

**Information Collection Request for  
The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997  
OMB # 1220-0157  
Part B**

**Submitted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics**

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## ***B. Collections of Information Employing Statistical Methods***

### **1. Respondent Universe and Respondent Selection Method**

This section summarizes the primary features of the sampling and statistical methods used to collect data and produce estimates for the NLSY97. Additional technical details are provided in the NLSY97 Technical Sampling Report, available online at <https://www.nlsinfo.org/content/cohorts/nlsy97/other-documentation/technical-sampling-report>. Chapter 2 of the report describes the design of the NLSY97 sample. Chapter 3 describes the sample-selection process. Chapter 4 describes the sample weighting process. Chapters 5 and 6 describe the accuracy and representativeness of the sample.

Additional information about statistical methods and survey procedures is available in the NLSY97 User's Guide at: <https://www.nlsinfo.org/content/cohorts/NLSY97>

The initial sample was selected to represent (after appropriate weighting) the total U.S. population (including military personnel) 12 to 16 years of age on December 31, 1996. The sample selection procedure included an overrepresentation of blacks and Hispanics to facilitate statistically reliable analyses of these racial and ethnic groups. Appropriate weights are developed after each round so that the sample components can be combined to aggregate to the overall U.S. population of the same ages. Weights are needed to adjust for differences in selection probabilities, subgroup differences in participation rates, random fluctuations from known population totals, and survey undercoverage. Computation of the weights begins with the base weight and then adjusts for household screener nonresponse, sub-sampling, individual nonresponse, and post-stratification of the nonresponse-adjusted weights. The number of sample cases in 1997, the first round, was 8,984. Retention rate information for subsequent rounds is shown in the table below. BLS anticipates continued declines in retention rate in Round 18. Declines are anticipated for two reasons. First, the Round 17 experience repeated the declines observed in Round 16 and mimicked the previous experience of the NLSY79 when it went to biennial interviewing after a history of annual interviews. Moreover, we plan to have Round 18 primarily be phone-administered, and expect that the absence of extensive in-person fielding will also damage our ability to achieve historical rates of retention. In Round 16, the retention rate (taking into account the deceased respondents) was close to that of Round 8. We saw an increase in retention rate in Round 10, a modest decline in Round 11, and additional increases in Rounds 12 and 13. Response rates fell slightly in Round 14 and then remained stable in Round 15. Round 16 was the first round after adoption of a biennial (rather than annual) interview schedule. The retention rate dropped markedly in Round 16, although continued to exceed 80 percent when deceased respondents are accounted for. Only sample members who completed an interview in Round 1 are considered in-scope for subsequent rounds (as long as they are not known to be deceased). Even if an interviewer is unable to complete an interview for an in-scope sample member in one round, they attempt to complete an interview with that sample member in each subsequent round. The interview schedule is designed to pick up crucial information that was not collected in the missed interviews.

The schedule and sample retention rates of past survey rounds are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. NLSY97 Fielding Periods and Sample Retention Rates**

Round	Months conducted	Total respondents	Retention rate	Number of deceased sample members	Retention rate excluding the deceased
1	February–October 1997 and March–May 1998	8,984	—	—	—
2	October 1998–April 1999	8,386	93.3	7	93.4
3	October 1999–April 2000	8,209	91.4	16	91.5
4	November 2000–May 2001	8,081	89.9	15	90.1
5	November 2001–May 2002	7,883	87.7	25	88.0
6	November 2002–May 2003	7,898	87.9	30	88.2
7	November 2003–July 2004	7,755	86.3	37	86.7
8	November 2004–July 2005	7,503	83.5	45	83.9
9	October 2005–July 2006	7,338	81.7	60	82.2
10	October 2006–May 2007	7,559	84.1	77	84.9
11	October 2007–June 2008	7,418	82.6	90	83.4
12	October 2008 – June 2009	7,490	83.4	103	84.3
13	September 2009 – April 2010	7,561	84.2	112	85.2
14	October 2010 – May 2011	7,420	82.6	118	83.7
15	September 2011 – June 2012	7,423	82.6	134	83.9
16	October 2013 – June 2014	7,141	79.5	151	80.8
17	September 2015 – August 2016	7,103	79.1	173	80.6
18	October 2017 – June 2018	6950*	77.4*	180*	78.9*

**Note 1:** The retention rate is defined as the percentage of base year respondents who were interviewed in a given survey year.

