

What is the How Couples Meet and Stay Together (HCMST) study?

The How Couples Meet and Stay Together (HCMST) study is a nationally representative, longitudinal study of how Americans meet their spouses and romantic partners, with a study emphasis on how the internet is changing relationship formation. It is the first study with nationally representative data on the couple dissolution rates of same-sex couples. The HCMST study is conducted by the Stanford research team with Professor Michael J. Rosenfeld as the principal investigator and is sponsored by the U.S. National Science Foundation, Institute for Research in the Social Sciences and a UPS endowment. Yearly surveys have been conducted since 2009. The third wave (out of at least five expected waves) of the survey was completed in 2011, with the aim to examine couple dissolution five years after the Main Survey. The research team proposes that the study will provide insight into the following research topics among others:

- The ways that traditional and nontraditional couples meet. How, and for whom, the internet has altered couple formation.
- Whether or not most recent marriage cohorts (especially the traditional heterosexual same-race married couples) met in the same way their parents and grandparents did.
- Couple dissolution rates of nontraditional couples compared to couple dissolution rates of more traditional same-race heterosexual couples.
- How couple stability changes for same-sex couples with the availability of civil union, domestic partnership, or same-sex marriage rights.

The universe of analysis for the HCMST survey is English literate adults in the U.S. with an oversample of self-identified gay, lesbian, and bisexual adults. HCMST recruited panelists with the help of Knowledge Networks (KN), with most surveys completed online (respondents without internet access were given an internet access device). Of 4,002 adults who responded to the Main Survey, 993 respondents without a spouse or romantic partner were dropped (N=3,009). However, there is demographic information available for them. The response rate was 71% for the Main Survey (Wave 1), 84.5% for Wave 2, and 72.9% for Wave 3.

What's new in Wave 3 of the HCMST study?

There were many clarifications to the documentation of variables and value labels in Wave 3. The same demographic data collected at Wave 1, such as race/ethnicity and education, were collected again. New variables were included identifying family members who played the intermediary role in the respondent meeting their partner. In addition, a variable indicating if the respondent moved interstate was included. Information was also collected on whether there were changes in marital status, relationship status, living arrangements, and reasons for separation (if applicable) since Wave 2.

What does HCMST offer family researchers?

The HCMST provides researchers with detailed information regarding respondents' current sexual relationship, enabling researchers to identify current relationship type (opposite-sex and same-sex relationships) and status (cohabiting, unmarried, married, domestic partnership, and civil union). Other details specific to the respondents' current relationship are also available, including how, when, and where the couple met, and relationship and cohabitation duration. Respondents who are not in a residential union report physical distance between them and their partner. There are also multiple relationship quality measures. In the event of a relationship dissolution with their partner from Wave

1, respondents are asked when and how the relationship dissolved and which partner wanted the dissolution more. In addition, data were collected on the total number of times the respondent was married, gender the respondent is most sexually attracted, and acceptance of current partner by the respondent's parents. The data also include information on children in the respondent's household, however, do not make distinctions between biological, adopted, or stepchildren. The HCMST includes an array of sociodemographic characteristics of both the respondent and their partner.

The public-use HCMST excludes variables regarding state identification and qualitative answers to questions on "how couple met" and "explain relationship quality" in order to preserve respondent confidentiality. A restricted version of the data is currently unavailable, but can be created and disseminated if a demand arises, pending IRB approval.

How do I use the HCMST data?

For a quick glance at the data sources and variables in the public HCMST data, as well as background information on the survey, consult the brief [User Guide](#) and [PDF](#) generated by KN. To examine survey instruments separately by waves and to see notes on the coding of open text questions, see the [Stanford SSDS website](#) under the "Web site or document download links" section. You can also reference the online [codebook](#) containing frequencies and descriptions of variables or download a PDF version of the codebook via [ICPSR](#).

Analysts should note that statistical adjustments were made to offset known selection deviations, which were incorporated in the sample's base weight. Also included is a panel demographic post-stratification weight as an additional adjustment for non-coverage and non-response due to panel recruitment methods and panel attrition. Finally, a set of HCMST study-specific post-stratification weights are constructed to adjust for sample design and survey non-response. The application of the weights is dependent on the analytical unit of interest. To see the weights and additional details on how they were created, as well as an application summary by weight, see the [Notes on Weights](#).

How do I access the HCMST data?

HCMST public use data are accessible under the "Data Files" section on the [Stanford SSDS website](#) in STATA, SPSS, and SAS formats. To download the data through the Stanford SSDS website, users must create an account with SSDS and will be prompted to fill out a [Data Use Agreement form](#). Public use data are also available through ICPSR in the same formats for registered users associated with a member institution.

Where can I learn more about the HCMST?

Visit the Stanford SSDS website for more information at <http://data.stanford.edu/hcmst>. An important place to start is the [User Guide](#) and [KN introductory PDF](#).

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