NORC at the University of Chicago

CHRR AT THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

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FAMILY BACKGROUND AND EARLY CHILDHOOD RETROSPECTIVES CONTENT PANEL REPORT FINAL

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Introduction

The National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS) are a significant, long-running program of the United States (U.S.) Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), designed to support research into how Americans navigate changes in the economy and transition through various life course stages. As the youngest NLS cohort members are now entering their 40s, the BLS seeks to begin a new cohort of adolescents, targeted for fielding in 2026. This NLSY26 cohort will enable researchers to understand new trends in labor market experiences, education, and a wealth of other factors that are affecting this new generation.

BLS contracted with NORC at the University of Chicago and CHRR at The Ohio State University on an NLSY Needs Assessment to provide BLS with topical content and methodological inputs that a future design team can use to create an NLSY26 survey responsive to key research goals. As part of this Needs Assessment, NORC convened a content panel on ***Child and Family Background***, comprised of federal and non-federal subject matter experts, to provide BLS with high-level recommendations that highlight emerging research themes, social trends, and policy changes relevant to consider for future data collection; alternative data sources that might supplement a new survey; and methodological issues that may impact data collection for the NLSY26. The content panel met multiple times between April and July 2022, to discuss recommendations and tradeoffs around content and survey design for BLS to consider for the new cohort.

The expert panel was excited to build on the prior strengths of the NLSY studies, but also to increase the scientific relevance of the study by increasing the content about child experiences early in life. A major scientific paradigm shift in the past 50 years has been understanding the cumulative nature of developmental processes. Indeed, it is now widely understood across the social sciences that much of the foundation for success later in life is built during early childhood. This suggests that to understand youth's human capital and educational attainment as well as their adult health and employment—it is critical to know about their early experiences in their families and communities.

As a panel we defined our task in the following way: we considered any content that would be asked about the youth's earlier childhood experiences and especially the content which would be best answered by a caregiver or parent about the youth's family or experiences in childhood. An exception was that we excluded information about childhood schooling and some content on childhood health because it would be covered in other content panels. For this reason, our report focuses mostly on child and family experiences that occur before the youth enters the sample (or about the family at the time the youth enter the sample). In some cases, this report also notes when we think the content that might also be important for youth surveys in later rounds. Finally, in completing this task, we did not see it as our task to identify the specifics of the content areas or survey items, but rather saw our task to highlight important areas for further attention and survey design.

The rest of the report is organized as follows. Section 2 and Section 3 describe the panel's recommendations related to topical content and survey design considerations. Section 2 describes content/topic-related considerations for future data collection with the new cohort, including (1) emerging research themes, social trends and policy changes that are relevant to consider (2) foundational data important for studying later life labor market and non-labor market outcomes, and (3) key areas of disparities and inequalities that may be important to measure. Section 3 describes survey design-related considerations relevant for the new cohort, including (1) the extent to which recommended topics are covered in existing NLSY questionnaires used for the 1997 cohort, (2) methodological issues that may impact future data collection on the recommended topics, and (3) relevant alternative data sources that might supplement a new survey. Section 4 concludes with a prioritization of the panel's recommendations

(including the methodology used to arrive at that prioritization), and a description of the tradeoffs considered for this prioritization.

Topic-Related Recommendations for the New Cohort

Emerging research themes, social trends and policy changes that are relevant for the content area

In this section, we review important social and demographic trends and policy contexts that we believe are important in understanding the youth's family and childhood background and experiences prior to their entrance into the NLSY26 sample. We review both defining aspects of their childhood and their families.

Incarceration.
Families' experiences with the criminal justice system, and specifically incarceration, has dramatically increased in the U.S. since the NLSY97 began (Western 2006; Pettit and Western 2004). Through the 2000s the rate of incarceration was increasing 6-8% a year. Since 2009 incarceration rates have been declining, but at a rate so slow that incarceration remains extremely high both historically and compared with other countries. As a result, getting information about parents' and caregivers' experiences with incarceration (inclusive of probation and in-home detention) is of high importance. It has critical implications for youth's experiences of parental absence and possible involvement in other systems such as child protective services. It is also important to get information about the youth respondent's own involvement with the criminal justice system inclusive arrests, detention, diversion, and probation. Again, of special interest is the racial and ethnic inequality in incarceration among respondents and their families. Data are quite clear that parental and youth incarceration disproportionately harm communities of color. Including adequate data on these experiences will increase the ability to understand how incarceration affects children's subsequent human capital accumulation and their transitions into the labor market.

Complex Family Life.
Demographers have documented several key trends that have led to what they term an increase in the "complexity" of family structure (McLanahan and Percheski 2008; Seltzer 2019; Cavanagh and Fomby 2019). The first trend is a retreat from marriage. Fewer adults are living in married households. Second, is an increase in co-habitation among romantic partners. These cohabitations, however, are typically short-term, as most cohabiting couples either dissolve or marry in a few years. Most important, however, is that cohabitation has become a normative context for childbearing, and when these relationships end, parents will often re-partner and have additional children. Thus, families increasingly include non-biological parents and children from with differing parents in the same household(s). The dissolution of marriage and cohabitation results in children increasingly residing across multiple households. For example, estimates suggest that after a divorce, a third of children experience shared physical custody. Finally, an increasing number of children are not living with their biological parents and are instead living with extended family or in foster care, as result of factors such as mass incarceration and the opioid crisis. About 6% of children experience foster care and the rates are more than double for Black and Native American children. As a result, the family experiences of children are complex and change over the course of their childhood. Because the number and type of parents/caregivers in a household have important implications for the household's economic wellbeing and parent's investments in their children's lives, which in turn has implications for youth wellbeing, human capital accumulation, and

labor market outcomes, understanding the complexity of the youth's family structure during their childhood is a very important topic of inquiry.

