

HEALTH AND RETIREMENT STUDY

Cross-Wave Marital History Aggregated Data

Data Description

Prepared by

Ang Li, Halimah Hassan, Marina Larkina, Xuefei Li, and Jacqui Smith

Version 1

October 2022

Conditions of Use

By registering for access to HRS Public Release data, the User agrees to all of the following:

- Make no attempts to identify study participants.
- Not to transfer HRS Public Release data to any third party other than staff or students for whom you are directly responsible except as indicated below.
- Not to allow others to use your username and password to access this site.
- To certify the destruction of any downloaded Public Release data file as well as any data files derived from the downloaded file when requested to do so by the Health and Retirement Study.
- To include the following citation in any research reports, papers, or publications based on Public Release data:

In text:

"The HRS (Health and Retirement Study) is sponsored by the National Institute on Aging (grant number NIA U01AG009740) and is conducted by the University of Michigan."

In references:

"Health and Retirement Study, ([insert Product Name]) public use dataset. Produced and distributed by the University of Michigan with funding from the National Institute on Aging (grant number NIA U01AG009740). Ann Arbor, MI, (year)."

- To include the following citation in any research reports, papers, or publications based on any Public Release data file tagged as "Early" or "Preliminary":

"This analysis uses Early Release data from the Health and Retirement Study, ([insert Product Name]), sponsored by the National Institute on Aging (grant number NIA U01AG009740) and conducted by the University of Michigan. These data have not been cleaned and may contain errors that will be corrected in the Final Public Release version of the dataset."

- Please note that although it is necessary to include the above citations to the HRS in any publications, it is not necessary to associate your publications with the HRS grant in [PubMed](#).
- Provide information regarding any research product (dissertation, thesis, journal article, book, book chapter, report, etc.) based on data obtained from the Health and Retirement Study by sending an electronic copy to hrrpublications@umich.edu.
- Report immediately to the Health and Retirement Study at hrrquestions@umich.edu any disclosure of study participant identity as well as any discovery of flaws or errors in the data or documentation files.

Notify the Health and Retirement Study through use of the update function provided at this site or by electronic mail directed to hrrquestions@umich.edu of changes in your electronic mail address, postal address, telephone number, organizational affiliation or organizational status.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	2
2. General Information.....	2
3. File Structure	3
3.1. Primary Identification Variables	3
3.2. Construction of Marital History Summary Variables.....	3
3.3. Construction of Marriage Variables	4
3.3.1. Construction of Start / End Dates of Marriages	4
3.3.2. Construction of Marital Status	5
4. Other HRS Resources for Marital History	5
4.1. HRS Tracker	5
4.2. Life History Mail Survey (LHMS)	5
4.3. RAND	6
5. Distribution Files	6
6. Program Statements.....	7
7. Linking Respondents across Time	8
8. Documentation: Codebook.....	8
9. Registration and Downloading the Data	8
10. If You Need to Know More.....	9
Table 1 Marital History Questions Asked in HRS	10

1. Introduction

The Cross-wave Marital History Aggregated data consist of information derived from public-release data collected in the Health and Retirement Study (HRS), which is funded under a cooperative agreement between the National Institute on Aging (NIA) and the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan. The HRS is designed to study labor force, health, and family transitions of the U.S. population aged 51 and older, and the impact of those transitions on economic resources, claims on structured programs such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, informal assistance and transfers to and from family members as well as health and well-being in later life.

The National Institute on Aging provides funding (NIH U01 AGO9740) for collection of all HRS data, with supplemental support from the Social Security Administration. The Institute for Social Research (ISR) Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Michigan conducted the survey. Preparation of this cross-wave marital history aggregated file by members of the HRS Life History project team was supported by funding from the National Institute on Aging (R01 AG051142).

Data alerts, new file notifications, and updates concerning this file will be placed on the HRS Data Alert web page <http://hrsonline.isr.umich.edu/alerts>.

