

HEALTH AND RETIREMENT STUDY

**2017 Spring**  
**Life History Mail Survey (LHMS)**

Release Version: Version 3

Release Date: January 2023

Data Description

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- 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](#).
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- Report immediately to the Health and Retirement Study at [hrrquestions@umich.edu](mailto: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](mailto:hrrquestions@umich.edu) of changes in your electronic mail address, postal address, telephone number, organizational affiliation or organizational status.

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## 1. Introduction

The Life History Mail Survey 2017 Spring (LHMS 2017 Spring) contains questions about residential, education, employment and health history, and other important childhood and family events. The LHMS 2017 Spring follows the Life History Mail Survey 2015 previously administered by HRS and released in June 2017.

The LHMS is part of 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, and informal assistance and transfers to and from family members.

The National Institute on Aging (NIA) provided funding (R01 AG051142) for the LHMS 2017 Spring, which was conducted by the Survey Research Center (SRC), at the Institute for Social Research (ISR), at the University of Michigan.

By receiving the dataset, you agree to use it for research and statistical purposes only and make no effort to identify respondents. In addition, you agree to send us a copy of publications you produce based on the data. See Registration and Downloading the Data (at the end of this document) for additional details.

The questions in the LHMS are based on several similar studies around the world, including: the English Longitudinal Study of Aging (ELSA, England), the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARELIFE), and the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS).

### 1.a Version 3 Changes

This data release contains the following updates:

New records

Four new records were added in this version. These records pertain to respondents who returned their questionnaire after the data collection period ended.

Corrections to the LH41 series of variables

When doing data entry and coding for second occupations (see [3b-33. Occupation, Industry and Promotions](#)) that respondents listed at LH41, we cross-checked responses to LH45 (a separate question about the job title in the respondent's most important occupation) against all entries in LH41 and made corrections to entries that were in conflict. Approximately 80-100 corrections were made

## 2. 2017 Spring LHMS Sample Design

In June 2017, questionnaires were mailed to a subsample of HRS respondents (n= 5,174). The sample for the 2017 LHMS was drawn from the 2015 Consumption and Activities Mail Survey

(CAMS) sample. It included 2015 CAMS sample members who were still alive in 2017 and whose household was considered finalized on their 2016 core interview(s) by early March 2017. (Members of finalized households had either completed core interviews or were considered final refusals for the core that wave.) A small number of respondents who were in the sample for the 2016 Harmonized Cognitive Assessment Protocol (HCAP) and who had not completed their assessment by early March, 2017 were excluded. New spouses of eligible panel respondents were also included in the 2017 LHMS sample.

The field period for the LHMS 2017 Spring was June through December 2017.

The data file contains 548 variables, and data for 3,848 respondents. The response rate is 74% percent.

### 3. About the LHMS 2017 Spring Data

#### 3a. Public and Restricted Versions

To protect the confidentiality of the information that respondents provide, a number of variables have been masked or are simply not included in the final release public file. Some of these variables are available to analysts as restricted data. The names of variables that were masked for confidentiality end in the capital letter “M”.

The variables in the LHMS 2017 Spring Restricted file are identical to those in the LHMS 2017 Spring Public file except for the following variables that include detailed respondent-level information for industry and occupation.

#### 2017 LHMS Spring

Variable Name	Description
LH41_1E	TYPE OF EMPLOYER OR BUSINESS - 1
LH41_1F	FIRST OR ONLY JOB TITLE – 1
LH41_1FP	PROMOTION TITLE - 1
LH41_2E	TYPE OF EMPLOYER OR BUSINESS - 2
LH41_2F	FIRST OR ONLY JOB TITLE - 2
LH41_2FP	PROMOTION TITLE - 2
LH41_3E	TYPE OF EMPLOYER OR BUSINESS - 3
LH41_3F	FIRST OR ONLY JOB TITLE - 3
LH41_3FP	PROMOTION TITLE - 3
LH41_4E	TYPE OF EMPLOYER OR BUSINESS - 4
LH41_4F	FIRST OR ONLY JOB TITLE - 4
LH41_4FP	PROMOTION TITLE - 4
LH41_5E	TYPE OF EMPLOYER OR BUSINESS - 5
LH41_5F	FIRST OR ONLY JOB TITLE - 5
LH41_5FP	PROMOTION TITLE - 5
LH41_6E	TYPE OF EMPLOYER OR BUSINESS - 6
LH41_6F	FIRST OR ONLY JOB TITLE - 6