**Note 2:** \* indicates projection; actuals not known.

## 2. Design and Procedures for the Information Collection

The NLSY97 includes personal interviews with all living Round 1 respondents, regardless of whether they subsequently become institutionalized, join the military, or move out of the United States. We employ a thorough and comprehensive strategy to contact and interview sample members. At each interview, detailed information is gathered about relatives and friends who could assist NORC field staff in locating respondents if they cannot readily be found in a subsequent survey round. Every effort is made to locate respondents. Interviewers are encouraged to attempt to contact respondents until they reach them. There is no arbitrary limit on the number of call-backs.

Preceding the data collection, the NORC interviewers are carefully trained, with particular emphasis placed on resolving sensitive issues that may have appeared in the pretest and in prior rounds. Most of the NORC interviewers have lengthy experience in the field from having participated in earlier NLSY97 rounds as well as from involvement with the NLSY79 and other NORC surveys. All new recruits are given one day of personal training on general interviewing techniques. All interviewers (whether having previous experience on the NLSY97 or NLSY79 or not) must complete a comprehensive and robust online training covering the questionnaire and its administration, data quality, study protocols and procedures and respondent confidentiality. In preparation for R18, the project will expand training modules with specific content targeting the changes to phone administration of the survey to

improve respondent experience. Interviewers must then attend training calls with their field managers and pass a certification where they must prove a full understanding of the questionnaire and how to correctly administer it. In addition to these trainings, the field staff received weekly memos throughout R17 which contained protocol reminders reinforcing proper procedures, tips for improving field work, and updates from the central office. This will be continued for R18.

Field interviewers are supervised by NORC Field Managers and their associates. All Field Managers complete the same online training that their interviewers will complete prior to the start of the study. NORC has divided the U.S. into 10 regions, each supervised by a Field Manager who is responsible for staffing and for the quality of field work in that region. A ratio of 1 supervisor to 15 interviewers is the standard arrangement. Field Managers are, in turn, supervised by one of the two Field Project Managers.

The interview content is prepared by professional staff at BLS, CHRR, and NORC. When new materials are incorporated into the questionnaire, assistance is generally sought from appropriate experts in the specific substantive area.

Because sample selection took place in 1997 in preparation for the baseline interview, sample composition will remain unchanged.

For Round 18, we propose a significant alteration of the data collection approach for the NLSY97. While historically an in-person survey, the rate of interviews completed by telephone has increased slowly since Round 1. In Round 18, we propose to convert the NLSY97 to a predominantly telephone survey, anticipating that approximately 75 percent of interviews will be completed by telephone, in contrast to a projected 26 percent in Round 17 and 15 percent in Round 16. Within the survey research literature, both unit non-response and item non-response are documented to be higher in telephone administration than in in-person administration. (Safir and Goldenberg (2008) "Mode Effects in a Survey of Consumer Expenditures", Office of Survey Methods Research, Bureau of Labor Statistics retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/osmr/abstract/st/st080200.htm>, Groves, Dillman, Eltinge and Little 2002 "Survey Nonresponse" New York: Wiley.)

For the NLSY97, mode differences may come about from lack of coverage (respondents not having telephones), non-contact (telephone technology offers more ways for respondents to avoid interviewers), distraction (telephone respondents may be more likely to engage in other activities during the interview due to social norms governing in-person interactions), privacy (either increased perception of privacy from not being face-to-face with the interviewer or decreased privacy because the interviewer cannot ensure that the respondent is alone and out of the hearing range of others), or other factors.

For several years, respondents have been encouraged to visit the NLSY97 respondent web-site to update their contact information. This practice will continue in Round 18.

### **3. Maximizing Response Rate**

A number of the procedures that are used to maximize response rate already have been discussed in items 1 and 2 above. The other component of missing data is item nonresponse. Nonresponse includes respondents refusing to answer or not knowing the answer to a question. Almost all items in the NLSY97 have low levels of nonresponse. For example, in prior rounds there was virtually no item nonresponse for basic questions like the type of residence respondents lived in (YHHI-4400) or the highest grade of school respondents had ever attended (YSCH-2857).

Cognitively more difficult questions, such as "How many hours did you work per week?" (YEMP-23901) have low levels of nonresponse. In the hours per week example, 8 individuals out of 1,584 (0.5%) did not answer the question in Round 13.

