

Event History Variables

1 There are three created NLSY97 marital and cohabitation arrays: MAR_STATUS, MAR_COHABITATION, and MAR_PARTNER_LINK. Through use of these arrays, researchers can track changes in a respondent's marital and cohabitation status. The arrays are constructed using a continuous month timeline; January 1980 is the starting point and given a value of 1, hence February 1980 is given a value of 2, etc...These arrays provide information beginning in the month the respondent turned 14 and ends in the month they were last interviewed. For more information see the Marital and Marriage-Like Relationship link and Appendix 7: Continuous Month Scheme and Crosswalk link below.

Variables associated with the marriage and cohabitation arrays are provided for every month number under the continuous month scheme. There is a link to a continuous month and week crosswalk (an Excel file) in Appendix 7: Continuous Month Scheme and Crosswalk.

Documentation

2 The NLSY97 provides information on their variables via the NLSY97 User's Guide. The User's Guide is organized into topical areas. Documentation on the event history variables related to family structure is found under the topic *Marital and Marriage-Like Relationships* as well as in Appendix 7: Continuous Month Scheme and Crosswalk of the *Codebook Supplement*.

Links:

[NLSY97 User's Guide](#)

[Topical Guide to NLSY97 Data](#)

[Marital and Marriage-Like Relationships](#)

[Appendix 7: Continuous Month Scheme and Crosswalk](#)

Variable Name

3 The name of each individual variable as it is identified in the data file. Because similar questions are asked repeatedly (over time) in the NLSY97, each question had to be given a unique variable name to distinguish the respondents' answers to the same questions over time. The variable names and question names associated with each variable both appear in the Investigator--the NLS on-line electronic codebook.

[NLS Investigator](#)

Question Name

4 The name given to each unique question in the questionnaire. Because the NLSY97 data are longitudinal and ask many of the same questions in multiple survey rounds, this allows--with the use of the variable name--researchers to identify respondents' answers to the same questions over time. The question names along side the questionnaire also allow researchers to determine the flow of the questionnaire and who answered which questions and why. It's important to note that in the Investigator, the universe of respondents is not always identified--particularly in the newer rounds. Additionally, the NLSY advises users to reference the associated questionnaires to help them determine who was asked each question in a given round.

Area of Interest

5 Also known as the electronic codebook location. The NLS Investigator divides the electronic codebook into separate "sections" referred to as *Areas of Interest* to help users identify variables. All of the event history variables related to family structure are found in the *Marriage and Cohabitation* Area of Interest.

MAR_STATUS

6 Marital status takes precedence over cohabiting status in the coding scheme for this variable. This means that if an individual is divorced and cohabiting with a new partner they are coded as "divorced." Respondents do not have to be living with their spouse to be coded as "married." Because there is not a code for annulment, respondents who report this event are coded as "divorced."

MAR_COHABITATION

7 This array helps researchers identify the partner or spouse the respondent is living with in a given month. The 100 level numbers refer to cohabiting partners the respondents are living with and the 200 level numbers refer to marital partners the respondents are living with. If a respondent is married, but not living with their spouse, they are coded as a valid skip (-4). This coding scheme also identifies the partners/spouses in chronological order; partner 101 was the respondent's first

partner, 102 was the respondent's second partner, etc...Users should note that the numbers do not necessarily refer to the same person as the partner/spouse questions asked directly of the respondent during the survey.

- 8** The NLSY97 definition of a respondent's household changes in round seven. In the first six rounds, a respondent's household is where the respondent considers their permanent household to be and not where they are living at the time of their interview. This is particularly problematic for respondents who are in the military, away at college or incarcerated because they may report that their partner, spouse (or children) are in their household, even though they may not actually be living with them--which would be reflected in the answers given in the fertility and marriage sections of the questionnaires--leading to inconsistencies in data. Beginning in round seven, household is defined as "where the respondent currently resides."

MAR_PARTNER_LINK

- 9** As the title signifies, this variable links the cohabiting partner/spouse ID found on the partners roster (PARTNERS_UID.XXX) and the subsequent characteristics of the respondents' partners to specific spells of marriage or cohabitation. As described in the NLSY97 User's Guide "...a researcher might look at the MAR_COHABITATION variable for the 10th month of 1998 and determine that a respondent was living with his second partner in that month because the variable's value is 102. If the researcher checks the value of MAR_PARTNER_LINK for the same month and year, the respondent might have a value of 9801, indicating that the partner in the event history arrays associated with that month is the first new partner reported in the round two survey. The researcher can then examine the round two variables with *Spouse/Partner 01* in the title to determine that person's characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, age, religion, and so on." This coding scheme works except for those instances where there is a significant gap between relationship spells. The example given in the User's Guide cites a respondent that married and "divorced a spouse before round one and then began cohabiting with the same person in round 3--the survey would not necessarily identify this as the same person." For a tutorial on linking partners of NLSY97 respondents to their characteristics click the link below.

[Matching Cohabiting Partners to Their Characteristics in the NLSY97](#)

- 10** Since cohabiting with two different partners in the same month is a rare event, the monthly variables that captured this activity (E7041701-E7041704:MAR_DUAL_1997.01-MAR_DUAL_1997.04) were changed (in round 3/1999) to a static yearly variable that indicated whether the respondent lived with more than one partner during any month since the date of the last interview.
-

This project was supported with a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, grant number 5 UOI AE000001-04. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are solely those of the author(s) and should not be construed as representing the opinions or policy of any agency of the Federal government.

National Center for Family & Marriage Research

website: <http://ncfmr.bgsu.edu>

e-mail: ncfmr@bgsu.edu