1996. Data on respondents' educational experiences and family and community backgrounds, among a wide array of other topics, also are included in this survey.

### The NLS program today

Currently, the NLSY79, the Children of the NLSY79 (including the child and young adult versions), and the NLSY97 all are active surveys. The NLSY97 is an annual survey, while the other surveys collect data every other year. The four original cohorts no longer are interviewed, and their surveys are considered inactive. The young men were surveyed for the final time in 1981, the older men were completed in 1990, and both the young women and the mature women had their final survey in 2003. Data from all of the NLS cohorts may be accessed by users through the NLS program Web site at [www.bls.gov/nls](http://www.bls.gov/nls). □

### Child Assessments: HOME, PIAT, and More

Twenty years ago, the first Children of the NLSY79 survey began gathering (among other items) detailed cognitive, socioemotional, and physiological assessment information about the children of NLSY79 female respondents. Since then, assessments have been administered biennially to these children and youth. The various NLSY79 child assessments were selected for their validity, reliability, and suitability for use in a large-scale household survey. Some of the items are answered by the child's mother, some items are administered directly to the child, and others are filled in by the interviewer. For a list of specific assessment items, researchers are encouraged to refer to the field instruments (child and mother supplements) used to administer the assessments and to the appendixes in the *NLSY79 Child and Young Adult User's Guide*. Both types of documentation are available through the NLS Web Investigator at [www.bls.gov/nls](http://www.bls.gov/nls).

### Description of the assessments

*The HOME Short Form.* Items from the HOME (Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment) Inventory, developed by Bradley and Caldwell, were selected and adapted for use in the NLSY79 child surveys to measure the nature and quality of the child's home environment from birth to adolescence.

*How My Child Usually Acts/Temperament.* Mothers' answers to items from Rothbart's Infant Behavior Questionnaire, from Kagan's Compliance Scale, and from Campos form scales measuring the temperament or behavioral style over the past 2-week period for each child under age 7.

*Motor and Social Development.* Items drawn from Poe, Bayley, Gesell, and the Denver Developmental Screening Test measure motor-social-cognitive development for children under age 4.

*Behavior Problems Index.* Items from Zill and Peterson's adaptation of the Child Behavior Checklist, developed by Achenbach and Edelbrock, elicit mothers' ratings of children 4 years of age or older in areas of problem behavior such as hyperactivity, anxiety, dependency, aggressiveness, and peer conflict.

*Parts of the Body.* Ten items developed by Kagan measure the ability of children aged 1 or 2 to identify various parts of their bodies. This assessment was not administered after 1988.

*Memory for Location.* This assessment developed by Kagan measures the ability of children aged 8 months to 3 years to remember the location of an object that is subsequently hidden from view. This assessment was not used after 1988.

*Memory for Digit Span.* A component of the revised Wechsler Intelligence Scales for Children (Psychological Corporation), this scale assesses the ability of children ages 7 through 11 to remember and repeat numbers in forward and reverse order.

*Verbal Memory.* A subtest of the McCarthy Scales of Children's Abilities (Psychological Corporation), this assesses

short-term verbal memory of children ages 3 through 6 to remember words, sentences, or major concepts from a short story. Part C, the story, was not used after the 1990 survey. This assessment was not administered after 1994.

*What I Am Like/Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC).* Two scales from Harter's Self-Perception Profile for Children measure children's perceptions of their competence in academics as well as their sense of self-worth. The assessment is administered to children aged 8 and above (12 and above beginning in 1996).

*Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT) Math.* This subtest (American Guidance Service) measures achievement in mathematics for children aged 5 and older.

*PIAT Reading Recognition and Reading Comprehension.* These PIAT subtests assess the reading knowledge and comprehension of children aged 5 and older.

*The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R), Form L.* This test measures the hearing vocabulary knowledge of children aged 3 and above. The test has been administered to children ages 4 and 5 or 10 and 11 starting with the 1996 survey round.

### Assessment universes

Not all assessments are fielded in each child survey year. In some instances, assessments are administered only to children for whom no valid score has been obtained during a previous survey. In 1988, a procedure was introduced whereby children ages 10 and 11 were designated to complete any assessment for which they were eligible to establish a representative index group for future analyses. In 2002 and 2004, very young children were not administered assessments. Also, beginning in 1994, children aged 15 or older by December 31 of the interview year no longer were given any of the child assessments; instead, this older group of children, known as the young adult cohort, now responds to its own questionnaire.

