Health and Retirement Study

2015 Life History Mail Survey (LHMS)

Version 1.0, June 2017

Data Description

1. Introduction

The 2015 Life History Mail Survey (LHMS) (Version 1.0) contains questions about residential history, education history, and other important childhood and family events.

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 (U01 AG009740) for the 2015 LHMS, which was 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 2015 LHMS (Version 1.0) 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).

2. The Sample Interviewed in the 2015 HRS LHMS

In December 2015, questionnaires were mailed to a subsample of HRS respondents (n= 11,256). The sample for the 2015 LHMS consists of all living HRS respondents who were not included in the 2015 Consumption and Activities Mail Survey (CAMS) and who completed their most recent HRS core interview in English (rather than Spanish). The field period for the 2015 LHMS was December 2015 through summer 2016.

The data file for the LHMS contains 332 variables, and data for 6,481 respondents. The simple response rate for the LHMS is 58% percent.

3. About the LHMS Data

3a. Variable Names and Labels

Variable names begin with the letters LH to designate the Life History Mail Survey, followed by _15 for the wave in which the data were collected.

LH1_15   LH1. LIVED OUTSIDE U.S.

As shown in the example, the variable label contains the question number found in the 2015 LHMS questionnaire.

3b. 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.

3b-1. LH5 Series, Residential History - Start and End Years

For this question, respondents were instructed to write the start and end year for each of their residences before age 50, and to write their age or the decade if they could not remember the exact year. The data for the LH5a – Residence Start Year and LH5b – Residence End Year series therefore contains a mix of ages and years on some lines, as seen in the example below.

LH5_1A   LH5_1A. RESIDENCE 1 START YEAR
     Section: A   Level: Respondent   Type: Numeric   Width: 4   Decimals: 0

     On the next pages please fill in as much information as you can about all the
     places that you have lived for one year or more from when you were born until
     age 50.

     To begin, next to #1 please write your year of birth as the "start year" on the
     top row.

     User note: Respondents were instructed to write their age or the decade if they could not
     remember the exact year.

     Start year (or age, or decade)

     ....
     5819   21-2016. RANGE OF VALUES
      678   Blank. ANSWER NOT GIVEN/MISSING

3b-2. LH20 and LH21 Series, Primary through High School Education – Start Grade, Start Age, End Age

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

In the LH20 series, a number of respondents provided school information for grades greater than 6 (rather than writing those in the LH21 series). In these cases, if the "School Name" field in LH20 clearly indicated a middle, junior or high school, the response was moved to LH21; otherwise it was left in LH20. Similarly, responses clearly indicating post high school activities were moved to LH23.

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.

For example, this respondent has indicated a junior high start age of 58 and end age of 60. These values possibly refer to the year rather than the respondent's age. These responses are included in the data as written by the respondent.

Q21 In the grid below, please list the names of all the **JUNIOR/MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS** and then add the information for the HIGH schools you attended. In the Start Grade column,

Fill in the age you started and ended and details about the school. If the school(s) you attended were

#	Start Grade	Start Age	End Age	Name of Junior/Middle or High School	City/Town	State
1	0 7	5 8	6 0			
2	0 9		6 8			
3						

3b-3. State Coding Scheme

LH5 Residential History
LH20 Primary Education
LH21 Junior and High School Education
LH23 Post High School Education

These four series asked respondents to provide the state for their residence and schooling 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 were coded as 96.

For LH20, LH21 and LH23 the same scheme is maintained. For example, a 1 in any of the education history series represents the same state as the 1 in the LH5 residential series.

3c. Open End Questions

Responses were reviewed for two open end questions:

LH23e_15, major field of study in post high school education

LH23f_15, degree or certificate earned in post high school education

Responses to these two questions 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 LH23e_15, major field of study, were then grouped into larger categories to protect respondent confidentiality, as shown below:

LHMS code	NCES CIP Code	NCES Description
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
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

continued:

LHMS code	NCES CIP Code	NCES Description
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

3d. "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:

LH11_15, who respondent lived with when started first full-time job:

　　11 Children, unspecified
　　12 In the military

LH13_15, type of residence when started first full-time job:

　　4 Military housing
　　5 Boarding house, rented room, dormitory, student housing or workers' housing

LH14_15, who respondent lived with at age 40:

　　11 Children, unspecified

LH30a_15, high school foreign language studied:

　　10 English

4. File Structure

The 2015 HRS LHMS 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 LH36_15 WHO ANSWERED SURVEY QUESTIONS) provides information about who answered the questions in the 2015 LHMS. The data file contains one record for each respondent or proxy (n= 6,481) who filled out and returned a 2015 LHMS questionnaire.

The data file is called LHMS15_R, loosely translated as: Life History Mail Survey 2015, 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 HHID and PN. The variable PN refers to the respondent to whom the questionnaire was mailed. Identification variables in the HRS 2015 LHMS Final Release (Version 1.0) 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,
.SPS for SPSS program statements,
.DO for Stata DO statements,
.DCT for Stata dictionary statements, and
.TXT for codebook files.

For example,

LHMS15_R.DA contains ASCII data
LHMS15_R.SAS contains corresponding SAS program statements,
LHMS15_R.SPS contains corresponding SPSS program statements,
LHMS15_R.DO contains corresponding Stata DO statements,
LHMS15_R.DCT contains corresponding Stata dictionary statements, and
LHMS15_R.TXT contains the ASCII codebook

The HRS 2015 LHMS Final Release (Version 1.0) 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 will probably want to download the codebook file (LHMS15_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:\lhms2015\sas" and the data file is located in "c:\lhms2015\data", you can run the file as is. A SAS system file (*.SD2 or *.SAS7BDAT) will be saved to directory "c:\lhms2015\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:\lhms2015\spss" and the data file is located in "c:\lhms2015\DATA", you can run the file as is. An SPSS system file (*.SAV) will be saved to directory "c:\lhms2015\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:\lhms2015\stata" and the data file is located in "c:\lhms2015\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 2015 LHMS (Version 1.0) can be linked to respondent records from 2014 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 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.

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, Room 3410
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.

9. If You Need to Know More

This document is intended to serve as a brief overview and to provide guidelines to using the 2015 LHMS (Version 4.0) 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: hrsquestions@umich.edu

Postal service:
Health and Retirement Study
The Institute for Social Research, Room 3410
The University of Michigan
P.O. Box 1248
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1248

FAX: (734) 647-1186