



General Lifestyle Survey Overview

A report on the 2009 General Lifestyle Survey

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Office for National Statistics

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Introduction

This report presents the latest information from the General LiFestyle Survey (GLF) for the 2009 calendar year (January to December). The report comprises a basic overview, covering the main topics of the survey, and tabular output for the Smoking; Drinking; Housing and consumer durables; Marriage and cohabitation; Pensions; and General health and use of health services topic areas. 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.

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 (www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=15381&Pos=&ColRank=1&Rank=422).

Survey background

The GLF is a multi-purpose continuous survey carried out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). It collects information on a range of topics from people living in private households in Great Britain. 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.

The survey presents a picture of households, families and people living 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.

The interview consists of questions relating to the household, answered by a household reference person or 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

The 2009 GLF was sponsored by ONS, the NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care, Department for Work and Pensions, HM Revenue & Customs and Scottish Government.

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 Appendix B.

The 2009 survey

In 2009, 8,206 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 73 per cent. Further details about the sample design and response are given in Appendix B.

A glossary of definitions and terms used throughout the report and notes on how these have changed over time is provided in Appendix A.

The survey results (from 1998) 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 Appendix D.

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 Appendix C.

The questionnaire that was used to collect the 2009 survey data is given in Appendix E; and a list of the main topics covered by the survey since it began in 1971 is provided in Appendix F.

Related links

A separate report on the 2009 GLF smoking and drinking results can be found on the ONS website at www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=5756.

GLF 2009 results will be combined with those from other sources in the ONS *Social Trends*, *Pension Trends* and *Health Statistics Quarterly* releases that will be published later in 2011.

Social Trends:

www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=13675&Pos=&ColRank=1&Rank=422

Pension Trends:

www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=14173&Pos=&ColRank=1&Rank=422

Health Statistics Quarterly:

www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=6725&Pos=&ColRank=2&Rank=448

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): www.csu.nisra.gov.uk/survey.asp29.htm

Additional tabulations

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. The ONS can provide more detailed analysis of the tables in this report, and can also provide additional tabulations to meet specific requests. A charge will be made to cover the cost of providing additional information.

Anonymised microdata from the GLF and GHS surveys are available from the United Kingdom Data Archive. Details on access arrangements and associated costs can be found at www.data-archive.ac.uk or by telephoning 01206 872143.

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Overview

This overview provides a brief summary of some of the key findings from the General LiFestyle Survey (GLF), and the General Household Survey (GHS). There is separate report for the smoking and drinking survey topics: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=5756>.

All of the tables referred to in the overview can be accessed by clicking on the links in the *List of tables* section of the report.

Households, families and people

Between 1971 and 1991 the average size of a household in Great Britain declined from 2.91 persons to 2.48. It continued to decline, though at a slower rate, throughout the 1990s falling to 2.32 by 1998, since then it has changed little. In 2009 the average number of persons per household was 2.35. ([Table 3.1](#))

The proportion of people that live alone has increased considerably since the 1970s. In 1973, 9 per cent of adults lived alone, compared with 16 per cent of adults in 2009. There were also marked differences between the age groups. For example, adults aged 25 to 44 were five times more likely to live alone in 2009 (10 per cent) than in 1973 (2 per cent). ([Table 3.3](#))

In 2009, 77 per cent of families with dependent children in Great Britain were headed by a married or cohabiting couple, no change since 2007. This proportion fell markedly in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, (92 per cent of families were of this type in 1971) but has changed little since the late 1990s. The percentage of families that are headed by a lone mother increased from 7 per cent in 1971 to 22 per cent in 1998 and has changed little since then. In 2009, 20 per cent of families were headed by a lone mother. The proportion headed by a lone father has increased marginally since the early 1970s, but since the mid-1990s has remained at about 2 to 3 per cent. In total, the proportion of families headed by a lone parent was 8 per cent in 1971, but is nearly three times higher in 2009 at 23 per cent. ([Table 3.6](#))

In 2009, 51 per cent of families with dependent children headed by a lone parent, had a usual weekly gross income of £300 or less; compared with only 11 per cent of families headed by a married couple and 15 per cent of those headed by a cohabiting couple. ([Table 3.11](#))