LGBTQ+.
There has been a stark increase in cultural awareness and acceptance of LGBTQ+ status since the NLSY97 (The SAGE Encyclopedia of LGBTQ Studies 2016; Adamczyk and Liao 2019; Merino 2013; Rhodebeck 2015; Scheitle and Hahn 2011). Perhaps as a result, increasing numbers of youth and adults are self-identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or other with other terms that reflect non-heterosexual and non-cis gender identities. Gallup survey data suggest that upwards of 15% of adults born from 1997-2002 identify as LGBTQ+ and that in 2020, nearly 10% of youth ages 13-18 already identified as LGTBQ+. The increase means that even among married two-parent families, parents may not identify as heterosexual, and it also means that increasingly numbers of adults are in same-sex marriages or partnerships. While greater community acceptance has likely contributed to the growing numbers, it is also the case that there remains significant bias, discrimination, harassment, violence against members of the LGBTQ community. As a result, individuals with LGBTQ+ identities face unique challenges related to mental health, education, family formation and labor market. Gathering data on parents' and youths' gender and sexual identity is important for understanding differences in family experiences and inequality in educational and labor market outcomes.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).
Immigration enforcement has increased tremendously since the 1997 cohort in response to 9/11 and increasing social and economic instability throughout the Americas (Massey and Pren 2012; Dreby 2014; Masssey, Pren and Durand 2016). Deportations of undocumented immigrants were at their height in 2013, and despite declining slightly, have remained at historically high levels. Gathering data about parents' and youth's immigration status and interaction with ICE (and any other local, state, or federal law enforcement agencies) would give us unprecedented insight into an increasingly important topic related to the labor market outcomes of Latino youth.

For example, SIPP includes a question on immigration status that is edited in the public use file but is more detailed in the actual questionnaire and the internal data. This question does not specifically ask about undocumented status but about a range of legal 'statuses' that include LPR, temporary visa, refugee, etc. The California Health Interview Survey and the Three City Unregulated Work survey also ask about immigration status. Additionally, the LAFANS designed their questionnaire for parents about children's immigration status. This survey asks whether the child was a U.S. citizen, permanent resident, on a visa, or something else where the parents could specify further (LAFANS Parent Survey; Section D). Of course, there is some risk of losing the most vulnerable respondents and therefore being left with problems of sample selection. But, this is true when sampling any marginalized group and doesn't negate the need to try and capture data from this population. Coupled with the oversampling of Latinos to better understand the diversity of experiences of Latino subgroups (e.g., Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Hondurans, Nicaraguans, etc.), gathering rich data on immigration status and ICE interaction would benefit our understanding of the long-term trajectories of Latino youth from differing nationality backgrounds.

Technology.
One obvious change since the NLSY97 was fielded is the ascendance of technology in education, employment, and social contexts (Burrows and Savage 2014; McFarland, Lewis and Goldberg 2016; Tinati, Halford and Carr 2014; Lazer and Radford 2017; Zhao 2006). In particular, social media outlets have become a dominant part of children's lives. We do not yet fully understand the implications of how this has affected youth—whether or for whom social media and related technology has heightened mental health problems, or the ways in which it might have enhanced youths' connections and expanded their sense of the world. For this reason, understanding how parents limited or engaged their children with social media and other technologies could lead to novel insights into future labor market outcomes.

Gaining access to social media accounts of respondents would possibly lead to important network-based breakthroughs in understanding the adolescent social world as well as how early social media engagement may have ramifications on later employment experiences (both positive and negative). Asking parents about screen time and access to high-speed and reliable internet would be valuable as well.

COVID-19.
Children's experiences during the covid pandemic will likely be an important influence on the childhood experiences of NLSY26 study participants that may affect their later human capital accumulation and labor market outcomes. The pandemic potentially brought many disruptions and changes to youth's family life as a result of changes in families' behavioral patterns. For this reason, we think emphasis should be given not only to health considerations of the pandemic (on which we defer to the health panel) but also changes in family lives. First, we think employment changes, including working remotely, and disruptions for parents will be important. For example, information about how the pandemic affected schooling and extra-curricular activities of the youth. Did the pandemic result in greater social isolation of youth in terms of non-resident family members such (e.g., grandparents), friends, and other social activities (church groups etc.)? We also think information on parents' and youth's choices around vaccination might be important. Of special interest is data on racial and ethnic disparities in the impact of covid, both its prevalence and in its impact on parental employment and family life.

Related foundational data important for studying later life outcomes

Social science has demonstrated the importance of early life experiences in shaping many later life outcomes. Of significant importance in early and middle childhood are parents and adverse experiences. Parents are especially important because their actions shape so much of children's experiences in and out of the home. It is important to note that we use the term parents broadly to include caregivers whether they are biologically related to the child or not.

Parent-child relationships and parent "investments."
Parenting plays a significant role in determining children's future health, educational and socio-emotional outcomes, over and above parents' financial investments in children's development. The general idea is that what parents do and how they engage with their children is key to their children's healthy development. Cognitively stimulating, warm and consistent interactions between parents and children is a critically important determinant of children's healthy development. Indeed, in principle, good parenting could prevent undesirable outcomes for children and ensure that children reach their full potential. Adolescence is a critical period for parent-child relationships, both because it shapes adolescent identity formation and also because children are continuing to develop the skills (cognitive and socio-emotional) that can affect lifelong achievement and attainment and parent-child relationships can shape these skills.

The lives of adolescents extend beyond the family to include schools, peers, and extracurricular activities. As children's worlds expand, parents spend less time interacting directly with them and more time planning and monitoring their academic and social networks. Through this management, parents ensure that children form positive relationships, learn self-management, and adopt a sense of personal responsibility in their extrafamilial lives. As adolescents navigate increasing independence, parents must adjust their strategies for supporting, monitoring, and appropriately disciplining their children. Sensitive parenting in adolescence thus includes learning about and arranging for enriching academic, recreational, and social opportunities as well as supervising children's social networks and activities to minimize children's exposure to violence, substance use, and delinquent peers.