### 2017 LHMS Spring

Variable Name	Description
LH41_6FP	PROMOTION TITLE - 6
LH41_7E	TYPE OF EMPLOYER OR BUSINESS - 7
LH41_7F	FIRST OR ONLY JOB TITLE - 7
LH41_7FP	PROMOTION TITLE - 7
LH41_8E	TYPE OF EMPLOYER OR BUSINESS - 8
LH41_8F	FIRST OR ONLY JOB TITLE - 8
LH41_8FP	PROMOTION TITLE - 8
LH41_9E	TYPE OF EMPLOYER OR BUSINESS - 9
LH41_9F	FIRST OR ONLY JOB TITLE - 9
LH41_9FP	PROMOTION TITLE - 9
LH41_10E	TYPE OF EMPLOYER OR BUSINESS - 10
LH41_10F	FIRST OR ONLY JOB TITLE - 10
LH41_10FP	PROMOTION TITLE - 10
LH45	(MOST IMPORTANT) JOB TITLE
LH46	(MOST IMPORTANT) TYPE OF EMPLOYER OR BUSINESS

### 3b. Variable Names and Labels

Variable names begin with the letters LH to designate the Life History Mail Survey, followed by \_17 for the wave in which the data were collected.

LH1\_17    LH1. LIVED OUTSIDE U.S.

As shown in the example, the variable label contains the question number found in the LHMS 2017 Spring questionnaire.

### 3c. Data Quality

Due to the skip patterns in this questionnaire, all missing answers are treated the same in the dataset and coded as simply "Answer not given/Missing." This is true whether the respondent was "expected" to answer the question or not, based on earlier responses.

While cleaning the data, when extreme, unlikely or conflicting values were encountered, electronic images of the questionnaires were checked directly to determine if errors were introduced during the data entry/scanning process. This includes instances where a start year is greater than an end year, or a start age is greater than an end age. If the respondent reported the extreme or conflicting value, the value appears unchanged in the data.

3c-1. LH22 Series, Primary through High School Education – Start Grade, Start Age, End Age

For these two questions, respondents were instructed to write the start grade, end grade, start age and end age for each school they attended from Kindergarten through high school.

In the LH22 series, a number of respondents provided information for post high school education or training (rather than writing those in the LH35 series). In these cases, if the “School Name” field in LH22 clearly indicated a post-high school institution, the response was moved to LH35; otherwise it was left in LH22.

As described earlier in this section, electronic images were checked in all instances of extreme or conflicting values to confirm that the data accurately reflects the respondent’s answers.

### 3c-2. State Coding Scheme

LH5 Residential History

LH22 Primary through High School Education

LH35 Post High School Education

LH44 Employment History

These four series asked respondents to provide the state for their residence, education and employment history. The state variable in these series is coded as follows: beginning with LH5, the first state mentioned is coded as 1, the second state is coded as 2, and so on for each unique state mentioned. If the first state mentioned is repeated on a later line in LH5, it is coded as 1, if the second state mentioned is repeated on a later line it is coded as 2, etc. Mentions of foreign countries are coded as 96.

For LH22, LH35 and LH44 the same scheme is maintained. For example, a 1 in the state variables in the education and employment series represents the same state as the 1 in the LH5 residential series.

### 3c-3. Occupation, Industry and Promotions

For question LH41, respondents were asked to describe places worked for one year or more after finishing full-time education. If a respondent changed jobs (or job titles) but stayed with the same employer, they were asked to list the first and last title held with that employer on the same line. During the original coding and data entry process, only the first job title was considered and assigned an occupation code. The first job is provided in the variable LH41\_xFM\_17 (FIRST OR ONLY JOB TITLE); the corresponding employer/business is in variable LH41\_xEM\_17 (TYPE OF EMPLOYER OR BUSINESS).

After the initial data entry and coding work was completed, HRS determined that only coding the first job would be problematic for the analysis of life-course occupation histories as it could lead to an underrepresentation of the kinds of occupations that are often the result of promotions, such as managerial jobs. To remedy this problem, HRS went back and did additional data entry and coding for the second occupation if it was a result of a promotion. The promotion title is provided in the variable LH41\_xFPM\_17 (PROMOTION TITLE). Whether a second occupation was a result of

a promotion was decided at the time of data entry. HRS entered all second occupations as promotions if they involved supervisory or managerial tasks or more complex tasks than the first occupation. The second occupation was not entered if it was not the result of a promotion because those types of second occupations may reflect a change in the job title or a job that involved parallel tasks with the same employer, and we could not definitively distinguish between the two. As a result, the second occupations/promotions are not well suited for analyzing parallel tasks or occupation shifts other than promotions. We checked several instances of second occupations and most were very similar to the first occupation (e.g., cook & laundry worker) or appeared to be an outlier job that was outside the main career (e.g., bookkeeper and administrator before and/or after other bookkeeper employments).

