

**Comments on Information Collection Request for the
National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (OMB Control Number 1220–0109)**

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1 . Prime-age women's increasing death rates

Case and Deaton have gotten the most press about this, but Nan Astone and Steven Martin [wrote a report](#) on this topic prior to the Case and Deaton publication. They also had a [later response](#) to Case and Deaton documenting differences in results from the two studies regarding the magnitude of the changes for women relative to men that may have been due to differences in the methodology used in the two studies (in particular the age standardization).

These mortality results beg for a thorough analysis of the behavioral causes of the changes such as drug abuse, depression, obesity and smoking, and how these behaviors (especially for women relative to men) may have changed across cohorts. Although a study of mortality rates requires large sample sizes, the NLSY could contribute to the debate by describing changes in behaviors that potentially could underlie these trends. One advantage that the NLSY has over more health focused data sets is fact that the respondents have been followed for such a long time, and health consequences can be cumulative and can be a result of interacting behaviors across multiple domains (e.g., family, work, etc.) that the NLSY documents. The NLSY also has the ability to make comparisons between men and women and across cohorts (e.g., comparing the older NLSY79, younger NLSY79, and NLSY97)

2 . Older women's cohabitation behavior

Much of the work on cohabitation has focused on younger women (especially those with young children), but cohabitation is also prevalent for older women (e.g., as remarriage rates after divorce have been declining over time). There has been some work on the financial and policy-related disincentives for marriage due to Social Security rules about widow's benefits (Stacy Dickert-Conlin's paper about [Widows Waiting to Wed](#)). However, I think that there has been very little research about how/whether the consequences of cohabiting may be different for older versus younger women. For example, we don't know how cohabitation might impact inheritance. Are adult step-children from a cohabiting relationship (even long-term relationships) less likely to inherit than step-children from a formal marriage? More importantly, we don't know how cohabitation of older adults might affect obligations for caring for a parent or partner that needs care. For example, is a cohabitating partner as likely to provide care as a married or remarried partner? Are children or step children less likely to provide care when their parents are cohabiting (or when a parent in a cohabiting relationship dies)? Although the NLSY respondents are probably

still too young for caretaking needs to be highly likely, documenting family dynamics over time continues to be important for NLSY respondents, because those family dynamics are likely to have consequences as the cohort ages.

3. The role of the family as providing a social safety net

One function of the family is to provide a social safety net both for aging parents and kids transitioning to adulthood or returning to the household after negative shock like divorce, unanticipated childbearing, or unemployment. To understand both the stresses and consequences for the family providing support and the potential resources for family members who need support, it is important to document these transfers or in-kind support and the motivations for this support.

4. Declining women's labor force participation

Female labor force participation rates in the US began declining in the late 1990s. Some of that decline is due to the fact that the population is aging, and older people have lower labor force participations rates. However, some have speculated that a lack of work-family supports for women with children in the US provides a disincentive for women to work and leads to labor force participation rates that are not high enough to offset the effect of the aging of the population (unlike Europe, where FLFP rates have not declined). A comparison between the NLSY79 and 97 can be useful to document differences across cohorts in work-family supports for women with young children and differences in labor market outcomes. The NLY79 will be useful to better understand the decline in women's labor force participation as women age and how that behavior is affected by earlier labor force involvement.

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