

# Data for Research on Adolescence and the Transition to Adulthood

---

The NLSY79 Child/Young Adult surveys provide researchers with the opportunity to study the effects of family transitions on child development across the lifespan. The NLSY79 Child/YA data can be used to investigate the connections between economic or employment instability, changes in family structure, or residential mobility on a variety of cognitive, educational, socio-emotional, health, and behavioral outcomes from childhood through adolescence into adulthood.

---

The **NLSY79 Child and Young Adult** data set profiles the development of the children of the mothers in the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth 1979 (NLSY79) Cohort. The NLSY79 originally included 12,686 respondents ages 14-22 when first interviewed in 1979. The design and content of the NLSY79 enable users to study the social, economic, and demographic experiences of the respondents and their families over more than a 30-year period.

The biennial NLSY79 Child surveys, initiated in 1986, use mother interviews, direct assessment, and self-report to gauge the children's health, physical and social development, activities, attitudes, behaviors, relationships, school progress, and home environment from birth through adolescence. In 2016, the Child survey is no longer conducted; however, 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.

For the NLSY79 Young Adult surveys, initiated in 1994, young adult children 15 and older are interviewed about schooling, employment, training, family experiences, health, behaviors, and attitudes. The Child/Young Adult sample, which ranges in age from birth to early forties, contains significant numbers of minority and economically disadvantaged respondents. Additionally, beginning in 2016, children 12 and older are included in the Young Adult data collection.

The current data release represents 17 survey rounds of Child data and 13 Young Adult survey rounds.

**Child Assessments.** Starting in 1986, the children of NLSY79 female respondents have been assessed every two years. The assessments measure cognitive ability, temperament, motor and social development, behavior problems, health, and self-competence of the children as well as their home environment. Once the children reach age 15 (1994-2014) and age 12 (2016-present) they are no longer assessed but given an in-depth Young Adult questionnaire more suited to their life stage.

**Health.** The following health information and physical characteristics are collected for each child: birth weight; prenatal history; type of birth; post-birth care including feeding practices and immunizations; hair and eye color; handedness; height and weight; limiting health conditions affecting activities or schooling; use of medicine, medical equipment or medical care, nature and timing of accidents and injuries; hospitalization history; health care; dental checkups; psychological treatment or referral; health insurance coverage; and (starting in 2004) asthma history.

**School & Family Background.** Mothers report on Head Start and preschool enrollment, schooling, grade repetition, school behavior, educational expectations, peer relations, and religious attendance and training for their school-age children. Starting in 1996, children answer questions on homework, classroom activities, and parent participation in school decisions and events. A one-time school survey in 1995-1996, completed by school personnel,

contains information on each child's achievement, attendance, progress, activities, grades, and test scores. School names are collected from mothers for school age children and college names are reported by the young adults.

**Early Adolescence.** Starting in 1988, children age 10 and older have reported on a wide range of topics related to adolescent development, including:

- After-school activities
- Alcohol and drug use
- Antisocial behavior
- Childbearing expectations
- Computer use
- Depression/moods
- Family decision-making
- Friendships and dating
- Gender roles
- Marriage expectations
- Parent-child interactions
- Peer pressure
- Religious attendance
- Risk taking
- School attitudes
- Sex education
- Sexual activity
- Smoking
- Television viewing
- Volunteering
- Work experience

**Data on the Young Adults.** Starting in 1994 children 15 and older are administered the Young Adult (YA) interview which asks about employment, education, training, health, fertility and parenting, marriage and cohabitation, personality traits and attitudes. YAs self-report on substance use, sexual activity, non-normative activities, computer use, pro-social behavior, and political attitudes. All young adults are included in each release of the NLSY79 Child-YA dataset, which also contains their complete Child assessment history. Starting in 2010, Young Adults age 31 and older are interviewed every four years.

**Maternal Data and Linkages.** The NLSY79 Child-Young Adult files can be combined with information from the complete longitudinal record of their mothers, by merging with extracts from the NLSY79 main Youth. The NLSY79 main Youth file contains histories of employment, education, income, training, work attitudes, aspirations, health, marriage, fertility, household composition, and residence. Information is also available on childhood adversity, substance use, illegal activities, aptitude, and social-psychological scales such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem, the Rotter Internal-External Locus of Control, women's roles, the Pearlin Mastery, and the CESD depression scale. The Child dataset contains a number of created variables that provide information about the mother, including: family background, household composition, quarterly maternal work histories before and after each child's date of birth, educational background of household members, and prenatal care. The Child dataset also includes information on the childcare experiences during the first three years of life for all children of a least one year of age.

**Geographic and Contextual Data.** Geocode files are available for all survey years for the NLSY79 youth, which can be merged with the NLSY79 Child and Young Adult dataset. Researchers can connect the children and young adults, over time, with community characteristics such as population size, population characteristics, birth/death and marriage/divorce rates, labor force statistics, median family income, per capita income, poverty levels, educational attainment levels, crime rates, school characteristics, etc.

---

The National Longitudinal Surveys are sponsored by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) with data collection and user services provided, under contract, by CHRR at The Ohio State University and NORC at the University of Chicago. Funding for the NLSY79 Child/Young Adult surveys is provided by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). For information on NLS data or documentation visit [www.nlsinfo.org](http://www.nlsinfo.org) or contact NLS User Services ([usersvc@chrr.osu.edu](mailto:usersvc@chrr.osu.edu) or 614-442-7366).

---

**NLS data and documentation are publicly available for search and download at:** <http://www.nlsinfo.org>

**The annotated, searchable NLS bibliography can be accessed at:** <http://www.nlsbibliography.org>

# NLSY79 Child/Young Adult Data Brief

Child/YA Interviews	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994 <sup>1</sup>	1996	1998 <sup>2</sup>	2000 <sup>3</sup>	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010 <sup>4</sup>	2012	2014	2016	2018
Total	4,971	6,266	5,801	6,509	7,086	7,102	7,066	6,415	7,466	7,537	7,814	7,658	6,997	6,323	6,011	5,391	4,965
Child <sup>5</sup>					6,107	5,430	4,923	3,390	3,228	2,513	1,970	1,353	895	515	276	39 <sup>6</sup>	—
Young Adult					979	1,672	2,143	3,025	4,238	5,024	5,844	6,305	6,102	5,808	5,735	5,352	4,965
Hispanic	937	1,158	1,303	1,483	1,546	1,520	1,550	1,192	1,624	1,648	1,735	1,665	1,521	1,367	1,270	1,156	1,041
Black	1,604	1,895	1,994	2,133	2,347	2,329	2,228	1,913	2,412	2,455	2,550	2,521	2,217	2,020	1,922	1,754	1,555
non-Black non-Hispanic	2,430	3,213	2,504	2,893	3,193	3,253	3,288	3,310	3,430	3,434	3,529	3,472	3,259	2,936	2,819	2,481	2,369

1. Starting in 1994, children who turn age 15 by December 31st of the survey year are interviewed as Young Adults.
2. Young Adults age 21 and older were not fielded in 1998.
3. In 2000, 38 percent of the black and Hispanic child and younger young adult (15-20) oversamples were not fielded, but were restored to the sample in 2002.
4. Starting in 2010, young adults over age 30 are interviewed only every other round (every four years).
5. Ages calculated as of December 31 of the survey year.
6. Mother Supplement only.