

# Learn Why the NLS Counts

As Explained by U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics  
Commissioner Erica L. Groshen



The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics is best known for our monthly job and inflation reports. We also publish data on many other topics, ranging from how Americans spend their time and money to workplace injuries and the growth of entrepreneurship.

The National Longitudinal Surveys stand out because they are designed to answer key long-term questions about people's paths through life. Most of our measures about the labor market and economy focus on current conditions. What's the national unemployment rate? How rapidly is employment growing in California or North Dakota or Georgia? How many job openings are there in manufacturing? What are the trends in consumer prices for food, energy, clothing, and shelter? It's important to have up-to-date answers for these and other economic questions. But some questions take longer to answer—years or even decades.

Some long-term questions we care about include: How many jobs do people hold over their lifetimes? How do earnings grow at different stages of workers' careers? The surveys designed to answer these and other long-term questions are called "longitudinal" surveys. What's that mean?

A longitudinal survey asks questions about the same people at different points in their lives. Longitudinal surveys are useful for studying changes that occur over long periods. These surveys are also useful for examining cause-and-effect relationships. For example, how do events that happened when a person was in high school affect labor market success as an adult? This week we published a new report that looks at the experiences of baby boomers from age 18 to age 48.

The NLSY79 follows a set of people born in the latter years of the post-World War II baby boom, 1957 to 1964, and living in the United States when the survey began in 1979. To answer my earlier questions—using just-released data—these baby boomers held an average of 11.7 jobs from age 18 to age 48. Their inflation-adjusted hourly earnings grew the most during their late teens and early twenties, and earnings generally grew faster for college graduates than for people with less education.

The survey doesn't just ask about labor market activity. It also asks about education, training, health, marriages and other relationships, children, use of government programs, juvenile crimes and arrests, drug and alcohol use, and much more. Why do we ask about these topics, some of which are pretty sensitive? In short, we're trying to understand all the things that affect or are affected by labor market activity. That covers nearly every part of our lives.

Before this survey of baby boomers began in 1979, four other longitudinal surveys began in the 1960s of earlier generations. BLS began another survey in 1997 that represents people born in the years 1980 to 1984 and living in the United States at the start of the survey. We only still conduct the surveys of the two more recent generations, but we have learned so much from all the surveys. These surveys are some of the most analyzed in the social sciences.

Researchers in economics, sociology, psychology, education, and health sciences have used the surveys to examine a broad range of topics. Here are just a few examples of what researchers have learned from the surveys:

- Nobel Prize winner James Heckman and his colleagues found that noncognitive skills, such as motivation and perseverance, are as important to future labor market success as are skills such as reading and math.
- People who obtain a GED or other exam-certified high school equivalent have labor market outcomes that are similar to those of high school dropouts, rather than to people who earn a regular high school diploma.
- The labor market effects of a 4-year college degree are similar for those who start at a 4-year college and those who transfer from a 2-year college to a 4-year college.
- Obesity is not only a health concern, but a labor market concern. Workers pay a price for obesity with lower wages and employment, and this price is higher for women than men.
- Low birth weight is a better predictor than cognitive test scores of whether people either work or attend school at ages 24 to 27. Birth weight also is a better predictor of adult wages.

Although we learn a lot each time we update our monthly and quarterly data on employment, compensation, prices, and productivity, there is so much we could not learn without these longitudinal surveys.

This is all possible thanks to former BLS Commissioner Janet Norwood who passed away recently—and to the people who have agreed to participate in the surveys for so long—so that we can understand people's paths over time!



Face of USPS Business Reply Mail  
card to be placed here by the printer

Thanks  
Again  
for Your  
Help and  
Participation  
in the  
NLSY79

## RESEARCH

Information gathered from the NLS is routinely used by researchers who write papers on varying topics. The list below is just a sampling of some of the pieces written in the last couple of years. For a complete list of known articles using the NLS, visit the NLS Bibliography web site at <http://www.nlsbibliography.org>.