Sensitive questions have the highest nonresponse. Table 4 presents examples of Round 16 questionnaire items that are most sensitive or cognitively difficult. Even very personal questions about sexual activity have low rates of nonresponse. The top row of the table show that the vast majority of respondents (over 92%) were willing and able to answer the question, "How many sexual partners did you have in the last 12 months?" Those who could not

answer this question with a specific number were asked to pick a range that represented the number of partners. The second row of the table shows that while 40% still did not answer this question, the additional question reduced the number of respondents for whom we had no information on the number of sexual partners from 7.3% to 5.9% (410/6919). The third row shows that over 95% of respondents were willing to answer the perhaps even more sensitive follow-up question concerning the gender of sexual partners. Lastly, almost all respondents (0.3% nonresponse rate) were willing to reveal whether they had earned money from a job in the past year, but many did not know or refused to disclose exactly how much they had earned (11.5% nonresponse rate). Because high nonresponse rates were expected for the income amount question, individuals who did not provide an exact answer were asked to estimate their income from a set of predetermined ranges. This considerably reduces nonresponse on the income question. Only 7.9% of those who were asked to provide a range of income did not respond. These individuals represent less than 1.0% (56/5831) of all individuals requested to provide income data in that round.

**Table 4. Examples of Nonresponse Rates for Some Round 16 Sensitive Questions**

Q Name	Question	Number Asked	Number Refused	Number Don't Know	% Nonresponse
YSAQ2-306	Number of Sex Partners in last 12 months?	6,919	350	152	7.3%
YSAQ2-307	Estimated Number of Sex Partners? <sup>1</sup>	152	10	50	39.5%
YSAQ2-307-New	Were Sex Partners All Male, All Female, or Some of Both?	5926	230	48	4.7%
YINC-1400	Receive Work Income in 2012?	7141	25	3	0.4%
YINC-1700	How Much Income from All Jobs in 2012?	5831	73	533	11.5%
YINC-1800	Estimated Income from All Jobs in 2012? <sup>2</sup>	606	47	9	9.2%

<sup>1</sup> Asked of respondents who were unable to answer the previous question (YSAQ2-306).

<sup>2</sup> Asked of respondents who were unable or unwilling to answer the previous question (YINC-1700).

To reduce the proportion of “don't know” or “refused” responses to questions on income or assets (such as YINC-1700, shown in table 4), respondents who do not provide exact dollar answers are asked follow-up questions designed to elicit approximate information. For many income categories, the respondents are asked to select the applicable category from a predefined list of ranges. The approach for asset questions is slightly different: The initial question asks the respondent to provide an exact value, but if he or she is unable or unwilling to do so, interviewers are instructed to ask the respondent to define a range for the value using whatever values he or she feels are appropriate. If the respondent does not know or refuses to provide either an exact value or a range, a follow-up question asks him or her to select the appropriate range from a predefined list. This method provides researchers with some information on income, asset, and debt amounts when the respondent is reluctant or unable to furnish an exact figure.

We note that questions about sexual activity, in addition to other sensitive items on topics such as drug use and criminal activity, have historically been asked using audio self-administered technology to anyone interviewed in person. With the conversion to predominantly phone work, sex questions and drug use questions will be asked only in interviewer-administered format. Criminal activity questions will still be asked using self-administration in the few in-person interviews conducted, but will primarily be asked directly by interviewers. Item non-response rates may increase in response to the change in mode. Sensitive items have consistently been found to be under-reported in interviewer-administered vs self-administered modes (Tourangeau and Yan, Psychological Bulletin 2007, Vol.

133, No. 5, 859–883). For drug use, for example, estimates of under-reporting range from 19 to 30 percent across multiple meta-analyses of experimental and quasi-experimental studies (Tourangeau and Yan 2007, Richmand, Kiesler, Weisband, and Drasgow 1999).

In contrast, face-to-face interviewing has been found to lead to under-reporting of sensitive items relative to telephone interviewing. Thus, sensitive items that had previously been interviewer-administered in-person but will now be interviewer-administered by telephone may experience decreases in item non-response. Income and other financial items would be the chief examples of such items. (de Leeuw E.D., van der Zouwen J. (1988). “Data quality in telephone and face to face surveys: a comparative metaanalysis.” In: Groves RM, Biemer PP, Lyberg LE, Massey JT, Nicholls WL II, Waksberg J, eds. *Telephone Survey Methodology*. New York: Wiley: 273:99).