### Accessing the assessment data

The Children of the NLSY79 data files contain summary scores for each assess-

ment measure, which can be found under the "Assessment" area of interest in the NLS Web Investigator. For a subset of assessments, subscores are constructed. When available, national norms based on the raw scores are provided to users. The data file also includes individual item responses (found under the "Child Supplement" and "Mother Supplement" areas of interest) as recorded in the field, as well as interviewer reports of testing conditions for each assessment.

To access Children of the NLSY79 data through the NLS Web Investigator, go to [www.bls.gov/nls](http://www.bls.gov/nls). For a comprehensive listing of research based on these data, see the annotated online *NLS Bibliography* at [www.nlsbibliography.org](http://www.nlsbibliography.org). □

### The How-to on Custom Weights

NLS data come from complex longitudinal surveys featuring multiple representative samples. Weighting the data can be tricky. The NLS staff creates sets of cross-sectional weights for each cohort and each of its survey rounds. These weights produce group estimations that are demographically representative of each cohort's base-year population when used in tabulations. Using these weights allows users to correct the raw data for the complex survey design in a particular year.

If data from just 1 survey year are being used, the weight series provides an accurate adjustment. However, if the desired data are for more than 1 survey year (2000 and 2002, for instance), no single set of weights will provide an accurate adjustment. In that instance, researchers should use the custom weight program, which is designed for multiyear analysis.

To use the custom weight program in the NLS Web Investigator, follow these simple steps:

- Go to the NLS program Web site at [www.bls.gov/nls](http://www.bls.gov/nls) and select the NLS cohort of choice.
- Click on the option, "Create custom weights." This selection takes the user to the custom weights area of Web Investigator.
- Select the survey years desired.
- Click on the "Create Custom Weights"

button. Doing this generates a zip file containing the needed custom weights. The output will have two implied decimal places: in other words, 128278 means the respondent represents 1,282.78 people.

Researchers may contact NLS User Services ([usersvc@postoffice.chrr.ohio-state.edu](mailto:usersvc@postoffice.chrr.ohio-state.edu)) with questions or comments on sampling weights or any other data issues of concern. □

### Spotlight: Crime, Delinquency, and Arrest in the NLSY97

Running away from home. Selling drugs. Vandalism. Theft. Researchers can learn about NLSY97 respondents' active participation in these and other criminal or delinquent behaviors in the NLSY97 main data file. Information on delinquency, crime, and arrest was collected in the self-administered section of the survey; the data, described below, can be accessed through the NLS Web Investigator at [www.bls.gov/nls](http://www.bls.gov/nls).

#### Delinquent versus criminal behavior

Within the criminal justice system, "delinquent" behavior usually is differentiated from "criminal" behavior on the basis of an offender's age. For example, a 12-year-old who vandalized property likely would be charged with a delinquent offense; an older youth might be charged with either a delinquent or a criminal offense at the discretion of the judge. The descriptions of delinquency in this article include behaviors such as running away from home that are unlawful for minors but not necessarily unlawful for those aged 18 and older. The discussions of crime and arrest describe behaviors that are considered criminal activity for adults, even though a respondent who committed one of these offenses may have been charged as a juvenile rather than as an adult.

#### Delinquency questions in the NLSY97

The first set of questions about delinquent behavior addressed running away from home and staying away at least overnight. Data include the respondent's age when this first occurred, the total number of

times the respondent reported running away, and the number of times he or she reported running away since the last interview. After round 1, youths ages 17 or older at the date of the last interview or who were not living with any parents were not asked the runaway questions. Questions about running away from home were discontinued after round 6.

The second series of questions asked whether respondents ever had carried a handgun (defined as any firearm other than a rifle or a shotgun) and if they had carried one since the last interview. Other details gathered include age of first incident, number of days a gun was carried during the past 30 days, and whether the gun was carried to school during that period.

In a separate set of questions, respondents were surveyed on their involvement in gang activity. Those who said they belonged to a gang were asked at what age they had joined the gang and their membership status during the previous 12 months (round 1) or since the last interview (subsequent rounds). Those who said they did not belong to a gang during that time stated how old they were when they last belonged to a gang.