2. General Information

Our main objective in the preparation of the cross-wave marital history was to create a single user-friendly data file for each panel participant from 1992 to 2018 that summarizes the number and chronological order of all reported marriages together with the start/end dates and transition type if a marriage ended (e.g., separation, divorce, widowhood). Partnership history is not included in this file. The marital history data were aggregated using retrospective reports provided by HRS respondents or their proxy in different waves of biennial core panel interviews from 1992 to 2018. All information has previously been released separately as a public core data product for each biennial wave. It was collected in different sections within each wave. Table 1 summarizes the marital history questions and shows the various waves and sections drawn on to create this user-friendly cross-wave file. Other HRS resources with marital history, such as the HRS Tracker file and RAND HRS Longitudinal file (see Other Marital History Resources below), provide additional information about marriages organized by HRS waves.

In the HRS, marital history is collected differently at study entry and in subsequent biennial interviews. At study entry, individuals report their marital history. In general, first they are asked about their current marital status, then the number of marriages, the date the first and most recent marriages began, and either the duration or end date of those marriages. If marriages ended, the individuals are asked how it ended. In subsequent biennial interviews, respondents are asked about any changes in their marital status since the previous interview.

Construction of the Cross-wave Marital History Aggregated data involved several steps. We first used the initial core interview data to collect information about all previous marriages and to determine the current marital status for people interviewed in subsequent study waves. Then we examined all longitudinal data available for each panel member to modify, when necessary, marital status transitions between waves, in order to add end dates/new statuses for previously reported marriages and start dates for new marriages. Finally, all aggregated information was checked to ensure cross-wave consistency. During creation of the marital history variables, we edited to harmonize previously released codes because the specific questions and codes about marriages differed from wave to wave in HRS (see specific details for the variable construction in sections 3.2 - 3.3).

3. File Structure

Data in the Cross-wave Marital History Aggregated file are at the respondent level. The data file contains one record for each respondent ($N = 43,398$). The number of respondents included is based on the HRS Tracker file (2018 Early Release, Version 2). These data include proxy responses, in which a spouse or other individual responded to the survey on behalf of the invited HRS sample member. The data file contains 34 variables.

3.1. Primary Identification Variables

The HRS primary identification variables (IDs) are:

HHID	HRS HOUSEHOLD IDENTIFIER
PN	HRS PERSON NUMBER IDENTIFIER

Records in the data files are sorted by HHID PN. Identification variables are stored in character format. For further information about HRS identification variables and merging data, see <https://hrsdata.isr.umich.edu/sites/default/files/documentation/data-descriptions/trk2018v2a.pdf>.

3.2. Construction of Marital History Summary Variables

For each respondent, we generated two summary variables: MARHIST and MARCOUNT. The more general variable, “Marital History Summary” (MARHIST) is coded as “Never Married,” “Married, Dates Known,” “Married, Dates Unknown,” or Missing. “Never Married” code was assigned to the respondents who consistently indicated that they never married. If the respondent reported ever being married but later reported that they were never married, the respondent would have either “Married, Dates Known,” or “Married, Dates Unknown” code. Some respondents were assigned “Never Married” code when only partnership was reported for marital status (before HRS 1998) and the actual marital status cannot be determined and no other legal marital records were found across all waves. “Married, Dates Unknown” code was assigned for those respondents whose marital status or changes in the status were reported but no dates (both dates: start and end) could be determined. Finally, for 1,166 respondents no marital history was available.

The more specific variable, “Number of Different Marriage Records” (MARCOUNT) indicates the number of marriages from 0 to 6, where 0 means “Never Married.” Total number of marriages contained marriages with dates that were reported at the initial interview, including the current marriage at that wave, as well as any new marriages that began between follow up interviews. In general, at study entry, the respondents are asked about current marriage and its start date, the date the first and most recent marriage began, and either the duration or end date of those marriages. However, the number of marriages asked at the initial interview varies. For example, in HRS 1992 (wave 1), data were collected on three past marriages, and current and most recent marriage. For the new respondents, in HRS 1994 (wave 2), data were collected only about the first marriage. For new respondents in HRS 1996 (wave 3), data were collected on the first and most recent marriages. In HRS 1998 and 2000 (waves 4 and 5), new respondents were asked about three past marriages and the current marriage. From 2004 forward, new respondents were asked about first three and most recent marriages with the start dates, end statuses, and length of those marriages.