[Job Displacement among Single Mothers: Effects on Children's Outcomes in Young Adulthood](#)

Jennie Brand and Juli Thomas

American Journal of Sociology 119, 4 (January 2014): 955-1001

[The Black-White Wage Gap Among Young Women in 1990 vs. 2011: The Role of Selection and Educational Attainment](#)

James Albrecht, Aico van Vuuren, and Susan Vroman

Labour Economics 33 (April 2015): 66-71

[The Changing Roles of Education and Ability in Wage Determination](#)

Gonzalo Castex and Evgenia Dechter

Journal of Labor Economics 32, 4 (October 2014): 645-684

[Obesity and Self-control: Food Consumption, Physical Activity, and Weight-loss Intention](#)

Maoyong Fan and Yanhong Jin

Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy 36,1 (2014): 125-145

[Adolescents' Intelligence Is Related to Family Income](#)

Yoav Ganzach

Personality and Individual Differences 59 (March 2014): 112-115

[On the Fringe: Family-Friendly Benefits and the Rural-Urban Gap Among Working Women](#)

Rebecca Glauber and Justin Young

Journal of Family and Economic Issues published online (19 August 2014): DOI: 10.1007/s10834-014-9418-z

[Double Time: Is Health Affected by a Spouse's Time at Work?](#)

Sibyl Kleiner and Eliza Pavalko

Social Forces 92,3 (March 2014): 983-1007

[Getting Sick and Falling Behind: Health and the Risk of Mortgage Default and Home Foreclosure](#)

Jason Houle and Danya Keene

Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health 69, 4 (2015): 382-387

[Young Women's Job Mobility: The Influence of Motherhood Status and Education](#)

Jessica Looze

Journal of Marriage and Family 76, 4 (August 2014): 693-709

[Marrying Ain't Hard When You Got a Union Card? Labor Union Membership and First Marriage](#)

Daniel Schneider and Adam Reich

Social Problems 61,4 (November 2014): 625-643

[The Impact of Youth Debt on College Graduation](#)

Min Zhan

Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare 41, 3 (September 2014): 133-156

[Association Between Sedentary Work and BMI in a U.S. National Longitudinal Survey](#)

Tin-Chi Lin, T.K. Courtney, David Lombardi, and S.K. Verma

American Journal of Preventive Medicine published online (1 October 2015): DOI: 10.1016/j.amepre.2015.07.024

## The NLS in the Media

Researchers find future wage benefits tied to part-time, after-school work have waned with time.

### Early Job Experience Isn't the Payoff It Once Was

By Katherine Peralta, U.S. News & World Report, Sep 10, 2014

As the school year gets underway and teenagers in the U.S. weigh whether to take after-school jobs, the pros and cons of doing so paint a conflicting picture. Learning time management, self-reliance, how to relate to employers and other productivity-increasing skills are all benefits of working part-time in high school. Having a job in high school also translates to higher pay later in life.



But the wage advantages of early job experience have deteriorated with time, underscoring the worsened job market outcomes for the youngest working Americans, according to a recent paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Examining the 1979 and 1997 cohorts of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, researchers Charles Baum and Christopher Ruhm found that the future pay advantage of working 20 hours per week during the senior year of high school fell from 8.3 percent for the older group – which was measured from 1987 to 1989 – to 4.4 percent for the younger one, measured from 2008 to 2010.

The worsened outcomes for those that finish high school but aren't bound for college also underscore the growing divide between them and college graduates. The report found that senior-year employment lessened the probability of working later on in the low-paid private sector for the 1979 cohort, but increased it for the 1997 cohort.

High school employment might negatively affect students and their future wages in other ways as well including by reducing study time—which could hurt a student's grade-point average—and by increasing stress or exhaustion. But that doesn't stop universities from naming after-school jobs as an attractive part of college applications.

Overall employment has declined for high school students in recent years. About 32 percent of students 16 and older were employed during the 1990s, but that figure fell sharply after 2000 and was just 16 percent in 2010, the report showed. One explanation for this is that the Great Recession—when the younger cohort was finishing high school—increased job competition between teenagers and immigrants and low-income adults seeking work.

