

The National Longitudinal Surveys

Sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), NLS data collection and user services are provided, under contract, by CHRR at The Ohio State University and NORC at the University of Chicago. Funding for the NLSY79 Child/Young Adult survey is provided by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

NLS cohort topics include:

Demographic and family background, education, military experiences, job characteristics and training, labor market status and histories, marital and family characteristics, income and assets, transfers of time and money, retirement, geographic location and mobility, health, nutrition, and physical activity, fertility and parenting, sexual activity, attitudes and expectations, behaviors and perspectives, environmental characteristics, and civic engagement.

Additionally, NLSY79 Child and Young Adult surveys include:

Assessments of the quality of the home environment, cognitive development, temperament, and motor, social and emotional development.

How do I obtain NLS data?

National Longitudinal Surveys data are made available to researchers through the Investigator website at: nlsinfo.org/investigator. Investigator allows users to search for variables of interest for any NLS cohort, create simple tabulations of the data, extract data sets for analysis, and access documentation. NLS public data are immediately available and free of charge.

Where do I get more information?

Visit the NLS website at: nlsinfo.org for online access to questionnaires and other documentation, a searchable, annotated bibliography of NLS research, news releases, updates, information on obtaining restricted-access data, such as geocoded files, and much more.

Questions about NLS data should be directed to NLS User Services: usersvc@chrr.osu.edu or 614-442-7366.

Questions about BLS publications and restricted-access NLS data should be directed to: NLS_info@bls.gov or 202-691-7410.

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Using the NLS to Study VOLUNTEERING

National Longitudinal Surveys



What are the National Longitudinal Surveys?

The National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS) are a set of surveys sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) of the U.S. Department of Labor. The NLS has gathered information at multiple points in time on the labor market experiences and other significant life events of seven cohorts of men and women.

Which NLS cohorts have volunteering and civic engagement data?

Various data about volunteering and civic engagement are available for all three ongoing NLS cohorts and three of the four original cohorts (for which data collection has ended).

1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY97):

Began in 1997 with 8,984 men and women born in 1980-84 (ages 12-17 in 1997). Sample members were interviewed annually from 1997 to 2011 and biennially thereafter. The 2021 interview was conducted with 6,713 men and women ages 36-42. In addition, a COVID-19 Supplement was fielded in 2021.

In several later rounds, NLSY97 respondents answered questions about time spent doing unpaid volunteer work, including activities aimed at changing social conditions. They also reported donations of money to political, environmental or community causes. In round one, respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of peers in their grade involved in volunteer work, and parents of NLSY97 respondents were asked if they volunteered at school or in the classroom.

1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79):

Began in 1979 with 12,686 men and women born in 1957-64 (ages 14-22 in 1979). Sample members were interviewed annually from 1979-1994 and biennially thereafter. Oversamples of military and economically disadvantaged, non-black/non-Hispanic respondents were dropped in 1985 and 1991, leaving a sample size of 9,964. The 2022 interview was conducted with 6,413 men and women ages 57-66.

In 2006, NLSY79 respondents reported time spent volunteering and the type of organization where they volunteered the most hours. A more extensive section in 2010 collected information about time spent volunteering and the types of organizations or activities involved. Respondents also reported amounts of donations to various types of nonprofit organizations. Additional questions in this section asked about involvement of the respondent's paid employer in facilitating volunteer time and donations.

NLSY79 Child and Young Adult (CYA):

Began in 1986 with children born to female NLSY79 respondents. Biennial data collection consists of a battery of cognitive, socioemotional and physiological assessments, interviews with the mothers, and interviews with the children themselves; from 1994 onward, children turning age 15 and older during the survey year have been administered a Young Adult questionnaire that is similar to the NLSY79 questionnaire. In 2016, interviewed NLSY79 mothers completed the Mother Supplement for children in the household at least part-time who were 0 to 13 years of age as of the end of 2016, and children 12 and older were included in the Young Adult data collection. To date, more than 10,000 children have been interviewed in at least one survey round.

The NLSY79 Child cohort aged 10 and older are asked about volunteer work or community service after school. Both mothers and children are asked about parent volunteer activities in the child's classroom or school.

The NLSY79 Young Adult cohort answer an extensive series of questions about pro-social behaviors, including participation in and donations to volunteer or community organizations. In 2006, a series of political questions was added.

Original NLS cohorts: The Mature Women and Young Women each periodically responded to a set of questions about time spent in volunteer work and occasionally reported their reasons for volunteering and whether they needed to use

paid child care while volunteering. In three surveys, the Older Men were briefly asked whether they spent leisure or retirement time volunteering. The fourth original cohort, Young Men, provides no data on volunteering and civic engagement.

Older Men (OM): Began in 1966 with 5,020 men born in 1906-21 (ages 45-59 in 1966). Sample members were interviewed 12 times from 1966 to 1983. A final interview in 1990 was conducted with 2,092 respondents who were 69-83 years old, and 2,206 family members of deceased respondents.

Mature Women (MW): Began in 1967 with 5,083 women born in 1922-37 (ages 30-44 in 1967). Sample members were interviewed 21 times from 1967-2003. The final interview in 2003 was conducted with 2,237 women ages 66-80.

Young Women (YW): Began in 1968 with 5,159 women born in 1943-53 (ages 14-24 in 1968). Sample members were interviewed 22 times from 1968-2003. The final interview in 2003 was conducted with 2,859 women ages 49-59.

Which NLS data are relevant to volunteering and civic engagement research?

- Participated in volunteer work
- Amount of time volunteering
- Types of organizations volunteered for
- Philanthropy, time spent on philanthropic volunteer activities (NLSY79)
- Volunteer work organized through work (NLSY79), do coworkers volunteer (NLSY79)
- Percent of peers who volunteer (NLSY97)
- Used child care while volunteering (NLSY79, YW)
- Number of times parents volunteer at school (CYA)
- Do parents chaperone school trips (CYA), volunteer in classroom (CYA, NLSY97)
- Is community work required by school, church, or court ordered (CYA, NLSY97)
- Donated to a cause and amount donated (NLSY79, CYA, NLSY97), employer matched donations (NLSY79)