#### Criminal behavior questions in the NLSY97

The survey asked about participation in and intensity of various criminal activities in the previous year (round 1) or since the last interview (subsequent rounds). The types of criminal activities included were the following:

- Purposely damaging or destroying property not belonging to the respondent
- Stealing something worth less than \$50
- Stealing something worth \$50 or more (including a car)
- Committing other property crimes, including fencing stolen property, possessing or receiving stolen property, or selling something for more than it was worth
- Attacking or assaulting someone
- Selling or helping sell marijuana, hashish, or hard drugs

Youths who reported stealing something stated whether they had stolen from a store, snatched someone's purse or wallet or picked someone's pocket, or gone into

a locked building to steal something, and whether they had used a weapon during the act. Additionally, respondents who reported stealing something worth \$50 or more were asked if they had stolen a car.

In round 1, followup questions about a particular activity (except stealing something worth less than \$50) determined the respondent's age at the time of the activity and the number of times he or she had participated in related activities during the past 12 months. Respondents who reported no involvement during the previous 12 months were asked how old they were when they last participated in that type of criminal activity. If the respondent reported committing other property crimes, selling or helping sell drugs, or stealing something worth \$50 or more, he or she was asked about any monetary rewards in 1996—the total cash received or the total cash he or she would have received—from selling these items. Respondents who reported selling or helping sell drugs stated whether they were involved in selling marijuana or hashish, hard drugs, or both, as well as the amount of income received from these sales.

Reference periods and question details changed slightly after round 1. Respondents were questioned about the number of times they had participated in each activity since the last interview. However, respondents who had answered "don't know" or had refused in round 1 were again asked about criminal activities in which they ever had participated. Those who reported stealing something (worth more or less than \$50) or participating in the other property crimes listed above were asked for the amount of any monetary rewards in the previous calendar year—the total cash received or the total cash they would have received—from selling these items. Respondents who reported selling or helping sell drugs distinguished whether they were involved in selling marijuana or hashish, hard drugs, or both, and listed the amount of income received from these activities.

#### Arrest questions in the NLSY97

NLSY97 respondents were asked whether they ever had been arrested by the police or taken into custody for an illegal or delinquent offense (not including arrests for minor traffic violations) and the total num-

ber of times this had happened. Round 1 then collected information on the number of arrests before the respondent's 12th birthday and the respondent's age at the time of the first arrest. Further data were gathered on the respondent's most recent and first arrests. Subsequent rounds gathered the number of arrests since the last interview, including the month and year of the first arrest if it occurred during that time.

For the first and most recent arrests (round 1) or a continuous loop of all arrests (subsequent rounds), the respondent provided the month and year of the arrest and stated whether the police had charged him or her with an offense. A series of questions then determined the type of offenses with which the respondent was charged; he or she could enumerate multiple charges. The list of possible arrest charges included assault, burglary, destruction of property, possession or use of illicit drugs, sale or trafficking of illicit drugs, a major traffic offense, and a public-order offense.

For each offense with which they had been charged, respondents reported whether they had been convicted for or had pled guilty to the offense. Respondents then described the sentence, if any. For those sentenced to jail, an adult corrections institution, a juvenile corrections institution, or a reform or training school, the surveys recorded the month and year respondents began their sentence and the month and year their sentence ended (if appropriate). Similar questions asked about the month and year community service or probation began and ended.

### Other related questions in the NLSY97

Other questions related to delinquent or criminal behavior in the NLSY97 include a respondent's attitude toward justice and the safety of the respondent's household environment. Several questions on substance use (including alcohol, cigarette, marijuana, and cocaine use) also have been included each survey year. In addition, NLSY97 respondents were asked in 1997 and in 2000 to estimate the percent chance they might be arrested at least once in the next year and the chance they might be a victim of violent crime.

### Criminal or delinquent behavior in other NLS surveys

Information on crime, delinquency, and arrest records was collected from the NLSY79 in a special self-report supplement during the 1980 interview. This supplement detailed respondents' participation in and income from illegal activities and their contacts with the criminal justice system. The 1988–2004 surveys of the Children of the NLSY79 asked those aged 10 and older (including the young adults) to report on participation in various illegal activities. There were no direct questions regarding criminal behavior asked of the original cohorts. □

### Frequently Asked Questions

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

*Q1. I just did an extract with the NLS Web Investigator and requested SAS code to read the data. I see there is now quite a bit of code formatting variables. Is there any programming that I need to do to take this into account?*

A1. The only new things for the SAS codes for Web Investigator are the value labels for each variable, which can generate a lot of code. If a user wants value labels, nothing extra needs to be done; otherwise, value labels simply can be deleted.

