

# Family Welfare & Support

## Program Participation Data in the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth

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The **National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS)** are nationally representative surveys designed to track the life experiences of several US cohorts over time. The surveys collect data on employment, schooling, fertility, family processes, household structure, marriage, cohabitation, income, mobility, intergenerational transfer, health, attitudes, non-normative and criminal behaviors, civic engagement, aging, and more. The National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth (NLSY) are ongoing.

The **National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth/1979 Cohort (NLSY79)** profiles the lives of a U.S. cohort of men and women initially interviewed in 1979 when they were ages 14 to 22. The NLSY79 survey has completed its 29th round.

The **Children of the NLSY79 mothers (NLSCYA)** have been assessed biennially since 1986 to measure their cognitive ability, academic achievement, social development, health, behavior, and home environment. Starting in 1994, the Young Adult children, ages 15 and older, have been followed into adulthood. 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. Additionally, beginning in 2016, children 12 and older were included in the Young Adult data collection. Information about the sample design is located at: <https://www.nlsinfo.org/content/cohorts/nlsy79-children/intro-to-the-sample/sample-design>. Data are now available from 1986 to 2018, representing 17 survey rounds for the child sample and 13 for young adults. All NLSY79 main Youth mother information can be linked to the Child/Young Adult records.

The **National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth/1997 (NLSY97)** follow the lives of a sample of American youth born between 1980 and 1984, ages 12-17 when first interviewed in 1997 (Round 1). Data for survey rounds 1-20 are publicly available.

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## NLSY79

The "Income" and "Health" sections of each year's questionnaire collect information on amounts and time periods during which cash and noncash benefits were received from such sources as public assistance, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Food Stamps, government rent subsidies, public housing, or welfare-provided health/hospitalization coverage.

The monthly amount of reciprocity is tracked beginning in January 1978, for each of the following types of assistance:

- Unemployment for respondent
- Unemployment for spouse/partner
- AFDC/TANF for respondent and/or spouse/partner
- SSI for respondent and/or spouse/partner
- Food Stamps for respondent and/or spouse/partner

Summary variables are created which contain the total amount received in each calendar year beginning in 1978 for each of the 5 types of government assistance listed above.

Starting in 1998, questions were added about the effects of the 1996 welfare reform. Respondents reporting AFDC or SSI/Other Public Assistance were asked whether they had sought work, enrolled in training/school, or performed community service in response to changing requirements. Respondents not reporting these types of assistance but reporting a combined income of 125 percent of the poverty level or less, were asked whether they had applied for assistance, why they had not received any, and if and how the welfare reform changes affected them.

NLSY79 Variables	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	96	98	00	02	04	06	08	10	12	14	16	18	20
Unemployment compensation	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Public assistance	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Food Stamps	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Targeted cash or noncash benefits																		*	*										
Pensions/Social Security	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Veterans' benefits, workers' compensation, other disability	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Other sources	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
R receives government rent subsidy or public housing	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*		*		*
Effect of 1996 welfare reform on R																		*	*					*					
R receives targeted benefits from public assistance program																			*										

## NLSY79 Young Adult

All NLSY79 Young Adult (YA) survey years include questions about public assistance income sources. The most detail has been asked about TANF, AFDC, or any other general cash assistance to needy families, government food stamps, and supplemental security income or public assistance, or welfare payments from local, state or federal government.

For each of these types of public assistance, YA respondents are asked whether they and/or (if applicable) their spouse/partner received that type of assistance in the previous calendar year. From 1994 to 1998, beginning and ending dates were collected for spells of each of these types of assistance, as was the amount per week received in each spell. Beginning in 2000, the amount of detail collected was reduced and since then respondents have provided the following information about themselves and/or their spouse/partner:

- Whether they had received that form of public assistance
- The number of months they received that form of public assistance
- The amount received in the last month they received that form of public assistance

In all survey rounds, Young Adults have also been asked whether they received any WIC benefits, any educational benefits for veterans under the G.I. Bill or V.E.A.P., (other kinds of) scholarships, fellowships, or grants, or any (other) veterans' benefits, worker's compensation, disability payments, or payments from Social Security. Respondents who report any (other) veterans' benefits, worker's compensation, disability payments, or payments from Social Security are asked the total amount received from all such benefits.

Young Adult respondents are also asked whether they live in public housing or pay lower rent or receive a rent subsidy because the federal, state, or local government was paying part of the cost.

NLSY79 Young Adult Variables	94	96	98	00	02	04	06	08	10	12	14	16	18	20
Dates and amount of income of R and spouse from unemployment compensation	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Dates and amount of income of R and spouse from AFDC	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Dates and amount of income of R and spouse from Food Stamps	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Dates and amount of income of R and spouse from Social Security, other sources	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Did R receive educational benefits for veterans under the G.I. Bill or V.E.A.P.?	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Did R or other household member live in public housing or receive a government rent subsidy?	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Did R/spouse/partner or children receive any WIC benefits?	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Did R/spouse/partner receive any other veteran's benefits, worker's compensation, disability payments, or payments from Social Security; amount received	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

## NLSY97

The NLSY97 survey collects a large amount of detailed information on the income of youth respondents, including income from participation in government transfer programs for low-income individuals and families.