According to the most recent figures from the Labor Department, teenagers are also participating less in the labor market these days. The labor force participation rate of those from 16 to 19 years old—which measures the portion of that group either actively seeking work or already employed—fell to 32.9 percent earlier this year, marking its lowest point in recent history. It has since rebounded a bit to 33.3 percent.

NLSY79 Update is a newsletter for participants in the NLSY79. The publication is sent to you periodically to keep you up-to-date on how the information you provide is being used.

This publication is for your benefit, and we welcome your feedback. For comments or questions, please fill out and mail the attached reply card. No postage is necessary if mailed in the U.S. If you prefer, you can e-mail comments or questions to: [respsvc@chrr.osu.edu](mailto:respsvc@chrr.osu.edu).

## Now Get Your Payment Faster Using Your PayPal® Account Get Extra Cash With Early Bird!

NLSY79 respondents can get more cash if they participate in our *Early Bird* program this round. Participants in the *Early Bird* program call our hotline number and set up a time to be interviewed over the phone. Only by calling the *Early Bird* hotline do you save us the time, effort and cost we would spend contacting you. Then we can share the savings with you!

You will receive a letter in the fall of 2016 with the *Early Bird* hotline number. All you have to do is call the number before the deadline, leave us a message with your name and telephone number and a good time to phone you. An interviewer will call you, ready to conduct the survey or to schedule an appointment for your *Early Bird* interview—it's your choice, and it's that easy!



For your prompt participation, we can send you your payment by mail OR for even faster payment, we can now send your payment to your PayPal® account! (details will be provided by your interviewer if you are interested in using PayPal® for receiving your payment). If you choose not to participate in the *Early Bird* program, we are still happy for you to take part in the NLSY79 as you have in the past, and you will receive the standard payment (by mail or PayPal®) in thanks for your time.

To make sure we have the correct contact information for you please take a minute to go to [nlsy79.norc.org](http://nlsy79.norc.org) and update your contact info or fill out the postage paid card below and mail it back to us. Be sure to check the *Early Bird* box.

And...watch for the *Early Bird*!

### Upcoming NLSY79 Schedule

We begin contacting NLSY79 respondents for interviews (Early Bird mailing)	September 2016
We begin contacting NLSY79 young adult respondents for interviews	September 2016

Want to be included in the Early Bird Mailing? Please complete the card below.

#### Have You Moved?

#### Have You Changed Your Name?

#### Want to Be an Early Bird Participant?

#### Do You Have Feedback or Questions for Us?

Please complete the postage-paid card at right, marking any name, address, or phone number corrections below the mailing label. Please write in your e-mail address as well. Then, drop the card in the mail. Or you can go to the NLSY79 website at [nlsy79.norc.org](http://nlsy79.norc.org) to make address changes.

CHRR and NORC at The University of Chicago manage the survey and conduct the interviews under a contract with the Bureau of Labor Statistics, an agency of the U.S. Department of Labor.

Yes! Please include me in the Early Bird mailing

My name, address, or phone number has changed

Please check

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (Home) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (Work) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (Cell) \_\_\_\_\_ Days \_\_\_\_\_

Best time to call: \_\_\_\_\_ Times \_\_\_\_\_

Best way for us to reach you:

In Person  Cell Phone  E-mail

Home Phone  Work Phone  Text Message

Are you moving? When and where? \_\_\_\_\_

Comments/Questions \_\_\_\_\_



# Update

A PUBLICATION FOR NLSY79 PARTICIPANTS

Spring 2016

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You are part of a study known around the world by researchers and policy makers! The work the National Longitudinal Surveys has accomplished in fifty years stands as a model to researchers in the U.S. and in other countries looking to create their own longitudinal studies.

Since its inception in the 1960s, the NLS has gathered information at multiple points in time on labor market experiences and significant life events of seven cohorts of men, women and children. While labor market experiences have always been a core focus of the NLS, the studies cover schooling, training, skills, income and assets, family formation, fertility, household formation, attitudes and expectations, and much more.

For more information about the historical importance of the NLS read the recent comments from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Commissioner Erica L. Groshen as she talks about the importance of the National Longitudinal Surveys.