*Q2. For my NLSY79 research, I'm looking at the number of workers reporting injury/illness and wondering whether data for 1996–2000 are correct. The numbers seem to decrease sharply during that time. Does this have anything to do with the survey switching from annual to biennial?*

A2. Nine times between 1988 and 2000, NLSY79 respondents were asked: "Since [Date of last interview], have you had an incident at any job we previously discussed that resulted in an injury or illness to you?"

The number of injuries does decrease steadily in the referenced period. This reduction is most likely because survey respondents are growing older and increasingly working in safer jobs or in more managerial positions.

*Q3. In the NLSY79 survey year 2000, does "since date of last interview" mean from after the 1998 survey to the 2000 survey date?*

A3. Respondents of the NLSY79 were interviewed annually from 1979 to 1994, then every other year thereafter (1996, 1998, and so on). If a question asks "since date of last interview," this is to remind respondents to refer to the time they were last interviewed; they may have missed one or more interviews. So, somebody interviewed in 1998 and 2000 would be asked at the time of the 2000 interview to report on items since the 1998 interview. Somebody else not interviewed since 1993 would be asked at the 2000 interview to report on items since the 1993 interview. Search the "Last Interview Information" area of interest to find the date of the last interview.

*Q4. According to the codebook, the NLSY97 variable S21751.00 "Does R currently live on own?" has 5,075 valid skips. Does this mean that 5,075 people still live with their parents, since they were allowed to skip this question?*

A4. No, the S21751.00 variable is asked only of respondents whose independence status is considered uncertain. If it is already known a respondent is living with a parent or parent figure or is living alone, that respondent is not asked this question (and the computer automatically generates a valid skip value for that variable). But a respondent who reports living with other people who are not listed as parents or parent figures is asked question S21751.00.

If a variable has a higher-than-expected number of valid skips, researchers may want to trace the skip pattern back to the questionnaire to determine the universe of that question.

*Q5: What is the difference between the NLS Web Investigator and DB Investigator? Is the software the same? Does it matter which you use if you have the data set downloaded?*

A5: There are minor differences between DB Investigator and Web Investigator, but largely they respond the same. DB Investigator is the software designed to be installed locally on a user's computer. The user installs the database for the cohort(s) needed, and DB Investigator then extracts from those installed cohorts. Web Investigator accesses the NLS data over the Internet, downloading only the selected variables to a local computer. Web Investigator has a few more choices for filters and has value labels for the extracted variables, but whatever the choice, extracts from the same cohort using the same set of variables produce exactly the same extracted data set. □

### Completed NLS Research

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

Atkins, Robert L.; Hart, Daniel; and Donnelly, Thomas M. "The Association of Childhood Personality Type With Volunteering During Adolescence." *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* 51, 2 (April 2005): 145-62. [Children of the NLSY79, NLSY79 Young Adult]

Dougherty, Christopher. "Why Are Returns to Schooling Higher for Women than for Men?" *The Journal of Human Resources* 40, 4 (Fall 2005): 969-88. [NLSY79]

Hamil-Luker, Jenifer. "Women's Wages: Cohort Differences in Returns to Education and Training over Time." *Social Science Quarterly* 86, 5 (December 2005): 1261-78. [NLSY79, Young Women]

Mannino, D. M.; Mott, Joshua Adam; Ferdinands, J. M.; Camargo, C.A.; Friedman, M.; Greves, H. M.; and Redd, S. C. "Boys with High Body Masses Have an Increased Risk of Developing Asthma: Findings from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY)." *International Journal of Obesity* 30,1 (January 2006): 6-13. [NLSY79]

Salsberry, Pamela J. and Reagan, Patricia B. "Dynamics of Early Childhood Overweight." *Pediatrics* 116,6 (December 2005)1329-38. [Children of the NLSY79, NLSY79]

Schmiege, Sarah and Russo, Nancy Felipe. "Depression and Unwanted First Pregnancy: Longitudinal Cohort Study." *British Medical Journal* 331,7528 (December 2005): 1303-06. [NLSY79]

Strohschein, Lisa. "Household Income Histories and Child Mental Health Trajectories." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 46, 4 (December 2005): 359-75. [Children of the NLSY79]

Taniguchi, Hiromi and Kaufman, Gayle. "Degree Completion Among Nontraditional College Students." *Social Science Quarterly* 86,4 (December 2005): 912-27. [NLSY79]

Zagorsky, Jay L. "Marriage and Divorce's Impact on Wealth." *Journal of Sociology* 41,4 (Dec 2005): 406-24 [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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