Social scientists from differing disciplines have demonstrated how the economic and emotional contexts of children's home environments affect their development (Magnuson and Duncan 2019; Duncan, Magnuson and Votruba-Drzal 2014; List and Suskind 2021; Duncan, Magnuson and Votruba-Drzal 2015). This work has generally found that children reared in higher-income homes have better outcomes across a range of important developmental outcomes. Parental income (and more generally economic resources) is linked to children's outcomes through at least two key pathways—greater investments in goods and services that improve youth development as well as more time spent interacting with youth in developmentally enriching activities. Parental income affords parents opportunities to structure their time so that they are spending more time with their children, and so that the time they spend with children is of high quality. Specifically, time spent engaged in developmentally enriching activities matters. Differences in the expected return on parental investments in human capital development (for themselves and their children) at least in part drive parenting behavior. Research suggests that although all parents expect high returns on their investments in child development, lower-SES parents nonetheless expect relatively lower returns than their higher-SES peers.

Early childhood adversity and early health shocks.
Social science has demonstrated the importance of children's experiences of adverse events for their later health and life chances. Specifically, life events and contexts that create significant and long-lasting physiological stress responses in children are detrimental. When not buffered by caregivers, adverse events can have lasting harmful impacts on children because their effects can become biologically embedded during sensitive periods of development. As such early adversity can have lasting impacts on youth's later physical and mental health developmental outcomes (chronic diseases, depression, and substance use). The type of adverse events that research has suggested matter are diverse but include parental separation, parental substance abuse, parental mental health problems, parental abuse and neglect, deep and chronic poverty, witnessing domestic or community violence, natural disasters, and bullying. With sensitive and responsive caregivers and appropriate supports, many children are able to be resilient when faced with adversity. However, the more adversities a child contends with, especially in the absence of a warm and responsive caregiver, the more likely it is that they will face negative consequences for their later physical and mental health. These impacts on health, and especially mental health can have far reaching impacts on school and work trajectories. As a result, long-run social costs of adverse life events can include impacts on rates of disability, unemployment and underemployment, health care costs, crime, and more.

Key areas of disparities and inequalities that should be measurable

There are several important ongoing dimensions of social and economic inequality in family life that are of critical importance in understanding youth wellbeing and human capital accumulation as well as their subsequent labor market, family formation and health outcomes. We focus on two critical and related dimensions of inequality—the "diverging destinies" of lower income and upper-income youth and stratification by race, ethnicity, and immigration status. Elsewhere in this report we have noted other dimensions of inequality (i.e., gender-identity and sexual orientation; and undocumented immigrants).

Diverging Destinies.
The term "diverging destinies" was coined to describe the increasing inequality in children's life experiences by family socio-economic status (SES). As a function of growing income, wealth, and social inequality, parental investments are increasing for advantaged children and youth, whereas their disadvantaged counterparts experience comparatively fewer investments. Indeed, socio-economic inequality can be understood through the lens of segregation across multiple institutions, which functions to limit opportunity for the disadvantaged and create further opportunity for the advantaged, thus

generating further inequality (McLanahan 2004; Owens and Jencks 2016; Reardon, Kalogrides and Shores 2019). The divergence of opportunity for low and high SES groups is both the result of growing social and economic inequality and also a likely cause of future inequality. Higher SES families have advantages in nearly every relevant institution—a stable family with two parents, high quality neighborhoods with more resources, better K-12 schools and access to higher education and increasing economic returns to higher education. In contrast, lower SES families face compounding disadvantages of unstable and complex families, lower quality neighborhoods with fewer resources, lower quality K-12 schools and challenges accessing and completing higher education, and low-wage jobs with few benefits and opportunities for advancement. Moreover, there is a geographic dimension to the divergence, with lower SES children more likely to live in economically and racially segregated communities and neighborhoods. The vast array of differences across the opportunities available to families and youths' experiences taken together fuel inequality and limit economic upward mobility for families and youth.

Stratification by race, ethnicity, and immigrant status.
The historical and current prevalence of structural oppression, disenfranchisement, violence, and discrimination of populations of color and immigrants has created a country that advantages whites across all social and economic institutions. This can be seen in substantial racial and ethnic disproportionality in involvement in criminal justice systems and child welfare systems, poor health outcomes, income and wealth inequality, and school discipline and college completion rates. For example, the median net worth of white families is over 10 times greater than of Black families and seven times greater than Hispanic families. As such, racial, ethnic and immigrant status shapes the children's experiences in their homes, communities, and schools. These disparities are only partially explained by differences in access to economic resources. Experiences of bias, discrimination, degradation, harassment, and violence create significant social and psychological costs to families of color and their children. One important result of these costs are differences in health outcomes including infant mortality, chronic diseases and life expectancies favoring white populations compared to populations of color (with some exceptions for specific outcomes and racial/ethnic groups). In sum, racial, ethnic and immigrant groups are a powerful, defining identities that drive stratification and shape life chances among families and youth in the US, and as such is of critical importance to understanding human capital accumulation and labor market outcomes.

Related foundational data important for studying labor market outcomes

Understanding how family background and early childhood affect later labor market outcomes is of high importance. In short, we know from lots of social science that employment outcomes are driven by how individuals interact with social structures. Their human and social capital are situated within specific opportunity structures, and as noted above these opportunities are stratified by key economic and social identities. Human capital refers to the range of skills and characteristics that are productive in labor markets, including academic and technical skills, soft skills, health and mental health. Social capital refers to the networks, information, and resources that an individual can access through their connections to other individuals, communities and institutions. Family and childhood contexts and experiences are crucial to understanding labor market outcomes because as discussed above they are foundational to the accumulation of human and social capital.

