

Compendium

An Introduction (General Lifestyle Survey Overview - a report on the 2011 General Lifestyle Survey)

Includes chapters on health, smoking, drinking, households, families and access to vehicles.



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1 . Introduction

This report presents the latest information from the General Lifestyle Survey (GLF) for the 2011 calendar year (January to December). The GLF began collecting data in 1971 and the report includes a chapter looking at the findings from the survey over the forty years that it has been running. The main topics of the survey are covered in seven chapters: Smoking; Drinking; Households, families and people; Housing and consumer durables; Marriage and cohabitation; Pensions; and General health. The chapters provide overviews of each topic area, which are also supported by tabular output. The tabular output is provided in the form of Microsoft Excel tables that can be downloaded by clicking on the table references within the report. Not all of the tables are commented on in the text, they have been included in the tabular output to provide users with additional data for each subject area as well as the opportunity to compare results across years of the survey.

The GLF was previously known as the General Household Survey (GHS), but was renamed in 2008 to coincide with the survey's inclusion in the [Integrated Household Survey](#).

2 . Survey background

The GLF is a multi-purpose continuous survey that has been carried out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) since 1971. The survey presents a picture of families and people living in private households in Great Britain. This information is used by government departments and other organisations, such as educational establishments, businesses and charities, to contribute to policy decisions and for planning and monitoring purposes. Further information about the use of the survey is provided within the topic chapters.

The survey was originally designed to collect data that would be used to complement existing administrative statistics and to throw light onto changing social situations in away that would be relevant to current policy across government departments. The constraints of a survey (questionnaire length, inherent meaningfulness to respondents and the flow of the questionnaire, etc) meant that key aspects of the central themes were covered each year, but there was also the ability to include questions to cover additional areas of interest within them over time. For example, questions on health have been included since 1971, but over the 40 years specific health topics have been included at various times, such as questions on hearing, dental care, sight, use of NHS services etc. Within this survey model, topics outside of the central themes have also been easily assimilated, such as burglary and leisure activities. In addition, the survey has been able to target different population subgroups to ask specific questions.

The survey interview consists of questions relating to the household, answered by a household reference person or their spouse, and an individual questionnaire, asked of all resident adults aged 16 and over. Demographic and health information is also collected about children in the household. The GLF collects data on a wide range of core topics which are included on the survey every year. These are:

- demographic information about households, families and people
- housing tenure and household accommodation
- access to and ownership of consumer durables, including vehicles
- employment
- education
- health and use of health services
- smoking
- drinking
- family information, including marriage, cohabitation and fertility
- income
- pensions

The 2011 GLF was sponsored by ONS, the NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care, the Department for Work and Pensions, HM Revenue & Customs and Scottish Government.

Historical changes

The survey started as the GHS in 1971 and has been carried out continuously since then, except for breaks to review it in 1997/1998 and to redevelop it in 1999/2000.

From 1994/95 to 2004/05 the GHS was conducted on a financial year basis, with fieldwork spread evenly across the year April to March. However, in 2005 the survey period reverted to a calendar year and the whole of the annual sample (which was increased to 16,560), was dealt with in the nine months April to December 2005. From January 2006, the survey runs from January to December each year.

Since the 2005 survey did not cover the January to March quarter, this affected annual estimates for topics which are subject to seasonal variation. To rectify this, where the questions were the same in 2005 as in 2004/05, the final quarter of the 2004/05 survey was added (weighted in the correct proportion) to the nine months of the 2005 survey.

Another change in 2005 was that, in line with European requirements, GHS adopted a longitudinal sample design in which people remain in the sample for four years (waves) with one quarter of the sample being replaced each year. Thus approximately three quarters of the 2005 sample were re-interviewed in 2006. More details are given in the [GLF Technical Appendix B \(159.7 Kb Pdf\)](#).

3 . The 2011 survey

In 2011, 7,960 households in Great Britain took part in the GLF and around 15,000 interviews were conducted with adults aged 16 and older. The household response rate was 72%. Further details about the sample design and response are given in [Technical Appendix B \(159.7 Kb Pdf\)](#).

A glossary of definitions and terms used throughout the report and notes on how these have changed over time is provided in [Technical Appendix A \(75.4 Kb Pdf\)](#).

The survey results have been adjusted to account for non-response to the survey and to control for differences between the sample and population. Details of the weighting process are given in [Technical Appendix D \(67.1 Kb Pdf\)](#).

The GLF is a survey of a sample of the population and is therefore subject to sampling error, where the estimates inferred from the sample are not the same as if a census of the population was taken. A measure of this error is provided by the standard error estimates, which are published against certain statistics in [Technical Appendix C \(83.1 Kb Pdf\)](#).

The questionnaire that was used to collect the 2011 survey data is given in [Technical Appendix E \(609.4 Kb Pdf\)](#); and a list of the main topics covered by the survey since it began in 1971 is provided in [Technical Appendix F \(130.4 Kb Pdf\)](#).

4 . Related links

Data from the GLF and GHS are combined with other data sources to present a comprehensive picture of households, families and people living in Great Britain. The analyses of these data sources are presented in a number of ONS publications including: [Population Trends](#), [Health Statistics Quarterly](#) and [Pension Trends](#). The topic chapters within this report provide further information about these publications.

GHS and GLF data are widely used by universities and other research organisations. The release of the survey micro datasets for research and statistical purposes is controlled by the UK Data Archive and is supported by the Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS). The ESDS produce a report on the usage of the GLF, which is based on information from data users. The report can be downloaded from the [ESDS website](#).

The ESDS also organises an annual GLF user meeting, which is jointly chaired by ONS and the ESDS. The meeting provides a forum for data users and producers to meet and discuss new developments, exchange information about the GHS/GLF and talk about how the data are used. The 2012 meeting took place at the Royal Statistical Society, London and the agenda and papers for the meeting are available via the [ESDS website](#).

The GLF results are for private households in Great Britain; however, a similar survey called the Continuous Household Survey (CHS) is carried out in Northern Ireland. The survey is designed, conducted and analysed by the Central Survey Unit of the [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(NISRA\)](#).

5 . Microdata

This report gives a broad overview of the results of the survey, including tabular output. However, many users of GLF data have very specific data requirements that may not appear in the desired form in this report. Anonymised microdata from the GHS/GLF surveys and details on access arrangements and associated costs are available from the [United Kingdom Data Archive](#), or by telephoning +44 (0)1206 872143.

6. Background notes

1. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html or from the Media Relations Office email: media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk