Data Description
2013 Veterans Mail Survey

1. Introduction

The 2013 Veterans Mail Survey contains questions about veterans' health care and experiences in the military.

The HRS 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 (U01 AG009740) for the 2013 Veterans Mail Survey. The study 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 Obtaining the Data (at the end of this document for additional details).

1. The Sample Interviewed in the 2013 Veterans Mail Survey

In June 2013, questionnaires were mailed to a subsample of HRS respondents (n=3,811). The subsample consisted of respondents who answered "Yes" to the question "Have you ever served in the active military?" in any wave of the HRS study. The field period for the 2013 Veterans Study was June through the end of October 2013.

The data file for the 2013 Veterans Mail Survey contains data for 1,871 respondents. The simple response rate for the 2013 Veterans Mail Survey is 49 percent.

2. About the 2013 Veterans Mail Survey Data

2A. Sections

The 2013 Veterans Mail Survey has the following sections:

Section A   General Health
Section B   Military Service and Use of VA Services
Section C   Experiences in the Military
Section D   Friends from the Military
Section E   Final Questions

2B. Variable Names
Variable names begin with the section letter (above) followed by the variable number (in the following example 1), followed by _13 for the wave in which the data were collected. The variable label contains the question number found in the 2013 Veterans Mail Survey booklet or questionnaire.

Example: A1_13   A1. RATE HEALTH

In a separate study (VA-HRS Data Linkage Study), HRS respondents who reported prior military service were asked to provide authorization for linkage to their health care records from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). An indicator of whether the respondent signed and returned a valid data authorization form is included in this dataset. The variable is called CONSENT_13.

2C. Data Quality

When respondents were expected to answer a question but did not, we indicate the lack of a response with 9, 99, or 999 codes. If a respondent correctly skipped a question they were not expected to answer, that is recorded as "Blank. INAP (Inapplicable)."

If a respondent was *not* expected to answer a question (given the skip pattern instructions), but did so anyway, the response is retained in the data.

The following is an example of using the 9 code to designate a question that was "skipped" when it was *not* supposed to be skipped.

===

A1_13   A1. RATE HEALTH
     Section: A   Level: Respondent   Type: Numeric   Width: 1   Decimals: 0

     A. General Health

     A1. Would you say your health is excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?

     ....
      85   1. Excellent
     454   2. Very Good
     586   3. Good
     351   4. Fair
     102   5. Poor
     293   9. Answer not given

While cleaning the data, when extreme or unlikely values were encountered, copies of the questionnaires were checked to determine if errors were introduced during the data

entry/scanning process. If the respondent reported the extreme value in the questionnaire, the extreme value appears unchanged in the data.

2D. Open End or Other Specify Questions

Responses were reviewed for all open end and "Other, specify" questions and new code frames were developed where appropriate. New additional code frames for the following questions are listed below:

B6M1_13   B6_13. TYPE CARE VA – 1 (through B6M8_13)

8. Audiology/Hearing aid(s)
10. Dental

B9M1_13   B9M1. WHY NOT ALL HEALTH CARE VA – 1 (through B9M5_13)

5. Not eligible or denied service

B11M1_13   B11. TYPE NON VA HEALTH CARE – 1 (through B11M8_13)

8. Audiology/Hearing aid(s)
10. Dental

2E. Masked Variable

The data for the question "C3. Were you ever a prisoner of war?" has been deleted from the data file for confidentiality reasons.

3. File Structure

The 2013 Veterans Mail Survey Final Release (Version 1.0) data are at the respondent level. Respondent-level files contain questions that were asked of all respondents about themselves (or were answered by a proxy for the respondent if the respondent was not able to fill out the questionnaire). The variable E1_13 (E1. WHO ANSWERED QNR) provides information about who answered the questions in the 2013 Veterans Mail Survey.   The data file contains one record for each respondent or proxy (n=1,871) who filled out and returned a 2013 Veterans Study Mail Survey.

The data file is called VET13_R.

The primary Identification variables (IDs) are:

HHID   HOUSEHOLD IDENTIFIER
PN   PERSON NUMBER

Records in the data files are sorted in order by HHID and PN. The variable PN refers to the respondent to whom the questionnaire was mailed. For further information about HRS identification variables and merging data, see the Data Description for the HRS Core Surveys.

4.   Distribution Files

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

.DA for data files,
.SAS for SAS program statements,
.SPS for SPSS program statements,
.DO for Stata DO statements,
.DCT for Stata dictionary statements, and
.TXT for codebook files.

For example,

VET13_R.DA contains ASCII data
VET13_R.SAS contains corresponding SAS program statements,
VET13_R.SPS contains corresponding SPSS program statements,
VET13_R.DO contains corresponding Stata DO statements,
VET13_R.DCT contains corresponding Stata dictionary statements, and
VET13_R.TXT contains the codebook.

The 2013 Veterans Mail Survey Final Release 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 will probably want to download the codebook file (VET13_R.TXT) and the data description (this document).

5. Program Statements

5A.   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:\vet2013\sas" and the data file is located in "c:\vet2013\data", you can run the file as is. A SAS system file (*.SD2 or *.SAS7BDAT) will be saved to directory "c:\vet2013\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.

5B.   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:\vet2013\spss" and the data file is located in "c:\vet2013\DATA", you can run the file as is. An SPSS system file (*.SAV) will be saved to directory "c:\vet2013\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.

5C.   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:\vet2013\stata" and the data file is located in "c:\vet2013\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.

6.   Linking Respondents across Time

Respondent records in the 2013 Veterans Mail Survey Final Release (Version 1.0) can be linked to respondent records from 2012 and prior waves by HHID and PN. The sub-household identifiers, ASUBHH for 1992, BSUBHH for 1993, CSUBHH for 1994, DSUBHH for 1995, ESUBHH for 1996, FSUBHH for 1998, GSUBHH for 2000, HSUBHH for 2002, JSUBHH for 2004, KSUBHH for 2006, LSUBHH for 2008, MSUBHH for 2010 and NSUBHH for 2012 can be used to link household data with the cross-sectional respondent level data.

7. Registration and Downloading the Data

7A. 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 any data files.

By registering all users, we are able to document for our sponsors the size and diversity of our user community allowing us to continue to collect these important data. 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.

7B. Conditions of Use

By registering, you agree to the Conditions of Use governing access to the Health and Retirement Study's public release data. You must agree to

o   not attempt to identify respondents
o   not transfer data to third parties except as specified
o   not share your username and password
o   include specified citations in work based on HRS data
o   provide information to us about publications based on HRS data
o   report apparent errors in the HRS data or documentation files
o   notify us of changes in your contact information

For more information concerning privacy issues and conditions of use, please read "Conditions of Use for Public Data Files" and "Privacy and Security Notice" at the Public File Download Area of the HRS Web site.

7C. 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, Room 3050
P.O. Box 1248
Ann Arbor, MI (USA) 48106-1248

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

8.   If You Need to Know More

This document is intended to serve as a brief overview and to provide guidelines to using the 2013 Veterans Mail Survey Final Release (Version 1.0) 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.

8A.   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/

8B.   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: hrsquestions@umich.edu

Postal service:
Health and Retirement Study
The Institute for Social Research, Room 3050
The University of Michigan
P.O. Box 1248
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1248

FAX: (734) 647-1186