Please note, number of marriages in the aggregated data (up to 6) might not be the same number as the number provided by the respondent in the core interview to the question “Altogether, how many times have you been married [including your current marriage]?” There is no maximum for the number of marriages the respondent can report, but specific information about each marriage was asked about the limited number of marriages as described above.

3.3. Construction of Marriage Variables

We included information about six marriages. Each record consists of the start year and month (MxSTARTYR and MxSTARTMON), end year and month (MxENDYR, MxENDMON), and marital status of that marriage (MxSTATUS).

3.3.1. Construction of Start / End Dates of Marriages

Different sets of variables that indicated dates and/or durations of marriages were previously released in public core data for separate waves. We harmonized these data to provide the start and end dates of marriages in the aggregation data. For example, the HRS 1992 and HRS 1994 provided both start and end year; AHEAD 1993 provided the end year and duration, and the other waves provided the start year and duration. In general, at study entry, the date when the most recent marriage began is asked. If the respondent reported that marriage ended in divorce or widowhood at any of the follow up interviews, the end date for that marriage was calculated and marital status was updated. During aggregation process, we applied the following criteria to account for possible inconsistencies in raw data for dates. First, if the reported start date of a marriage was after the year that a respondent was interviewed, it was not included in the aggregated data. Second, in interviews after initial study entry, any reports of a new marriage were checked to determine if it existed in the marital history and if the start year was earlier than the last interview year. Third, the marriage end date, calculated as start date plus marriage duration, was changed to missing if the date exceeded the interview year (e.g., the respondent

reported in HRS 2004 that a marriage started in 2002, ended up in divorce and lasted for 15 years).

3.3.2. Construction of Marital Status

In the Cross-wave Marital History Aggregated data, we harmonized codes for each reported marriage to be either “MARRIED,” “ANULLED/SEPARATED/DIVORCED,” “WIDOWED,” “NEVER MARRIED,” or “OTHER.” These coding categories were selected to be the most consistent across respondents and waves. Specifically, we combined “separated” and “divorced” statuses into one category because they were not coded separately across all waves. For example, the codes for separation and divorce are combined in HRS 1996, AHEAD 1993, and AHEAD 1995.

During the aggregation process, we found that some marriages were terminated but the end reasons were unknown. For example, we recoded marital status as missing if the respondents reported the marriage end dates but 1) no other information about divorce or widowhood was reported; 2) current marital status was reported as “still married,” or 3) respondents had a record about a follow-up marriage.

Please note that we did not include partnership status in our data and actual marital status replaced the partnership code, when it was possible to determine. Specifically, before 1998 (HRS 1992 – 1996 and AHEAD 1993 – 1995), current marital status included a partnership category, which overrode actual marital status. For example, a marital status for a respondent who was already divorced and currently having a partner (by the time of interview) was coded as “Partnered” instead of “Divorced.” From Wave 4 (1998) forward, a cleaned version of marital status is used, which fills missing marital status using cover sheet data and marital transitions between interviews. In the case when the actual marital status (before HRS 1998) cannot be determined, partnership was recoded to “unmarried,” which could contribute to “Never Married” code in MARCOUNT if no other legal marital record were found for the respondent across all waves.

For the partnership information across waves, users are advised to refer to the RAND HRS Longitudinal file <https://hrsdata.isr.umich.edu/data-products/2018-rand-hrs-fat-file> that includes variables RwmSTAT (current marital status with partnership) and RwmPART (current partnership status).

4. Other HRS Resources for Marital History

4.1. HRS Tracker

Beginning with HRS 2004 (wave 7), the Tracker includes a variable xMARST that indicates whether a respondent is married, divorced/separated, widowed, or has never been married. This variable is available for those respondents who were interviewed in that wave.