Taken together these insights lead to an important conclusion -- focusing only on proximal antecedents of employment, such as high school performance or risky adolescent behavior, does an immense disservice to our understanding of what contributes to later employment outcomes. Omitting information on key family background and early childhood experiences from the NLSY26, will limit the research questions that can be asked and answered in important ways. Perhaps most detrimental, it would direct scientific

and policy discussions only on proximal experiences. Yet, as noted above, a key finding in the field of social science research is that early life and family experiences are critical determinants of human and social capital that affect adolescent and adult outcomes. Moreover, these associations between early life experiences and later labor market outcomes are not all present in early adolescence. All of the science points to development being a life span process that begins at conception, in which experiences in each stage of development have the potential to contribute outcomes at later stages of life. For example, evidence shows that participating in a prekindergarten program affects labor market outcomes, even when it has not had a lasting impact on achievement test scores (Gray-Lobe, Pathak and Walters 2021). Research on early poverty and adversity suggests it has long-run implications on later health that are not present until adulthood. As a result, key policy questions about how to improve educational outcomes to better prepare workers for complex jobs or reduce chronic diseases that limit individuals' ability to work may be better answered by focusing efforts on improving family contexts and early childhood experiences—reducing adversity and instability as well as increasing parental investments-- than on proximal efforts targeting adolescents or young adults.

Our panel identified topical areas that social science research tells are likely to make a major contribution to the academic and policy discussions of labor market outcomes in the years to come. Here we highlight just a few of the panel's recommendations to illustrate how the topics will inform labor market outcomes.

- A major limitation in current research on labor market outcomes is that many data sources do not collect detailed and systematic information on gender identity and sexual preference. Given the increasing number of adults who do not fit into cis gender heteronormative identities, it is urgent that these data be collected so that the extent to which these identities affect family and school experiences, and labor market outcomes (either because of discrimination or other mechanisms) can be studied.
- A sizeable surge in immigration from Latin America and Asia since 1997, and their residence in new destinations (e.g., Nebraska, Alabama, and North Carolina) is likely to shape the labor market for the coming decades. In particular, given the relative lack of resources for these families and children compared to more traditional areas of settlement (e.g., the Southwest and Northeast) important questions arise about the extent of immigrant incorporation, opportunities for economic mobility, and how these youth will fare in the labor market. Finally, the difficult to reach yet sizeable population of undocumented children and youth who have been attending U.S. schools and will enter the labor market are of particular interest and concern with respect to incorporation and economic mobility.
- The labor market outcomes of youth whose parents experience incarceration and as a result of the prison boom are both understudied and vitally important for understanding economic and health inequality in the coming decades. The reach of the criminal justice system into families and children's lives is profound. Moreover, the ripple effects of mass incarceration on children are likely to be even larger than the effects on the incarcerated themselves. Children who had an incarcerated parent may have experienced reduced economic resources in the home and been exposed to deleterious schooling and neighborhood contexts. Understanding their family life, schooling experiences, and residential experiences (e.g., moves, exposure to poverty, exposure to under-resourced schools) is key to gaining a clearer picture of their labor market outcomes
- Early childhood stability and adversity have been strongly linked with adult health outcomes, including chronic diseases and mental health. There is comparatively less research on how these factors in childhood taken together link to later employment, and the mechanisms that explain the link. Including more information and more detailed information about early childhood adversities will provide a unique opportunity to learn more about the downstream adult employment impacts of these experiences.

Selected topics considered for data collection with the new cohort

A central recommendation of this panel is to expand the amount of child and family background data that is collected. We explained below, we suggest this primarily be done by increasing the amount of content that is collected during parent and caregiver survey(s) and also to the extent possible by using administrative data sources. Our recommendation to increase the information collected across and within topics is driven by the following scientific insight (also described above) -- the lives experiences of children have become more unequal and divergent across many differing dimensions. Thus, understanding life course outcomes, especially human and social capital, is best done not with deep understanding about only one aspect of their experiences, but with *attention to the accumulation of advantages or disadvantages across multiple domains*. By increasing the amount and detail of family and child background data collected in the NLSY26, there will be an unprecedented opportunity to describe and study how inequalities of experience and opportunity across multiple dimensions of family and community life accumulate to affect later life and labor market outcomes. For example, having combined information on childhood residential addresses, parental immigration status, and parental employment could shed light on how processes of immigrant incorporation and upward mobility differ across communities.

In the NLSY97, the family and childhood background content were collected during a parent/caregiver survey at the start of the study and later some retrospective information was collected from youth surveys. As a result, the level of detail gathered from parents was both limited in scope and uneven across key family and childhood topics. For some topics such as parental employment, retrospective calendars provided fairly fine-grained detail, but for other topics such as immigration the information collected was minimal. Furthermore, for other high-importance topics such as child welfare system involvement and parental mental health there no information was collected at all. For many of these topics, the youth will not be able to provide reliable retrospective information so it's important to use parent surveys and administrative data to capture the needed data.

Below we provide some illustrative examples of how increasing the amount and detail of information collected about and from parents would make significant contributions to science and policy discussions. The scientific premise for these topics is described earlier in earlier sections of the report, so here we provide additional suggestions that arose from the content panel discussion:

- *Immigration Status of Parents/Family and ICE interactions.* The panel recommends collecting information on the immigration status of the respondent youth and their family members in parent surveys. We note that this goes beyond just parent's country of birth. Immigration status was not collected in the NLSY97. In addition to immigration, the panel places a high priority on collecting information on family member's experiences with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), or any other local, state, or federal law enforcement agencies.
- *Family Structure and Stability.* Given the increasing complexity of family structures and changes in family stability, the panel recommends collecting more information on children's retrospective family and household structures. The NLSY97 has a sensible approach to prospective household rosters, which should be improved by expanding it to better capture two households for children that have shared physical placements (for example, two household rosters in these cases). However, the retrospective family structure data only captured the youth's relationship to adults in the household at three ages (2, 6, 12) and asked the parent about the reasons for any separations from the child of three months or more. Finally, the parent provided a marital history in a calendar format. We recommend that the marital calendar be expanded to include romantic co-habiting partners. We recommend that more attention be given to retrospective information in general, and about shared time across multiple households, and non-adult family members (e.g.,

stepsiblings). In sum, the panel recommends revising the approaches taken in the NLSY97 to capture a more complete understanding of the complexity of family structures both in terms of relationships and residence, especially in cases in which children have physical placements across two households.

