Data for Research on Adolescence and the Transition to 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 is a nationally representative survey of more than 12,600 individuals who were age 14-21 when sampled and have been interviewed since 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 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.

Starting at age 15, NLSY79 young adult children 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. The current data release represents 15 survey rounds (1986-2014) of Child data and 11 Young Adult survey rounds (1994-2014).

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 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.

NLSY79 Child/YA Sample	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014
Total	4,971	6,266	5,803	6,509	7,089	7,103	7,067	6,417	7,467	7,538	7,816	7,660	6,997	6,323	6,011
0-14 years	4,970	6,231	5,666	6,430	6,109	6,431	5,834	3,392	3,229	2,514	1,972	1,354	895	515	276
15 years +	1	35	137	379	980	1,672	2,143	3,025	4,238	5,024	5,844	6,306	6,102	5,808	5,735
Hispanic	937	1,158	1,304	1,483	1,546	1,520	1,550	1,193	1,625	1,649	1,737	1,667	1,521	1,367	1,270
Black	1,604	1,895	1,994	2,133	2,350	2,330	2,229	1,914	2,412	2,455	2,550	2,521	2,217	2,020	1,922
Nonblack/non-Hispanic	2,430	3,213	2,505	2,893	3,193	3,253	3,288	3,310	3,430	3,434	3,529	3,472	3,259	2,936	2,819

Data and Documentation. NLSY79 data and documentation are available, at no cost, for online search and extraction at http://www.nlsinfo.org/. NLSY79 Child & Young Adult data have been used in more than 1900 papers and publications. Access the searchable, annotated NLS bibliography at: http://www.nlsbibliography.org/.

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For information on the NLS data or documentation visit the BLS website below or contact NLS User Services (usersvc@chrr.osu.edu).

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