

Welsh Health Survey User Guide



This guide provides a brief overview of the Welsh Health Survey and a summary of the main reports and datasets available.

The Welsh Health Survey

The Welsh Health Survey (WHS) in its current form began in 2003, replacing the previous Welsh Health Survey and the Health in Wales Survey. WHS covers a range of health related issues including health status, lifestyle and health behaviours, and use of health services.

The survey is funded by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and is carried out by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen).

Methodology¹

Each year, data is collected from a representative sample of around 15,000 adults and 3,000 children in Wales, using a short household interview and individual self-completion questionnaires completed by all adults and up to two children in each household. The survey can be carried out in Welsh or English depending on the respondent's preference.

Content¹

The content of the adult questionnaire has remained fairly stable since 2003, covering:

- health status, including general health and wellbeing, illness, eyesight and hearing
- health-related behaviours such as smoking, drinking, fruit and vegetable consumption, Body Mass Index and physical activity
- health services including GP, hospital visits and use of other services like dentists, opticians and NHS Direct.

Some changes have been made to reflect changes to legislation, such as the ban on smoking in public places, or to collect more detail on specific aspects of health, such as alcohol consumption.

The child component was extended in WHS 2007 to include three age specific individual questionnaires, along with height and weight measurements for children aged 2-15 years. Questionnaires are completed by children aged 13-15, or by the parents of younger children and cover broadly similar topic areas to the adult questionnaire.

Use of WHS data

The WHS is designed to provide data at national and local authority level and can also be analysed at local health board level.² Outputs from the WHS are relevant to those working in national and local government, NHS, research and academic settings. However, information from the WHS is also pertinent to a wider general audience, particularly those living in Wales.

A user evaluation of WHS conducted in 2009¹ found that information from the survey is used in a wide variety of contexts ranging from background and contextual information, through developing and monitoring health strategies, to academic research and teaching.

Reports and other publications

Annual substantive report

The main substantive report is produced by the Welsh Assembly Government on an annual basis.¹ The report is published in September of the year following fieldwork and available for download from the WAG website as well as in hard copy.

The report is divided into several sections, aligned with questionnaire content and containing key analyses of health status and illness; health related behaviours; use of health services; and the health of children. The report also contains copies of the individual questionnaires. All the information is published in English and Welsh within a single report.

Technical report

NatCen produce a technical report to accompany the main substantive report; the two reports are published simultaneously on the WAG website.¹ This provides details of the survey methodology along with key documentation. The description of methodology covers: survey and sample design; fieldwork procedures and data collection; response at household and individual level; data preparation; weighting and sampling errors; and outputs.

Headline results

Headline results are produced annually, around four months before the main substantive report. These are published on the WAG website¹ and cover adult and child data on health status and lifestyle, including key trends data

Local authority tables

Each year a set of tables is produced showing key WHS estimates at local authority/health board level, based on two years of data combined.¹

Topic reports

One-off reports based on WHS data are available through the main WHS website, such as the report on the health of carers and factors associated with smoking.¹

Reports on survey development

The WHS website also contains several reports on work carried out as part of WHS development.¹ A substantial amount of development work was carried out to extend the child component of WHS, including cognitive testing of new questions and a split sample experiment to assess the impact of the extended child questionnaire on response and data quality. More recently, a user evaluation of the WHS and work on WHS dissemination have also been carried out.¹

Results from WHS are also quoted in a wide range of other reports, including Chief Medical Officer's annual report, profiles produced by Public Health Wales, etc.

Datasets

Main dataset

The main WHS dataset is lodged with the UK data archive each year, shortly after the main substantive and technical reports are published. The archived dataset is an anonymised dataset containing the main and derived variables for the report, along with supporting documentation: a user guide; a list of main variables; a list of derived variables with the accompanying syntax; and questionnaire documentation.

Analysis of more detailed data

From time to time researchers may need to analyse WHS data at a greater level of detail than is available on the Data Archive. Before data is lodged with the data archive key variables are removed to preserve respondent confidentiality and to prevent disclosure. Personal identifiers and low level geographic information are removed. Requests for more detailed data can be submitted to NatCen and/or WAG and will be considered, on a case by case basis.

Introductory dataset

There is also an introductory dataset available that might be helpful for new data users. This contains a selection of key variables - with fewer variables than the main dataset, it is easier to use.

Survey related websites

Survey website

The main source of Welsh Health Survey information is the Welsh Assembly Government website.¹ The WHS site is regularly updated with relevant publications and contains topic reports and reports of development work, as well as the main substantive and technical reports.