4.2. Life History Mail Survey (LHMS)

The Cross-wave 2015-2017 Life History Mail Survey (LHMS): Harmonized and Aggregated Public Data include data obtained in Fall 2015 and in Spring and Fall 2017 from respondents in different subsamples of the HRS panel (<https://hrsdata.isr.umich.edu/data-products/lhms-cross-wave>). Respondents ($N = 11,761$) answered the Q36 “Have you ever been married?” (Yes/No). Those who answered “Yes” completed a table Q36A, filling information for each marriage (up to 5): gender of the spouse, cohabitation before marriage, start/end dates, and how the marriage ended. Participants were also asked about cohabitation and partnership histories (Q37).

4.3. RAND

The RAND data <https://hrsdata.isr.umich.edu/data-products/2018-rand-hrs-fat-file>, which were developed by the RAND Center for the Study of Aging using HRS Core data, include a number of variables that describe respondents’ marital status for each wave. For example, RwmSTAT current marital status with partnership; RwmPART current partnership status; RwmSTATH current marital status without partnership; RwmRCT number of marriages; RwmDIV number divorced; RwmWID number widowed, and other variables.

5. Distribution Files

The *Cross-wave HRS Marital History Aggregated Data* are packaged for distribution in a .ZIP file. Extract the data file, the program statement file that matches your analysis environment, the data description (this file), and the codebook file. If you have problems when downloading this data set or in extracting its contents, please contact the HRS Help Desk (hrsquestions@umich.edu).

The following extensions are used for the six different types of distribution files:

- .DA for data files
- .SAS for SAS program statements
- .SAS7BDAT for “ready-to-use” SAS files
- .SPS for SPSS program statements
- .SAV for “ready-to-use” SPSS files
- .DO for Stata DO statements
- .DCT for Stata dictionary statements
- .DTA for “ready-to-use” Stata files
- .TXT for codebook files

For example,

- AGGMARHIST2018A_R.DA contains ASCII data
- AGGMARHIST2018A_R.SAS contains corresponding SAS program statements
- AGGMARHIST2018A_R.sas7bdat contains “ready-to-use” data in SAS format,
- AGGMARHIST2018A_R.SPS contains corresponding SPSS program statements
- AGGMARHIST2018A_R.sav contains “ready-to-use” data in SPSS format,

- AGGMARHIST2018A_R.DO contains corresponding Stata DO statements
- AGGMARHIST2018A_R.DCT contains corresponding Stata dictionary statements
- AGGMARHIST2018A_R.da contains “ready-to-use” data in Stata format,
- AGGMARHIST2018A_R.TXT contains the ASCII codebook

6. Program Statements

The data are provided as SAS (.sas7bdat), SPSS (.sav) and Stata (.dta) “ready-to-use” files and in ASCII format. Each ASCII data file comes with associated SPSS, SAS, or STATA program statements to read the data. Files containing SPSS statements are named with a .sps extension, those with SAS statements with a .sas extension, and those with STATA statements with .do and .dct extensions.

6.1. Using the Files with SAS

To create a SAS system file for a particular dataset, two file types must be present for that dataset -- .SAS program statement files and .DA data files.

To create a SAS system file, load the *.SAS file into the SAS Program Editor. If the *.SAS file is located in "c:\ AGGMARHIST\sas" and the data file is located in "c:\ AGGMARHIST\data", you can run the file as is. A SAS system file (*.SD2 or *.SAS7BDAT) will be saved to directory "c:\ AGGMARHIST\sas".

If the files are not located in the specified directories, you will need to edit the *.SAS file to reflect the proper path names prior to running the file.

6.2. Using the Files with SPSS

To create an SPSS system file for a particular dataset, two file types must be present for that dataset -- .SPS program statement files and .DA data files.

To create an SPSS system file, open the *.SPS file in SPSS as an SPSS Syntax File.

If the *.SPS file is located in "c:\ AGGMARHIST\spss" and the data file is located in "c:\ AGGMARHIST\data", you can run the file as is. An SPSS system file (*.SAV) will be saved to directory "c:\ AGGMARHIST\spss".

If the files are not located in the specified directories, you will need to edit the *.SPS file to reflect the proper path names prior to running the file.

6.3. Using the Files with Stata

To use Stata with a particular dataset, the following three file types must be present for that dataset -- .DCT files, .DO files, and .DA data files.

