

## 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](https://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](https://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](mailto: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](mailto:NLS_info@bls.gov) or **202-691-7410**.

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# Using the NLS to Study FERTILITY

# 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 fertility data?

Fertility data are available for all three ongoing NLS cohorts and two original cohorts, Mature Women and Young Women. The remaining two original cohorts, Older men and Young Men, have limited data about children who lived in the household with the respondent at the time of the interview date.

### 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.

NLSY97 interviews include questions about pregnancies for both female and male respondents. Female respondents are asked questions about the timing, length, and outcome of each pregnancy. Male respondents are asked about the number of women they have impregnated, the total number of pregnancies, and pregnancy outcomes.

### 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 2020 interview was conducted with 6,535 men and women ages 55-64.

The NLSY79 began including an extensive fertility section in 1982, with women asked about pregnancies, including extensive pre- and postnatal questions about those ending in live births. Male and female respondents are asked some questions about all biological children they have had. The Fertility and Relationship History file includes a complete fertility and child residence history for both male and female respondents, as well as a complete pregnancy history for most female respondents.

**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 Young Adult survey includes an extensive fertility section, modeled after the one their mothers go through in the NLSY79, allowing researchers to compare intergenerational childbearing experiences, residence patterns and parenting for both male and female offspring of the NLSY79 mothers. As in the NLSY79, fertility expectations and outcomes can be explored, as can how fertility expectations may change across childhood and into young adulthood.

**Original NLS cohorts:** In the Mature Women and Young Women cohorts, many surveys collected information about each child living in the respondent's household at the time of the interview. This information is found in the "Household Roster" and includes the child's age,

date of birth, and sex. For Mature Women, surveys after 1976 included whether the child was biological or adopted. For Young Women, fertility questions were asked in 1973, with more extensive rosters in 1978 and 1983. Both cohorts have data about menopause which can be useful when creating a fertility history.

**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 fertility research?

The following topics have been covered in varying detail for NLSY97, NLSY79, CYA, Mature Women, and Young Women.

- Number of children born, date of birth, sex, status (adopted, deceased)
- Dates of child's death (NLSY79, CYA, NLSY97)
- Experiences related to pregnancy, including weight gain, substance use, and prenatal care (NLSY79, CYA, NLSY97)
- Age when pregnant, month/year of pregnancy, time between pregnancies (NLSY79, CYA, NLSY97)
- Pregnancy outcomes (NLSY79, NLSY97)
- Birth weight (NLSY79, CYA, NLSY97)
- Number of children desired or expected (NLSY79, CYA, YW)
- Infertility issues (NLSY97)
- Experiences related to sexual activity and contraception (NLSY79, CYA, NLSY97)
- Sexual education (NLSY79, CYA)
- Puberty (NLSY97, CYA)
- Menarche (NLSY79, CYA, NLSY97)
- Menopause (MW, YW)