Housing and consumer durables

Between 1971 and 2009 the proportion of households owning their home rose from 49 per cent to 69 per cent. Most of the increase occurred during the 1980s and was due to a marked increase in the proportion of households owning with a mortgage. ([Table 4.1](#))

The percentage of households renting council homes increased from 31 per cent in 1971 to 34 per cent in 1981, but since then has declined steadily to 10 per cent in 2009. ([Table 4.1](#))

The percentage of households renting from a housing association increased from 1 per cent in 1971 to 3 per cent in 1991 with the increase continuing since then to 8 per cent in 2009. ([Table 4.1](#))

The percentage of households renting privately fell from 20 per cent in 1971 to 10 per cent in 1995. Between 1995 and 2008 the proportion remained between 9 and 11 per cent, but increased to 13 per cent in 2009. This increase was offset by a decrease in the proportion of owner occupiers with a mortgage from 39 per cent in 2008 to 37 per cent in 2009. ([Table 4.1](#))

The shift between owner occupiers with a mortgage and private renters is most evident for households where the household reference person (HRP) had been resident for less than 2 years. For example, the proportion of owner-occupiers with a mortgage decreased from 43 per cent in 2008 to 27 per cent in 2009, but the proportion of private renters increased from 31 per cent to 50 per cent for the group where length of residency of the HRP was 12 months but less than 2 years. ([Table 4.13](#))

Since the early 1970s the survey has recorded a significant increase in the ownership of many consumer durables and household amenities. For example, 97 per cent of households had central heating in 2009, compared with only 37 per cent in 1972. Access to a car or van has also risen since the survey began (at least one car or van was available to 52 per cent of households in 1972, this increased to 77 per cent in 2009). ([Table 4.19](#))

Just over half (54 per cent) of all households had a telephone in 1975. In 2009 over 99 per cent had a phone (either fixed or mobile). In 2000, when the GHS first asked about mobile phones, the proportion of households in which at least one person had a mobile phone was 58 per cent; this increased to 84 per cent in 2009. ([Table 4.19](#))

The proportion of households with a home computer increased from 13 per cent in 1985 to 76 per cent of all households in 2009. ([Table 4.19](#))

Marriage and cohabitation

In the 1970s the GHS asked women aged 18 to 49 about their current marriage, since then the questions have been developed and extended from time to time to reflect changes taking place in society. The survey now obtains information about marital history and periods of cohabitation from all adults aged 16 to 59.

In 2009, 13 per cent of both men and women aged 16 to 59 were cohabiting. Among men aged 16 to 59, those in the 25 to 34 age groups were more likely to cohabit than any other age group (25 per cent of men aged 25 to 29 and 28 per cent of men aged 30 to 34, compared with fewer than 18 per cent in all other age groups). Among women, 28 per cent of those aged 25 to 29 were cohabiting compared with 3 to 23 per cent in the other age groups. However the difference between the 25 to 29 and 30 to 34 age groups was not statistically significant in 2009. ([Table 5.3](#))

Among women aged 18 to 49, the longest time series for which data are available, the proportion of women who were married at the time of interview declined from 74 per cent in 1979 to 47 per cent in 2009. The proportion of women who were single (i.e. who had never been married) more than doubled from 18 per cent in 1979 to 38 per cent in 2002. In 2009, 43 per cent of women aged 18 to 49 were single. ([Table 5.7](#))

The proportion of non-married women aged 18 to 49 who were cohabiting at the time of interview, has increased from 11 per cent in 1979 to 32 per cent in 2009. ([Table 5.8](#))

Occupational and personal pension schemes

The GHS has included questions on occupational pensions on a regular basis since 1981 and on personal pensions since 1987. The GLF continues to include these questions.

Occupational pension schemes are schemes provided by employers. They do not include group personal pensions, group stakeholder pensions or group self-invested personal pensions. Since 1989, trends in participation in occupational pension schemes have differed for men and women and for those working part-time and full-time.

