

### What is the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979-Round 23, 2008?

The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (NLSY79), as part of the National Longitudinal Survey (NLS) program, chronicles the life-course experiences of U.S. youth through adulthood. Basic funding is provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

Since 1979, the NLSY79 has collected information on core topic areas related to work, assets and income, family, schooling, military service, and health (annually from 1979-1994 and biennially from 1994-2008). Select survey years covered additional topics and include childcare, alcohol and drug use, job search methods, educational/occupational aspirations, school discipline, pre- and post-natal health behaviors, delinquency, and childhood residences. The NLSY79 yields twenty-three rounds of panel data for a nationally representative sample of 12,686 young men and women aged 14 to 21 as of December 31, 1978 and is comprised of the following three sub-samples:

- *Cross-sectional sample* (n=6,111). Representative of the non-institutionalized civilian population living in the U.S. in 1979 and born between January 1, 1957 and December 31, 1964<sup>1</sup>
- *Supplemental sample* (n=5,295). Designed to oversample civilian Black, Hispanic/Latino, and economically disadvantaged non-Black/non-Hispanic young men and women living in the U.S. in 1979 and born between January 1, 1957 and December 31, 1964<sup>2</sup>
- *Military sample* (n=1,280). Designed to represent the population serving in one of the four branches of the U.S. military as of September 20, 1978 and born between January 1, 1957 and December 31, 1961 (aged 17-21 as of December 31, 1978)<sup>3</sup>

The latest release of NLSY79 data—round 23—was fielded from January 2008 to March 2009 and includes 7,757 respondents (82% of eligible respondents) aged 43 to 52 years:

- *Cross-sectional sample* (n=4,688, 80.3% response rate)
- *Supplemental sample* (n=2,908, 84.8% response rate)
- *Military sample* (n=161, 83.0% response rate)

Over half (54.3%) of NLSY79 respondents (excluding dropped respondents—see footnotes 1, 2, and 3) answered all twenty-three surveys from 1979-2008.

### What's new in the NLSY79-Round 23, 2008?

The round twenty-three questionnaire maintained longitudinal elements from previous rounds, reintroduced rotating question modules that had been asked in round twenty-two, and added new questions that reflected the rising age of the NLSY79 sample and emerging topics of research. The questions covered topics such as health (physical and mental), eating habits, and cigarette smoking; caregiving—residential and non-residential; assets; and retirement expectations.

With respect to the health of respondents, an updated health module—the 50+ Health Module—was added in 2008 and will be administered to respondents as they turn 50 years old.

<sup>1</sup> With a few exceptions, all members of the cross-sectional sample have been eligible for interview during each round of the NLSY79.

<sup>2</sup> After the 1990 interview, none of the 1,643 members of the economically disadvantaged, non-Black/non-Hispanic subsample were eligible for interview.

<sup>3</sup> After the 1984 interview, 1,079 members of the military subsample were no longer eligible for interview; 201 respondents were randomly selected from the military sub-sample to remain in the survey.

Measures in this module include mortality status of parents, difficulty in various activities, use of special equipment for regular activities, questions on specific health issues, and the Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression scale (CES-D). In addition, respondents were asked about their consumption of fast food, snacks, and sugared soft drinks as well as frequency of skipping meals. Finally, questions regarding cigarette smoking (last asked in round eighteen) were included in the round twenty-three questionnaire.

For the first time, NLSY79 respondents were asked a series of questions regarding residential caregiving of disabled and chronically ill household members. Data provides information on the presence and number of disabled and chronically ill household members as well as the reported number of hours per week the respondent spends caring for them. Additionally, respondents were asked if they provide care to a relative or friend who resides outside of their household and how many hours a week they do so.