### 3d. Open End Questions

Responses were reviewed for six open end questions:

- LH35f\_17, major field of study in post high school education
- LH35g\_17, degree earned in post high school education
- LH35h\_17, certificate earned in post high school education
- LH54\_17, major surgeries
- LH57a\_17, periods of ill health or disability
- LH60\_17, most important accomplishments

Responses to the LH35 series, post high school training or education, were coded based on the Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) categories, provided by the National Center for Educational Statistics (<https://nces.ed.gov>). The codes for LH35FM\_17, major field of study, were then grouped into larger categories to protect respondent confidentiality, as shown below:

<b>LHMS code</b>	<b>NCES CIP Code</b>	<b>NCES Description</b>
1	52	BUSINESS, MANAGEMENT, MARKETING, AND RELATED SUPPORT SERVICES
2	9	COMMUNICATION, JOURNALISM
3	13	EDUCATION
4	51	HEALTH PROFESSIONS, RESIDENCY PROGRAMS, AND RELATED PROGRAMS
4	60	RESIDENCY PROGRAMS
5	16	FOREIGN LANGUAGES, LITERATURES, AND LINGUISTICS
5	23	ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE/LETTERS
5	24	LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES, GENERAL STUDIES AND HUMANITIES
5	38	PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES
5	39	THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS
5	50	VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

<b>LHMS code</b>	<b>NCES CIP Code</b>	<b>NCES Description</b>
5	54	HISTORY
6	22	LEGAL PROFESSIONS AND STUDIES
6	28	MILITARY SCIENCE, LEADERSHIP, OPERATIONAL ART
6	29	MILITARY TECHNOLOGIES AND APPLIED SCIENCES
6	43	HOMELAND SECURITY, LAW ENFORCEMENT, FIREFIGHTING AND RELATED PROTECTIVE SERVICES
7	1	AGRICULTURE, AGRICULTURE OPERATIONS, AND RELATED SCIENCES
7	3	NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION
8	4	ARCHITECTURE AND RELATED SERVICES
8	14	ENGINEERING
8	15	ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGIES AND ENGINEERING-RELATED FIELDS
8	26	BIOLOGICAL AND BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES
8	27	MATHEMATICS AND STATISTICS
8	40	PHYSICAL SCIENCES
9	5	AREA, ETHNIC, CULTURAL, GENDER, AND GROUP STUDIES
9	19	FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES/HUMAN SCIENCES
9	42	PSYCHOLOGY
9	44	PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND SOCIAL SERVICE PROFESSIONS
9	45	SOCIAL SCIENCES
10	10	COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES/TECHNICIANS AND SUPPORT SERVICES
10	11	COMPUTER AND INFORMATION SCIENCES AND SUPPORT SERVICES
10	25	LIBRARY SCIENCE
11	12	PERSONAL AND CULINARY SERVICES
11	31	PARKS, RECREATION, LEISURE, AND FITNESS STUDIES
11	36	LEISURE AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES
12	46	CONSTRUCTION TRADES
12	47	MECHANIC AND REPAIR TECHNOLOGIES/TECHNICIANS
12	48	PRECISION PRODUCTION
12	49	TRANSPORTATION AND MATERIALS MOVING
12	53	HIGH SCHOOL/SECONDARY DIPLOMAS AND CERTIFICATES
13	96	OTHER

Responses to the employment series beginning at LH41 were coded based on the same US Census codes used to code J166M and J168M (Section J) in the core interview. These codes were then grouped into larger categories to protect respondent confidentiality, also using the same masking code used in the HRS core study.

Responses to the health questions (LH54 and LH57), and to LH60, major accomplishments, were coded based on an analysis of frequencies found in the responses.

### 3e. "Other: Specify" Questions

Responses were reviewed for all questions with an "Other: Specify" option, and were either coded into existing code frames or new code frames were created. For the four questions below, the following new code frames were created:

**LH14\_17**, Who lived with you when you started your first full-time job?

- 11 Children, unspecified
- 12 In the military

**LH16\_17**, What type of residence did you live in when you started first full-time job?

- 4 Military housing/barracks
- 5 Rooming house, boarding house/YMCA/dormitory

**LH18\_17**, Who lived with you when you were 40?

- 11 Children, unspecified

**LH33b\_17**, In what sports did you participate (in junior/middle and high school)?

- 12 Softball
- 13 Wrestling
- 14 Cheerleading, drill team

**LH41d\_17**, What did you do after leaving this job?

- 6 Retired, took buy out package
- 7 Pursued further education
- 8 Started own business/became self-employed
- 9 Moved/relocated
- 10 Joined military
- 11 Still work at this job

**LH49a\_17**, Why did you leave or stop working for this employer?

- 11 The company closed, went out of business, or relocated
- 12 Started own business/became self-employed
- 13 Did not like it; problems with the owners; problems with coworkers; hours were cut
- 14 Moved to a different job, reason unspecified
- 15 Divested ownership in the business/sold the business

#### 4. File Structure

The HRS LHMS 2017 Spring Final Release (Version 3.0) data are at the respondent level. The data file contains one record for each respondent or proxy (n= 3,848) who filled out and returned a 2017 LHMS questionnaire. The variable LH61\_17 WHO ANSWERED SURVEY QUESTIONS provides information about who answered the questions in the 2017 LHMS.