#### **4. Testing of Questionnaire Items**

BLS is cautious about adding items to the NLSY97 questionnaire. Because the survey is longitudinal, poorly designed questions can result in flawed data and lost opportunities to capture contemporaneous information about important events in respondents’ lives. Poorly designed questions also can cause respondents to react negatively, making their future cooperation less likely. Thus, the NLSY97 design process employs a multi-tiered approach to the testing and review of questionnaire items.

When new items are proposed for the NLSY97 questionnaire, we often adopt questions that have been used previously in probability sample surveys with respondents resembling the NLSY97 sample. We have favored questions from the other surveys in the BLS National Longitudinal Surveys program to facilitate intergenerational comparisons. We also have used items from the Current Population Survey, the Federal Reserve Board’s Survey of Consumer Finances, the National Science Foundation-funded General Social Survey, and other Federally funded surveys.

The only new questions in Round 18 cover job tasks. They are asked in Round 27 of the NLSY79 and originally come from the Princeton Data Initiative (PDII) Extended Interview.

Existing questions are also reviewed each year. Respondents’ age and their life circumstances change, as does the societal environment in which the survey is conducted. Reviews of the data help us to identify questions that may cause respondent confusion, require revised response categories, or generate questionable data. Sources of information for these reviews include the questionnaire response data themselves, comments made by interviewers or respondents during the course of the interview, interviewer remarks after the interview, interviewer inquiries or comments throughout the course of data collection, other-specify coding, recordings of items during the interviews, and comparison of NLSY97 response data to other sources for external validation. We also watch carefully the “leading edge” respondents, who answer some questions before the bulk of the sample – for example, the first respondents to attend graduate school or to get a divorce. These respondents are often atypical, but their interviews can reveal problems in question functionality or comprehensibility.

In this round, for the first time, the majority of NLSY97 will be interviewed by phone. This switch means that we can no longer rely on visual stimuli such as showcards to aid in the survey process. It also means that we will not be able to have a self-administered part of the questionnaire for the vast majority of interviews. Because of this, we have concentrated this round on making the questionnaire more “telephone-friendly.” This includes not only eliminating the use of showcards and the self-administered section, but also making sure that responses that may be overheard by those in proximity to the respondent on the phone will not be revealing or embarrassing. Most importantly, we have worked to shorten code frames and question text so that they may be understood and remembered accurately over the phone.

A comprehensive pretest is planned as part of this information collection request and would occur approximately five months preceding the main NLSY97 field period to test survey procedures and questions. This pretest includes a heterogeneous sample of 201 respondents of various racial, ethnic, geographic, and socio-economic backgrounds. On the basis of this pretest, the various questionnaire items, particularly those being asked for the first time, are evaluated with respect to question sensitivity and validity. When serious problems are revealed during the pretest, the problematic questions are deleted from the main NLSY97 instrument. Because of the change in mode and hence changes in surveying procedures in Round 18, BLS anticipate more issues than in prior rounds; BLS has expanded

the time available between pretest and main to allow more intense review and a larger volume of edits than in prior rounds where the questionnaire and process may have been more stable.

Although further edits to questionnaire wording are extremely rare, we monitor the first several hundred interviews each round with particular care. Based on this monitoring, field interviewers receive supplemental training on how best to administer questions that seem to be causing difficulty in the field or generating unexpected discrepancies in the data. This review continues at a lower level throughout the field period, with interviewers receiving ongoing training until the end of the field period.

Round 18 questions that have not appeared in previous rounds of the NLSY97 include:

Questions on job tasks (in the Employment section). A series of six questions are being introduced which seek to understand the actual tasks respondents perform on their jobs. These questions are taken from the Princeton Data Improvement Initiative. As a part of that effort, the questions were administered to 2,500 individuals in a national random-digit dial telephone survey. That administration and the resulting data are described in a 2012 paper in the American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics by Hall and Kreuger (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1257/mac.4.4.56>). The job task data were used in a 2013 paper in the Journal of Labor Economics by Autor and Handel (<http://economics.mit.edu/files/11598>). These questions are also being administered in Round 27 of the NLSY79.

A list of all changes to the NLSY97 questionnaire from rounds 17 to 18 is contained in attachment 5.

#### **5. Statistical Consultant**

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The sample design was conducted by NORC, which continues the interviewing fieldwork.