### **What does the NLSY79-Round 23, 2008 offer family scholars?**

The NLSY79 is a rich resource for studies of marriage and the family—in both the topical areas covered and its survey design—providing researchers with analytical opportunities not available with other nationally representative data. Specific to marriage and the family, the data provide information on topics such as: attitudes and expectations; household composition; parents, family processes, and childhood; fertility, children and child care; income, assets, and program participation; and relationships, dating, and sexual activity.

The NLSY79 provides extensive information on respondents' fertility behavior. Items available include: the birth date (and date of death, where applicable) of every child born; the number of pregnancies and their outcomes; age of the respondents at the birth(s) of first-second-third child(ren); and usual residence of respondents' children. Information on these variables (in both the User's Guide and the NLS Investigator) is found in the "Fertility and Relationship History/Created" area of interest. See [Appendix 5](#) in the *NLSY79 Codebook Supplement* for more information on the edited and cleaned fertility data.

Also available are relationship history variables that include total number of spouses or partners since 1979 and a relationship code distinguishing current spouses from partners. In a modest proportion of cases, spouses/partners have entered and left a respondent's household between rounds and are not counted in the "total number of spouses or partners since 1979" variables. Identification of *spouses* may be possible using the marriage history and marriage transition information available at each survey round.

Another unique feature of the NLSY79 is a separate data collection of all children born to NLSY79 female respondents—known as the NLSY79 Children and Young Adults Survey (NLSY79C&YA)—which began in 1986. For more information, see the [NLSY79C&YA Website](#) and [Child & Young Adult Tutorial](#): Linking the NLSY79 mothers with their children. The NLSY79 provides many other measures related to marriage and the family that are too numerous to list here. For more information, see the NLSY79 documentation and website (multiple links below).

### **Using NLSY79-Round 23, 2008 Data**

Documentation for the [NLSY79](#) are publically available through the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) webpage and via the [NLS Investigator](#)—a web-based electronic codebook and data extraction

program. The following resources are available:

- [NLSY79 User's Guide](#)
- [NLSY79 Questionnaires](#) (scroll to the bottom of the page)
- [NLSY79 Main File Codebook Supplement](#)
- [NLSY79 Codebook Supplemental Geocode File](#)

In analyzing NLSY79 data, researchers should take into account the complex sampling methods used. The NLS Investigator should be used to access the cross-sectional respondent weights and to generate custom longitudinal respondent weights (log into the NLS Investigator, and click the Custom Weight link at the top of the page). Other weights typically used to correct for complex sampling methods (PSU and strata variables) are included in the NLSY79 Geocode datafile (see below). More information can be found in the NLSY79 User's Guide, [Sample Weights & Design Effects](#).

### **NLSY79 Data Resources Provided by the National Center for Family & Marriage Research**

The National Center for Family & Marriage Research (NCFMR) currently provides two data products to aid NLSY79 data users:

- [Measures Snapshots](#)—detailed summaries of family measures (e.g., couple relationship quality and family structure).
- Question Crosswalk (*coming soon*)—detailed summaries of how marriage and family questions are asked across large, national data sets.

These data products can help researchers in efficiently identifying appropriate data sets and measures relevant to their specific projects related to the family.

### **How do I access the data?**

All twenty-three rounds of the NLSY79 are publically available via the [NLS Investigator](#)—allowing users to search, select, save, analyze, and download data specific to their individual project needs (because of its large size, do NOT download the entire NLSY79 dataset). Data are available in SAS, SPSS, Stata, and comma-delimited datafile formats.

Restricted-use NLSY79 data available by contractual agreement only:

- [Confidential NLSY Geocode Data](#)—available to researchers in the U.S. **only**. Upon approval, researchers may use these datafiles at their own facilities. Application document and information are found by clicking [here](#).
- NLSY Zip Code and Census tract files are available for use at the BLS National Office in Washington, DC **only**. These files include the geocode data. Click [here](#) to access information.

### **Where can I learn more about the NLSY79-Round 23, 2008 data?**

For more information on the NLSY79, visit the following main webpage:  
<http://www.bls.gov/nls/nlsy79.htm>.