Independent youth provide information about participation in government programs. The respondents are told that these questions refer only to payments made directly to themselves and/or their spouses; answers should not include payments made to other members of the household. Data about the following government assistance programs were gathered in survey Rounds 2 and up:

- AFDC, ADC, or TANF
- Food Stamp benefits
- Unemployment Compensation (UI)
- WIC
- Worker's Compensation
- Other welfare programs

For each of these programs, the surveys ask whether the respondent or his or her spouse had participated in the program since the last interview (for respondents who had answered these questions in a previous interview) or had ever participated (for respondents going through this section for the first time). If so, respondents report whether they are currently receiving payments from that program. Questions concerning Unemployment Compensation or Worker's Compensation receipt ask about the respondent and spouse separately.

For each program reported, the NLSY97 survey collects information on the duration of each spell of receipt and the amount of aid the respondent or his or her spouse/partner received for each spell. For certain programs (e.g., AFDC or ADC, WIC, food stamps), the survey asks the respondent to state the members of the household covered by the program. These respondents report on whether they lived in public housing, received public housing assistance, or received rental vouchers. Respondents are asked to state dates they participated in these programs and the dollar amount of the benefits they received. Beginning in round 14, respondents report any cash benefits they received from government programs (SSI, TANF, etc.). They also estimate the total cash value of any food stamps or WIC benefits they received.

Variables containing monthly participation information are created for AFDC/TANF, Food Stamps, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), all other need-based programs, Unemployment Insurance, and Worker's Compensation (Rounds 1-3).

The collection of complete event history program participation data was discontinued in September of 2009 for all programs except unemployment compensation. Beginning in survey round 14, the collection of data for all programs other than unemployment was reduced to a single dichotomous variable of any receipt since date of last interview. In rounds 14 and 15, several questions were asked in the income section about calendar year income from government programs including TANF, WIC, Food Stamps, and SSI.

## NLSY Data Brief

NLSY97 Variables	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10	R11	R12	R13	R14	R15	R16	R17	R18	R19	R20
# and duration of unemployment compensation spells, income per week each spell (Youth & spouse collected separately)	Y	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
# and duration of workers' compensation spells, income per week each spell (Youth & spouse collected separately)	Y	*	*	*	*															
Source of workers' compensation payments	Y	*	*	*	*															
Income from workers' compensation, amount received (Youth & spouse collected separately)	Y					*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
# and duration of AFDC/TANF/ADC spells, income per month each spell	Y	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Income only	Income only	Income only	Income only	Income only	Income only	Income only
Persons covered under the AFDC/TANF/ADC program	Y	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*							
# and duration of Food Stamp (FS) spells, value of FS received per month each spell	Y	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Value only	Value only	Value only	Value only	Value only	Value only	Value only
Persons covered under the FS program	Y	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*							
# and duration of WIC spells, income per month each spell	Y	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Income only	Income only	Income only	Income only	Income only	Income only	Income only
Persons covered under the WIC program	Y	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*						
# and duration of Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program spells, income per spell	Y																			
# and duration of other welfare spells, income per month each spell	Y	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Income only	Income only	Income only	Income only	Income only	Income only	Income only
Persons covered under other welfare programs	Y	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*							
Youth lives in public housing or receives rental vouchers	Y	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

## Recent NLSY research on Welfare, Food Stamps, Family Program Assistance

Bryan, Brielle. "Support Seeking, System Avoidance, and Citizenship: Social Safety Net Usage After Incarceration." *Criminology* published online (03 October 2023). ([NLSY79](#))

Cheng, Tyrone C. and Celia C. Lo. "Citizenship Status and Restrictive Policies Affect Participation in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)." *Social Work Research* published online (29 April 2022): DOI: 10.1093/swr/svac009. ([NLSY97](#))

Damaske, Sarah, Adrienne Frech and Hilary Wething. "The Life Course of Unemployment: The Timing and Relative Degree of Risk." Damaske, S., Frech, A., & Wething, H. (2023). *The Life Course of Unemployment: The Timing and Relative Degree of Risk. Work and Occupations*, 0(0). ([NLSY79](#))

Jackson, Margot, Chinyere Agbai and Emily Rauscher. "The Effects of State-Level Medicaid Coverage on Family Wealth." *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 7,3 Wealth Inequality and Child Development: Implications for Policy and Practice (August 2021): 216-234. ([NLSY79](#), [NLSCYA](#))

Lacey, Lindsey. "The Physical and Mental Health Returns of Head Start 25 Years After Participation: Evidence from Income Eligibility Cutoffs." *Economic Inquiry* published online (14 April 2023): DOI: 10.1111/ecin.13148. ([NLSY79](#), [NLSCYA](#))

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Marks, Gary N. and Michael O'Connell. "No Evidence for Cumulating Socioeconomic Advantage. Ability Explains Increasing SES Effects with Age on Children's Domain Test Scores." *Intelligence* 88 (September-October 2021): 101582. ([NLSY79](#), [NLSCYA](#))

Price, Joshua L., Christopher A. Swann and Jeremy W. Bray. "Substance Use and Participation in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families: The Role of Unobserved Heterogeneity." *Journal of Substance Use* published online (16 February 2022): DOI: 10.1080/14659891.2022.2039969. ([NLSY97](#))

Sheely, Amanda. "State Supervision, Punishment and Poverty: The Case of Drug Bans on Welfare Receipt." *Punishment and Society* 23,3 (July 2021): 413-435. ([NLSY97](#))

Silveus, Neil and Christiana Stoddard. "Identifying the Causal Effect of Income on Religiosity Using the Earned Income Tax Credit." *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 178 (October 2020): 903-924. ([NLSCYA](#))

Sugie, Naomi and Emma Conner. "Marginalization or Incorporation? Welfare Receipt and Political Participation among Young Adults." *Social Problems* published online (12 November 2020): DOI: 10.1093/socpro/spaa050/5979691. ([NLSY97](#))

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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).

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

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