- *LGBTQ+ Identification of Youth and Family Members.* It is important for the NLSY26 measure youth (and family members) gender identity and sexual orientation.
- *Parental SES, Employment, and Financial Resources*. Information on parental income and education has been central to past NLS cohorts and should continue to be a key focus of the parent survey in the NLSY26. This information should be collected from parents/caregivers and from administrative records as that will reduce participant burden and increase reliability of the data.
- *Neighborhood Quality*. The panel recommends going beyond the interviewer observation about neighborhood in the NLSY97. In particular, the panel recommends adding survey items to the parent survey and youth surveys on their perceptions of neighborhood safety and quality. In addition, it is critical that the address of the youth's childhood residence (or residences) be collected and geocoded to facilitate linkages to other data sources with geographic identifiers. The range of possible data linkages has vastly increased since 1997, given technology advances with geographical coding and data and now includes not only census data on neighborhood quality as traditionally defined, but for example, data related to air pollution and systemic racism.
- *Welfare Program Participation.* In the NLSY97, participation in public assistance programs was collected only from "independent" youth. The panel recommends that the NLSY26 collect more comprehensive information on the youth's exposure to public assistance programs in childhood (e.g., TANF, SSI, SNAP, and WIC). The panel recommends including questions about receipt of public assistance receipt in the youth's childhood—including the timing of that receipt.
- *Parent/Household Criminal Justice Involvement.* The panel recommends that the parent survey items be asked of parents in to provide detailed information on criminal justice involvement of parents (and other family members) during the youth's childhood as well as any encounters with the criminal justice system the youth had prior to the start of the survey. This would include information on arrests, detention, diversion, or probation. The panel recommends that this information be collected in both the parent survey and, to the extent possible, with administrative data linkages.
- *COVID Disruptions.* To better understand the potential role of COVID on the youth's outcomes and development, the panel recommends collecting retrospective information on COVID-related deaths or serious illness in the family, as well parental work disruptions due to the pandemic.
- *Child Welfare Involvement*. The panel recommends including information on the youth's involvement in the child welfare system, preferably to be asked of caregivers in the parent survey. This would include any investigations and substantiations even if they did not result in the child's placement into foster care. Retrospective information on the youth's involvement in the child welfare system in childhood was not collected in the NLSY97, unless it resulted in child removal for greater than three months.
- *Parental Physical and Mental Health.* The panel recommends collecting information about parents' history of mental health including for example, current and past episodes of depression or other significant mental health problems such as substance use disorders, and current levels of self-efficacy. While the NLSY97 asked parents about their physical health and limitations, it did not collect information on their mental health.
- *Parents and Youth Experiences of Discrimination.* The panel recommends that the parent survey include items that ask parents about their own and their children's experiences of discrimination and bias across a range of key social and institutional settings. This can complement geographic measures of systemic inequalities by providing information on how families experience inequities.

- *Parental Time Investments and Views on Parental Investments.* The panel recommends expanding the ways in which parenting is conceptualized to include more about parents' time and money investments in children, and their views on the efficacy or importance parental investments. The NLSY97 focused parenting questions on the emotional quality of relationships, and this content area should be included in the NLSY26, but it did not collect any information on these other important dimensions of parenting.

Survey Design-Related Recommendations for the New Cohort

Degree of inclusion of recommended topics in NLSY97

The suggested topical content to be included in the NLSY26 study related to family background and youth's childhood are provided in Exhibit 1. Much of the content listed provided in Exhibit 1, was included in the NLSY97 early round interviews (although in some cases it was covered in later data collection but asked in a retrospective way). New content is proposed based primarily on our review of social and demographic trends, as well as the increasing body of work pointing to the importance of early adversity, parent-child relationships and parental investments as key drivers of youth wellbeing and human capital accumulation.

EXHIBIT 1

NLSY26 Survey content recommendations (and overlap with NLSY97).

Topic	Priority	In NLSY97 Parent Survey	In NLSY97 Youth Surveys	Recommendations and Notes	Panel Recommended Reporter	Topic Covered in Round 1 and/or Later
Immigration Status of Parents/Family and ICE Interactions	High	Some	NA	Add parent citizenship status and interactions with ICE	Parent	Later round
Household Composition, Family Structure and Stability	High	Yes	NA	Continue NLSY97 calendar approach in NLSY26	Parent	Round 1, and updated later rounds
LGBTQ+ Information About Parents/Family Member	High	No	NA	Add parent and family gender identity and sexual orientation information	Parent	Round 1
Parental SES- Income and Education	High	Yes	Yes		Parent, Administrative data	Round 1 and updated later
Welfare Program Participation	High	Yes	Yes	Items asked about youth participation if youth was "independent"	Parent, Administrative data	Round 1 and updated later

Parental Assets and Debt	High	Yes	Yes		Parent	Round 1 and updated later
Parent Employment/Unemployment/Occupation	High	Yes	NA	Continue NLSY97 calendar approach in NLSY26	Parent, Administrative data	Round 1 and updated later
Neighborhood Quality and Geocoded Address Information	High	Some	Some	NLSY97 includes interviewer observation and reports, and youth were asked about gangs. Recommend asking parents about their perceptions of neighborhood quality, and also ensuring residential addresses in childhood can be linked to other geographic data	Parent	Round 1
Home Residence (Homelessness, Stability, and Possible Movement in Response to Natural Disasters)	High	Some	NA	NLSY97 asked parents about hard times and "residential mobility"; recommend more detail (see above on address linking)	Parent	Round 1
Parent/Household Criminal Justice Involvement	High	No	Yes	NLSY97 youth are asked retrospectively about being charged (or convicted); NSLY97 parent survey asks explanations for a parental separation of 3 months or more and incarceration is one possible response	Parent	Round 1
COVID Disruptions to Family (Family Member Death, Parental Work Changes and Disruptions).	High	No	No		Parent	
Administrative Data on Family (UI, Tax Records, CPS)	High	No	No		NA	Round 1 and updated later
Child Welfare Involvement	High	No	No	NSLY97 parent survey asks for an explanation for a parental separation of 3 months or more and foster care is one possible response	Parent, Administrative data	Round 1
Early Developmental Delays and Health or Other Early Intervention Services	High	Some	Some	NLSY97 categories need updating (i.e., Mental retardation, but not other IDs)	Parent	Round 1
Quality of Parent's Co-Parenting and Romantic Relationships	High	Yes	Yes		Parent	Round 1 and updated
Parental Physical and Health Limitations	High	Yes	NA	NLSY97 Parents also asked about physical/emotional/health issues affecting youth respondent	Parent	Round 1 and updated
Parent and Youth Experiences of Discrimination	High	No	No		Parent	Round 1 or later
Parental Mental Health (Including retrospective)	High	No	No		Parent	Round 1 and updated later
Parent's Expectations of the Child's School and Work	High	Yes	NA		Parent	Round 1