UK Data Archive (UKDA)

The UK Data Archive (UKDA) is described on its website as: “*curator of the largest collection of digital data in the social sciences and humanities in the UK*”.³ The UKDA is a primary resource for researchers involved in secondary analysis, providing access to several thousand datasets and related documentation in a variety of areas. The UKDA carries out data management, including data acquisition, processing and dissemination of a range of quantitative and longitudinal datasets and qualitative data. At October 2010 there were six years of WHS available on the Data Archive.

Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS)

The ESDS website provides information in similar format for a range of surveys. Information about the survey, in the form of a study description, an online variable list and

survey documentation, including the questionnaire, is available to all users. Some government datasets are also available to all users via the ESDS Nesstar catalogue, allowing users to search for and explore data. Registered users can download datasets in several formats and can request to be notified of new datasets available on the site. Those who have registered with ESDS also have more ‘extensive’ access to Nesstar and can use this to download data in a range of formats.

ESDS also provide good support for new data users at a general level⁴ with a ‘getting started’ guide for each survey, introductory information on general topics such as the introduction to the health survey and a guide to Stata and SPSS analysis⁵.

Online data manipulation

Nesstar

Nesstar is a system that allows users to publish and to explore data online. The webview allows data users to explore data from WHS and other surveys online. Nesstar may be accessed through ESDS and a brief introduction to the system is available online.⁶ Nesstar allows data users, particularly those without access to other analysis packages, to explore a range of different datasets. Registered users have access to a range of analyses and may also choose to share their analyses with colleagues or the wider Nesstar community.

User groups and further support

Health Surveys User Group

The ESDS has, since 2005, organised a one day meeting for health surveys – the Health Surveys User Group. In the past this has included presentations by the Welsh Health Survey, the Health Survey for England, the Scottish Health Survey, English Longitudinal Survey of Ageing and related secondary analysis. Presentations on each of the key surveys and on related secondary analysis studies, or work of interest, take place throughout the day, and the meeting gives those who commission the surveys, survey

researchers and data users the opportunity to discuss the surveys. Details of the most recent meeting are shown here.⁷ Information about the HSUG is available on the ESDS website and also, to registered users, through JISC-mail.⁸

Survey Resources Network

The Survey Resources Network (SRN) is funded by the ESRC and managed by the University of Essex along with other academic and research centres. The SRN was developed to provide: information and resources for survey researchers through the Survey Question Bank⁹; opportunities for training and developing survey skills through the Survey Skills Programme.¹⁰

Courses

There are general training resources for data users. The National Centre for Social Research hold courses on survey analysis and various aspects of survey design.¹¹ The Cathie Marsh Centre for Census and Survey Research (CCSR) offer a range of courses targeted at new and experienced data users and the list of upcoming courses can be accessed through the ESDS site.¹² A range of courses are also provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS)¹³, Royal Statistical Society (RSS)¹⁴ and Courses in Applied Social Surveys (CASS).¹⁵

Contact details

For more information on this research please look at the links provided.

If you have any general queries about WHS, please contact:

stats.healthinfo@wales.gsi.gov.uk

References

¹ Welsh Health Survey:

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/health/health-survey/?lang=en>

² Local Health Boards in Wales:

<http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/healthinformation/localhealthboards/>

³ UK Data Archive: <http://www.esds.ac.uk/>

⁴ Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS), support for new users:

<http://www.esds.ac.uk/support/newuser.asp>

⁵ ESDS, overview of health data and support for analysis:

<http://www.esds.ac.uk/government/resources/analysis/>

⁶ Nesstar webview: <http://nesstar-demo.nsd.uib.no/webview/>

⁷ ESDS Health Surveys User Group:

<http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/esds/events/past.shtml>

⁸ JISC mail: <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/>

⁹ Survey Question Bank:

<http://www.surveynet.ac.uk/sqb/introduction.asp>

¹⁰ Survey Skills Programme:

<http://www.surveynet.ac.uk/ssp/introduction.asp>

¹¹ NatCen learning:

<http://www.natcen.ac.uk/our-training>

¹² ESDS, training:

<http://www.esds.ac.uk/support/training.asp>

¹³ Office for National Statistics training:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/about/what-we-do/training/courses/index.html>

¹⁴ Royal Statistical Society professional development centre:

<http://www.rss.org.uk/main.asp?page=2806>

¹⁵ Courses in Applied Social Surveys (CASS):

<http://www.s3ri.soton.ac.uk/cass/>

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