

Substance Use Questions in the NLSY79 Child/Young Adult Surveys

The NLSY79 Child/Young Adult surveys provide researchers with the opportunity to study alcohol and drug use across the lifespan and across generations. From ages 10-14, NLSY79 Children are asked about the frequency and recency of alcohol, cigarette, and drug use, as well as peer pressure to use these substances. This information, in light of the fact that interviewed children are largely resident in their mothers' households, offer opportunities to link the child data with maternal and household alcohol use, smoking, and substance use. Young Adults (ages 15+) are asked a detailed series of questions that address substance use as well as behaviors resulting from use.

All data and documentation can be accessed free of charge at www.nlsinfo.org/investigator.

Alcohol Use

CHILD SURVEY. Starting in 1988, the Child survey includes several questions about alcohol consumption for children ages 10 to 14. Children provide self-reports of:

- whether they had ever consumed alcohol
- whether they had consumed alcohol in the past three months
- age at first use
- the number of times in the past year the child had gotten drunk

Since 1992, children aged 10 and older have also been asked whether they feel pressure from friends to drink alcohol. This question is assigned to the CHILD SELF-ADMINISTERED SUPPLEMENT area of interest.

YOUNG ADULT SURVEY. NLSY79 Young Adults (age 15+) respond to a series of questions about recent and lifetime alcohol use. They include:

- age at first alcohol use
- age when first drank alcohol once a month or more often
- frequency of drinking in last 12 months
- average amount drunk when consuming alcohol
- problems related to alcohol consumption

The youngest young adults also answer questions about peer pressure and perceived drinking behavior of others.

MATERNAL REPORTS. In the NLSY79 main Youth, mothers provide information about the quantity and frequency of their own alcohol consumption. These questions are assigned to the ALCOHOL area of interest.

Information on familial history of alcohol abuse or dependency was collected during the 1988 survey and included a series of questions on whether relatives of the respondent had been alcoholics or problem drinkers, the relationship of the respondent to up to seven such alcoholic relatives, and the length of time, if any, that the respondent resided with each such relative. In 2012, as part of a new series on childhood health and adversity, main Youth respondents were asked if they lived with a problem drinker or alcoholic before age 18. Alcohol use during pregnancy information was gathered for female respondents during the 1983-86, 1988, 1990, 1992, and 1994-2012 surveys.

Smoking and Drug Use

CHILD SURVEY. Since 1988, children age 10 to 14 indicate age at first use, and the extent of cigarette use. They also answer a series of questions on whether they have ever used marijuana and/or other drugs such as LSD, cocaine, etc. If they answer "yes," they report whether such use occurred in the past three months and how old they were at first use. Since 1992, children aged 10 and older have also been asked whether they feel pressure from friends to try marijuana or other drugs. All smoking and drug use variables are assigned to the CHILD SELF-ADMINISTERED SUPPLEMENT area of interest in NLS Investigator.

YOUNG ADULT SURVEY. All Young Adults respond to a series of questions about recent and lifetime cigarette smoking and drug use. Young Adults are asked about the following types of drug use:

- cigarettes
- marijuana
- amphetamines
- sniffing/huffing
- cocaine
- crack cocaine
- hallucinogens
- sedatives
- any other drugs such as heroin, steroids, or MDMA

Questions address actual use as well as behaviors resulting from use. Beginning in 2000, Young Adults are asked explicit questions about amphetamine usage. From 2000 onward, the questionnaire included a series of questions designed to assess the impact of marijuana usage in the last 12 months. Young adults 18 years and younger also report whether they feel pressure from friends to try cigarettes or other drugs.

MATERNAL REPORT. NLSY79 mothers have been asked, in multiple survey years, about their own smoking habits as well as those of other household members. Mothers have also been asked about cigarette and drug use during pregnancy.

An extensive set of questions on substance use was included in the 1984 survey and collected information on lifetime use, age at first use, most recent use, and frequency of use during the past 30 days of:

- marijuana/hashish
- amphetamines
- barbiturates
- tranquilizers
- psychedelics
- cocaine
- heroin
- other narcotics

In addition, retrospective data on respondents' monthly use of marijuana from January 1979 through the 1984 survey date. The extent of respondents' prescribed use of three types of drugs (amphetamines, barbiturates, and tranquilizers) was also collected. Respondents who were working or in the military were asked whether, since the date of last interview or since their job/military duty began, they had used or "felt high" from one or more of these substances and how frequently they had used each on the job.

A special *Drug Use Supplement* was administered during the 1988, 1992, 1994, and 1998 NLSY79 Youth surveys to collect information on age at first use of marijuana/hashish, crack, cocaine, and other drugs; lifetime use; most recent use; and use in the past 30 days. The 1992, 1994, and 1998 questionnaires also asked about respondents' use of prescribed and nonprescribed sedatives, tranquilizers, stimulants, and pain killers. Beginning in 1994, respondents were asked to directly enter their answers into a laptop computer.

Other NLSY79 main Youth drug use questions are found in (1) the 1988, 1990, 1992, and 1994-2012 main Youth fertility section, which includes questions on use of marijuana or cocaine in the twelve-month period before first/second pregnancies and (2) the section of the 1980 survey that gathered information on the frequency with which respondents were engaged during the past year in smoking/selling marijuana or other drugs.

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www.nlsinfo.org or contact NLS User Services: usersvc@chrr.osu.edu; (614) 442-7366.

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