Youth Autonomy and Control	High	Yes	Yes		Parent, youth	Round 1 and later
Parental Closeness/Relationship With Youth	High	No	Yes		Parent, youth	Round 1 and later
Parental Time Allocation to Youth Wellbeing	High	No	No		Parent	Round 1 and later
Parental Views on Returns On Investments in Children	High	No	No		Parent	Round 1 or later
Birth Outcomes (weight, gestational age, complications)	High	No	No		Parent, Administrative data	Round 1
Aspirations and Expectations for Youth's Future Economic Mobility and Success	Medium	No	No	NLSY97 parent survey asked about what the parent expected for youth's work and schooling at various ages	Parent	Round 1
Parents' Valued Traits in Children	Medium	No	No		Parents	Later rounds
Parents Beliefs About Economic Inequality and Upward/Downward Social Mobility	Medium	No	No		Parent	Later rounds
Type of Housing	Medium	Yes	NA		Youth	Later rounds
Youth Witnessing/Experiencing Violence Before Age 12	Medium	No	Yes	NLSY97 youth survey asks if the respondent's house or apartment was broken into, he or she was the victim of repeated bullying, and he or she saw someone get shot or shot at with a gun	Parent and Youth	Round 1 for Parent, later round for youth
Early Child Care and Education	Medium	Yes	NA		Parent	Round 1
Adverse Childhood Events (ACES)	Medium	No	No	NLSY97 asked about some ACEs experiences of youth retrospectively	Parent and Youth	Later rounds
Technology/Internet Access/Prevalence Technology Exposure	Medium	No	No		Parent	Round 1
Grandparent Residence	Low	Yes	Yes	NLSY97 Parents asked if they lived with Grandparents 3+ months since child was born; NLSY97 youth asked retrospectively	Parent or youth	Later rounds
Parent Religiosity	Low	Yes	NA		Parent	Later rounds
Civic Engagement/Participation	Low	No	No	NLSY97 Parents asked about PTA/PTO and other classroom volunteer help	Parent	Later rounds

Methodological issues to consider on recommended topics

We discuss three new features of survey design for the NLSY26: (1) collected information during later waves from at least one primary caregiver; (2) expanding the family background section to include information reported by multiple caregivers if they reside with the child (not just one parent/caregiver reporting on another caregiver); and (3) collecting youth specific background information from at least one caregiver in the case of multiple youth/siblings in the household. We believe that data collected from

caregivers need not be collected in the same mode as youth data are collected and suggest that a phone survey could be conducted with parents and other caregivers.[1]

Caregiver Interviews for More Than One Wave of Data Collection.
Repeated information, i.e., an annual brief survey of one caregiver for at least some of the follow-up years, would provide valuable information about key aspects of youth's family environments. We highly recommend that this happens for two key reasons. First, it will enable the NLSY26 to collect *more content on child and family backgrounds.* Given the need for enhancing the information available about earlier childhood and family contexts we recognize that it will require more than one survey. In addition, some aspects of parenting and the quality parent-child relationships that matter for children's development described above will evolve over time (e.g., the role of supervision grows as children age, monitoring of social media, the ways in which caregivers are involved with school and work contexts), and given that the youth will be of differing ages at the start of the study, additional surveys with parents will be particularly instructive for learning about changing (and similar) family contexts during adolescence. These additional surveys with caregivers in later waves can be administered via phone to *one* of the multiple caregivers identified at the time of the first survey, ideally a caregiver that is projected to be majority time co-resident with the youth.

Multiple Caregiver Data Collection.
The NSLY97 sought family background information from one adult caregiver. The preferred caregiver to be interviewed in the NLSY97 was the co-resident biological mother (and, then if the co-resident biological mother was not appropriate, prioritization shifted to the next eligible caregiver). Given *the vast increase in family complexity and importance of parenting and parent-child relationship quality* noted above, we recommend expanding family background data collection to get reports on certain youth and parenting specific topics from multiple caregivers. This is supported by social science suggesting that:

- Taking a broader view of who constitutes a caregiver and recognition of multiple caregiver roles will update an outdated heteronormative nuclear family mold that no longer represents the family composition or experiences of many children in the U.S. Other national studies of children in families (such as the DOE new cohort of the ECLSK) have given considerable thought to how best to select caregivers to report on family life and children and we recommend that the BLS likewise give this more attention, and possibly consult with these other studies.
- Each caregiver can have unique contribution and influences on the background characteristics of youth that predict their future educational attainment and labor force engagement. Caregivers have differing roles in caring for and investing in youth. Getting information directly from multiple caregivers should provide the most complete information especially for children who reside across two households.
- Caregiver specific investments will especially matter in the case of co-parenting, joint or split custody, and related circumstances when children/youth are splitting time across households.
- Congruence or variation in certain important early and related parenting and relationship influences offer a more holistic perspective on youth background, e.g., differences in parent disciplinary styles, or quality or quantity of time spent with youth, the quality of the adult/co-parenting relationship, bargaining and distribution of decision making and power, congruence or not of expectations and beliefs. Literature points to when congruence and complementarities in time and related investments in children matter to their future outcomes.
- A primary caregiver report of *other* caregiver behavior may be limited, incomplete, and/or biased.