The data file is called LHMS17SPR\_R, translated as: Life History Mail Survey 2017 Spring, with the “\_R” designating the file is at the respondent level.

The primary Identification variables (IDs) are:

HHID HOUSEHOLD IDENTIFIER  
PN PERSON NUMBER

Records in the data files are sorted in order by the identifying variables from the HRS core study, HHID (household ID) and PN (person number). The variable PN refers to the respondent to whom the questionnaire was mailed. Identification variables in the HRS LHMS 2017 Spring Final Release (Version 3.0) are stored in character format. For further information about HRS identification variables and merging data, see the [Data Description for the HRS 2002 Core](#).

#### 5. Distribution Files

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

.DA for data files,  
.SAS for SAS program statements and .sas7bdat for SAS “ready-to-use” files,  
.SPS for SPSS program statements and .sav for SPSS “ready-to-use” files,  
.DO for Stata DO statements and .dta for Stata “ready-to-use” files,  
.DCT for Stata dictionary statements, and  
.TXT for codebook files.

For example,

LHMS17SPR\_R.DA contains ASCII data  
LHMS17SPR\_R.SAS contains corresponding SAS program statements,  
LHMS17SPR\_R.SAS7BDAT contains SAS data in “ready-to-use” format,  
LHMS17SPR\_R.SPS contains corresponding SPSS program statements,  
LHMS17SPR\_R.SAV contains SPSS data in “ready-to-use” format,  
LHMS17SPR\_R.DO contains corresponding Stata DO statements,  
LHMS17SPR\_R.DTA contains Stata data in “ready-to-use” format,  
LHMS17SPR\_R.DCT contains corresponding Stata dictionary statements, and  
LHMS17SPR\_R.TXT contains the ASCII codebook

The HRS LHMS 2017 Spring Final Release (Version 3.0) data are provided in ASCII format, with fixed-length records. Use the associated SAS, SPSS or Stata program statements to read the data into the analysis package of your choice. In addition, you may also download the codebook file (LHMS17SPR\_R.TXT) and the data description (this document).

## 6. Program Statements

### 6a. 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:\lhms2017spr\sas" and the data file is located in "c:\lhms17spr\data", you can run the file as is. A SAS system file (\*.SD2 or \*.SAS7BDAT) will be saved to directory "c:\lhms2017spr\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.

### 6b. 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:\lhms2017spr\spss" and the data file is located in "c:\lhms2017spr\data", you can run the file as is. An SPSS system file (\*.SAV) will be saved to directory "c:\lhms2017spr\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.

### 6c. 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:\lhms2017spr\stata" and the data file is located in "c:\lhms2017spr\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 HRS LHMS 2017 Spring (Version 2.0) can be linked to respondent records from 2016 and prior 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. Registration and Downloading the Data**

### **8a. Registration**

HRS data are available for free to researchers and analysts at the HRS Web site. In order to obtain public release data, you must first register at our Web site. Once you have completed the registration process, your 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.

### **8b. Conditions of Use**

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

### **8c. 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 of any publications you produce based on HRS data, with a bibliographical reference, if appropriate, to the address below.

Health and Retirement Study  
Attn: Papers and Publications

The Institute for Social Research  
P.O. Box 1248  
Ann Arbor, MI (USA) 48106-1248

Alternately, you may contact us by e-mail at [hrsquestions@umich.edu](mailto:hrsquestions@umich.edu) with "Attn: Papers and Publications" in the subject line.

## 9. If You Need to Know More

This document is intended to serve as a brief overview and to provide guidelines to using the LHMS 2017 Spring (Version 3.0) data. Additional information about the HRS 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. We will do our best to provide answers.

### 9a. HRS Internet Site

Health and Retirement Study public release data and additional information about the study are available on the Internet. To access the data and other relevant information, point your Web browser to the HRS Web site.

<http://hrsonline.isr.umich.edu>

### 9b. Contact Information

If you need to contact us, you may do so by one of the methods listed below.

Internet: Help Desk at our Web site

E-mail: [hursquestions@umich.edu](mailto:hursquestions@umich.edu)

By Mail:

Health and Retirement Study  
The Institute for Social Research  
The University of Michigan  
P.O. Box 1248  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1248

FAX: (734) 647-1186