Files with the suffix .DA contain the raw data for Stata to read. Files with the suffix .DCT are Stata dictionaries used by Stata to describe the data. Files with the suffix .DO are short Stata

programs ("do files") which you may use to read in the data. Load the .DO file into Stata and then submit it.

If the *.DO and *.DCT files are located in "c:\AGGMARHIST\stata" and the data file is located in "c:\AGGMARHIST\data", you can run the .DO file as is.

If the files are not located in these directories, you must edit the *.DO and *.DCT files to reflect the proper path names before you run the files.

Note that the variable names provided in the .DCT files are uppercase. If you prefer lower case variable names, you may wish to convert the .DCT files to lower case prior to use. You may do this by reading the .DCT file into a text or word processing program and changing the case. For instance, in Microsoft Word, Edit, Select All, Format, Change Case, lowercase.

7. Linking Respondents across Time

Respondent records in the *Cross-wave HRS Marital History Aggregated Data* file can be linked to respondent records in the cross-wave Tracker file and biennial core HRS waves by HHID and PN. The core sub-household identifiers can be used to link household data with the cross-sectional respondent level data.

8. Documentation: Codebook

The *Cross-wave HRS Marital History Aggregated Data* codebook is provided as an ASCII text file. Each variable has its own codebook entry that includes variable name, label, variable type (e.g., character, numeric), and frequencies.

MARHIST MARITAL HISTORY SUMMARY

9. Registration and Downloading the Data

9.1. Registration

The HRS data are available for free to researchers and analysts on the HRS web site. In order to obtain public release data, you must first register <https://hrsdata.isr.umich.edu/user/>. Once you have completed the registration process, a username and password will be sent to you via e-mail. Your username and password are required to download data files.

Registered users receive user support, information related to errors in the data, future releases, workshops, and publication lists. The information you provide will not be used for any commercial use, and will not be redistributed to third parties.

9.2. Conditions of Use

By registering, you agree to the [Conditions of Use](#) governing access to Health and Retirement public release data.

9.3. Publications Based on Data

As part of the data registration process, you agree to include specified citations and to inform HRS of any papers, publications, or presentations based on HRS data. Please send a copy and full citation of any publications you produce based on HRS data to hrrpublications@umich.edu.

10. If You Need to Know More

This document is intended to serve as a brief overview and to provide guidelines to using the *Cross-wave HRS Marital History Aggregated Data*. Additional information about the HRS and the LHMS can be obtained from the HRS web site. If you have questions or concerns that are not adequately covered here or on our web site, please contact us at hrrquestions@umich.edu. We will do our best to provide answers.

10.1. HRS Website

Public release data from the Health and Retirement Study and additional information about the study are available at <http://hrs.isr.umich.edu/>.

10.2. Contact Information

For specific questions, please contact the helpdesk at hrrquestions@umich.edu.

The HRS mailing address and fax are:

Health and Retirement Study
The Institute for Social Research
426 Thomson Street
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1248
FAX: (734) 647-1186

Table 1. Marital History Questions Asked in HRS

Question	W1 1992	AHEAD1 1993	W2 1994	AHEAD2 1995	W3 1996	W4 1998	W5 2000	W6 2002	W7 2004	W8 2006	W9 2008	W10 2010	W11 2012	W12 2014	W13 2016	W14 2018
Marriage start date - month	A	A1	A	A	A	A	A	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Marriage start date - year	A	A1	A	A	A	A	A	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Marriage end date - month	A	A1	A	A	A	A	A	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Marriage end date - year	A	A1	A	A	A	A	A	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Marriage status	A	A1	A	A	A	A	A	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
New marriage since previous wave			A	A	A	A	A	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Between wave marriage start - month			A	A	A	A	A	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Between wave marriage start - year			A	A	A	A	A	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Divorce/widow since previous wave			A	A	A	A	A	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Between wave divorce /widow - month			A	A	A	A	A	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Between wave divorce /widow - year			A	A	A	A	A	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
<i>Notes: A/A1 = Section A (before W5): Demographics (Respondent); B = Section B (since W6): Demographics (Respondent).</i>																