[1] It is the understanding of the panel that phone interviews yield better data than web interviews, particularly for longer interviews. However, the panel leaves it to survey design experts to decide which mode is best suited for the parent interview.

Child Specific Family Background Information.
Whether one or multiple caregiver's complete surveys, information on selected youth specific background information will be key in the case of multiple eligible children/youth in the household, which occurred in NLSY97, and we assume is likely to happen again in NLSY26. However, we recommend *not* assuming that background information is identical for each child/youth in the sample primarily because timing of experiences matters and as noted the complexity of families may mean that not all siblings shared early childhood experiences. In some cases, collecting the start and end date of certain experiences will suffice (e.g., start date and end date of a life event such as parental work) as is the case in NLSY97, but in other cases the collection of child specific data will be more complicated (e.g., if there are different parents and co-residential situations).

Relevant alternative data sources to capture recommended topics

In addition to self-report surveys, we strongly suggest consideration of two additional forms of data collection in this report. First, we recommend consenting parents and youth to provide access to a range of administrative data from government records and other public sources. Second, we suggest collecting as much retrospective data on place of residence so that data users with access to these data can match individuals to administrative or other public data that will provide rich information on youth's childhood community and environmental contexts. (We understand that other panels are covering the specific importance of biomarkers and school record data so do not provide any discussion of these sources of data).

Administrative Individual Data.
Administrative data collected by federal, state, and local governments about individuals offer a substantive complement (*emphasis on this is extra not a replacement*) to self-report survey data for several reasons related to (1) data quality, (2) additional objective outcomes, and (3) expanded information on multiple members of the household.

EXHIBIT 2.
Topical Areas to be Measured with Household or Individual Administrative Data

Topical Area	Possible sources of Admin Data
Adults' Employment and Earnings	Unemployment Insurance, Tax records (IRS), New Hire Data (HHS)
Receipt of Government Benefits	Food stamp/SNAP (USDA), TANF cash assistance (HHS), childcare assistance (HHS), housing subsidy (HUD), state and federal Medicaid (state DHS), SSI and SSDI benefits (SSA), Child support (state OCS)
Early Education	Home visiting service, early head start, Head Start (HHS ~~Dept of Education~~)
Prenatal Care, Birthing Parent Names, Gestational Age, Birth Weight	Vital birth records (CDC)
Having or Birthing a Child (Teen, Young Adult, Subsequent Parenting)	Vital birth records (CDC), tax record (IRS)

Marriage	Marriage or domestic partnership records, tax records
Death in Family/Household or Own Death	Death/mortality records

Individual-level administrative data provide the following possible improvements in data quality compared with self-report survey data:

- A longer history of information that does not suffer from recall bias, this is particularly important for things such as the history of parental employment and earnings, which are critical inputs for children's development.
- Increase the amount and reliability of information on the key "life" events including, birth, marriage, and death (and selected information about their circumstances, (e.g., gestational age and birth weight, reason for death, name of spouse/partner), earnings, government benefits, child protective services, health care, credit/banking, criminal justice, school performance and disciplinary actions.
- Reflects a more accurate rendering of information that might not be as well defined or transparent to the respondent, or that might be subject to confirmation or social desirability bias (or measurement error more generally), thereby reducing under-reporting (e.g., receipts of benefits that are sometimes difficult to unpack due to complicated government funding models) or misreporting. There is substantial evidence from Meyer and Sullivan that income measurement based on self-report has significant measurement errors, and that this problem is worse for low-income families that may have volatile earnings.
- A way to track future outcomes with *little to no burden* on participants, and further with no attrition, such as youth's future labor force participation, college enrollment, information about birth outcomes etc.
- A way to reduce participant burden but still get information about multiple members of the household this seems especially important for complex families
- A way to improve survey and research methodology, as well as government databases, by better understanding how administrative and self-report are similar and different. For example, these data may provide an opportunity to understand who is likely to under-report benefit receipt and under what circumstances. It may also be instructive for government and public entities to learn that their data might have substantial missing or mis-measured information about program participants.

Challenges include:

- Collecting some administrative data can be complicated because it is not all "owned" by the same entity (or entities). This makes it a time-consuming effort because some forms of administrative data require approval from and data use agreements with states or other localities (different districts).
- Some jurisdictions and programs may have very specific and cumbersome consent processes that are difficult to know in advance without significant legwork (FERPA, HIPAA).
- Data harmonization over time and across jurisdictions may be complicated by changes in reporting, data tracking systems or related metrics
- Quality of data match will be dependent on quality, availability, and validity of personal identifying information
- May requires consent and enough personally identifying information for multiple household members
- Requires administrative data specific analytic and data processing expertise

Administrative and Other Public Data Related to Youth's Residential Geographic Location.
An important innovation in social science research has been the ability to match an individual residential address to a variety of existing governmental and public data sources that provide information at the zip code (or other geographic units). These additional sources of information have the potential to measure a large quality and quantity of a variety of environmental factors including such things as Covid transmission, housing prices and stock, water and air quality, proximity to super fund sites, neighborhood crime, as well as exposure to natural disasters and weather events. Much of these data exist in historical forms, and as such provide an exciting and important avenue to understand how youths' health and development is affected by these early life experiences—and how their human capital accumulation and later health and labor markets are affected by these early experiences. To enable such geographic matching, we strongly urge BLS to consider collecting retrospective information about the youths' addresses of residence from parents and find a feasible way to facilitate users matching these addresses with other sources of existing governmental and public data on community contexts.

This effort will not be without some challenges including:

- The geographic units of measures may not be well aligned for research purposes. For example, geographic information being provided for address in terms of a census block group which may be hard to link to school district level data.
- Disclosure and confidentiality concerns may limit use of these outcomes for certain populations or regions
- Clean address history can be burdensome to collect and individual specific, e.g., a youth who splits time across households or rotates across households and settings (including for example foster care)

Top Ranked Topic- and Survey Design-Related Recommendations

Prioritized recommendations

Exhibit 1 provides our list of recommendations and their priority ranking for topical content that will be included in parent or youth surveys. We appreciate that many of the topics we recommend as "high" priorities were part of the NLSY97, and as such we do not provide further discussion of their importance, as we assume that BLS sees value in their inclusion. We discuss our recommendations in two categories: 1) topical content and 2) study design.

Survey Content.
Put simply our recommendation is to include at least some survey items on all the topics we rate as a high priority in Exhibit 1. We have ranked these topics as important because they will increase the relevance of the NLSY26 for understanding how family background and childhood affect children's subsequent life chances, with especially relevant links to educational attainment and human capital formation, mental and physical health, family formation, and labor market outcomes. In addition, including these topics will enable a range of social science researchers from diverse disciplines to answer important research questions that cannot be answered with other studies' data. For example, while other studies might have detailed information about childhood family structure or parental investments, they lack detailed information about labor market outcomes or mental health in adulthood. Thus, the value of these recommended topics is ultimately due to their inclusion in the NLSY26—a prospective cohort study with

detailed information about later education, employment, and economic trajectories across multiple life stages. Moreover, the new topics that we recommend highly are important because they will provide foundational information about a range of critical inequities that affect communities and families. It is only by fully understanding these inequities that we can consider efforts to reduce them. Thus, a study such as the NLSY26 with a large representative sample, significant oversamples of key demographic subgroups, that is geographically diverse, provided an unprecedented opportunity to learn more about how intersections of family and community contexts shape youth's lives. These topics include (in no particular order): parents' gender identity and sexual orientation; parent and youth criminal justice and child welfare system involvement; parental investments and parents' expected returns on investment; quality of parenting; parents' mental health; parent and youth's experiences of discrimination.

Our panel recommended content on the social and economic disruption associated with the COVID pandemic highly. This ranking is based on the fact that at this point in our historical time, as experts we do not yet know much about what the medium- or long-run effects of the pandemic disruptions will be on youth. Thus, we felt like the NLSY26 provides a unique opportunity to measure the youth's experiences and learn how it affects their educational and economic trajectories. We caution, however, that as more research on the short-term impact of pandemic is completed and more becomes known about how families and youth have adjusted, this topic may no longer be of as much value. Likewise, we may learn that parents are not able to reliably recall the details about such disruptions, and information such as this may be important to consider in re-evaluating the high-priority ranking we gave it.

It is also worth noting that we ranked questions about parents' religiosity, which were in the NLSY97 parent interview, as a "low priority." We arrived at this ranking because we know of no rigorous research that suggests this is an important determinant of youth's developmental outcomes, human capital accumulation, labor market trajectories or other key outcomes of interest. Parents' civic engagement was suggested in a brainstorming session, but ranked as a low priority for the same reasons.

Study design.

The panel uniformly agreed that among recommended changes that could be implemented in the NLSY26 that the highest priority should be given to incorporating as many sources of retrospective and prospective administrative data, and residential address information, as feasible. As described earlier in the report there are many advantages to administrative data collection. Key among them is the ability to collect more detailed and reliable data on important topics with minimum respondent burden. Many studies have demonstrated the high scientific value and feasibility of linking administrative data with survey studies, and we think this should be a top priority for the BLS. It will be an invaluable addition to the NLSY26 because of the administrative data's potential high level of detail and reliability and the way in which will be able to increase the range of content in the study all of which cannot be achieved through survey data collection.

Our second recommendation is to collect multiple waves of survey data from one caregiver. We suggest that this approach would enable the NLSY26 to cover more family background content, and also provide parent reports of important family contexts that change dramatically during adolescence (parental investments, parent-child relationships, etc.). While youth may be able to provide self-reports on some of these changes, we believe that getting caregiver reports at different stages will not only enable a richer data collection approach that will be beneficial for understanding youth's later education and employment trajectories.

The final recommendation is to collect at least one interview from more than one primary caregiver. Although more panel members ranked multiple waves of parent surveys ahead of conducting surveys with multiple caregivers, there was significant enthusiasm for this design feature, and some members ranked

this higher than others. The key reasons for undertaking interviews with more than one caregiver are provided earlier in the report, but in sum youth have increasingly complex families, and an effort to understand the youth's family background is increasingly misguided if it continues to only focus a single caregiver (and even more so if outdated notions of biological mothers as the primary caregiver are perpetuated). We know that caregivers have divergent views and knowledge about youth, and only surveying one caregiver will likely provide incomplete information about family background and contexts.

Tradeoffs that informed the ranking of recommendations

In discussion with the content panel and NORC, the chair of the panel defined the scope of the content panel work in the following way— the content panel was to make recommendations about any content that should be collected from parents (rather than youth themselves) and any content that occurred in the youth's life prior to the first wave of data collection, with the exception of the youth's health and school related experiences. In addition, the content panel was to focus primarily on the scientific contribution of recommended content, and not to worry as much about the difficulty or costs of particular content and survey design elements. We recognize that there are numerous decisions to be made tradeoffs in whether or not to collect data and in what mode to collect the data, but caution that as content panel we are in no position to understand the full extent of the participant burden and cost constraints. Finally, the panel was to provide recommendations for content topics, but with a few exceptions not to recommend specific details or survey items within those topics.

Having a defined task in this way, the panel turned to developing our recommendations. We developed recommendations and rankings in an iterative process. First, we began brainstorming a list of content topics that we thought were important in light of social and demographic trends and research findings since the fielding of the NLSY97. After generating this list, we then returned to the "base case" of the NLSY97 by considering the content and survey design elements of the NLSY97. We created a table that considered how the list of topics we had generated were handled in the NLSY97 (Exhibit 1). We also added some topics to the list which had not been brought up during the brainstorming session but seemed worthy of inclusion and/or discussion. This list of topics was given preliminary rankings by the panel chair based on the panel's conversation and circulated to the panel via email for feedback. Then, during a later meeting the proposed content recommendation rankings were discussed and revised. Finally, recommendations for study design were discussed in detail and ranked. The recommendations and rankings reflect the consensus opinion of the content panel.

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