The proportion of men working full-time who were members of their current employer's occupational pension scheme decreased from 64 per cent in 1989 to 54 per cent in 2000 and has remained at between 53 and 55 per cent every year since then. In 2009, 54 per cent of men working full-time were members of their current employer's occupational pension scheme. The percentage of women working full-time who were members of their current employer's occupational pension scheme showed a different pattern, rising from 55 per cent in 1989 to 60 per cent in 2002. In 2009, 58 per cent of women working full-time were members of their current employer's occupational pension scheme. ([Table 6.3](#))

Among women working part-time, the proportions who were members of their current employer's occupational pension scheme has increased from 15 per cent in 1989 to 40 per cent in 2009. ([Table 6.3](#))

Since 1991 the survey has provided trend data on personal pension arrangements among self-employed men. The possession of a current personal pension among self-employed men working full-time remained fairly stable between 1991 and 1998 at around two thirds. Between 1998 and 2009 the proportion with a current personal pension decreased from 64 per cent to 38 per cent. ([Table 6.13](#))

For full-time and part-time combined, self-employed men were more likely than self-employed women to have a current personal pension arrangements (35 per cent of self-employed men compared with 22 per cent of self-employed women were contributing to a personal pension scheme in 2009). Over a third (39 per cent) of self-employed men had never had a personal pension compared with over a half (58 per cent) of women. ([Table 6.12](#))

General health and use of health services

The GLF provides information about the self-reported health of adults and, by proxy, children including their use of health services.

In 2008 the question relating to health over the previous 12 months, that had three possible responses; 'good', 'fairly good' or 'not good', was replaced by a question relating to health in general with five possible responses; 'very good', 'good', 'fair', 'bad' or 'very bad'. This new question, harmonised with national surveys across the European Union, was originally added to the GHS in 2005 and a time series from 2005 to 2009 is provided in table 7.1. In 2009, 40 per cent of adults said their general health was very good, 39 per cent reported good health, 15 per cent reported they had fair health, 5 per cent reported they had bad health and 1 per cent said their health was very bad. ([Table 7.1](#))

To allow comparisons between the two general health questions, both were included on the GHS (and asked of all adults) between 2005 and 2007, with the three-category question asked first. This means that responses during this period may be subject to bias caused by question exposure/order effects, for example, where adults who might have otherwise responded 'very good' to the five-category question could have responded 'good' in line with the highest category of the three-category question. This might explain the notable change in the percentages between the 'very good' and 'good' categories between 2007 and 2008. Therefore care should be taken if drawing conclusions concerning this change. ([Table 7.1](#))

Thirty per cent of people (averaged over all age groups) reported a long standing illness or disability in 2009. Just over half of those with long standing illness or disability, 18 per cent of all respondents, said that it limited their activities. ([Table 7.2](#))

In 2009, 15 per cent of adults and children had consulted an NHS GP in the 14 days before interview. This proportion has changed little in the previous 30 years. Females had an average of six NHS GP consultations per year, whereas males had four. ([Table 7.17](#) and [Table 7.18](#))

The proportion of respondents who had attended an outpatient or casualty department in the three months before interview increased from 10 per cent in 1972 to 16 per cent in 1998 and then fell to 14 per cent in 2001. In 2009, 13 per cent of all respondents had attended an outpatient or casualty department in the three months before interview. ([Table 7.26](#))

The proportion of people attending hospitals as day patients in the twelve months before interview increased since this question was first asked in 1992, from 4 per cent to 8 per cent in 2009. A similar proportion of respondents, 7 per cent, reported an inpatient stay in the twelve months before interview, this has stayed the same since 2006. ([Table 7.27](#) and [Table 7.28](#))

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	(b) Average number of restricted activity days per person per year due to illness or injury, by sex, age and socio-economic classification of household reference person
7.7	Chronic sickness: prevalence of reported long-standing illness or disability by sex, age and economic activity status
7.8	Chronic sickness: prevalence of reported limiting long-standing illness or disability by sex, age and economic activity status
7.9	Acute sickness
	(a) Prevalence of reported restricted activity in the 14 days before interview due to illness or injury, by sex, age and economic activity status
	(b) Average number of restricted activity days per person per year due to illness or injury, by sex, age and economic activity status
7.10	Self-reported sickness by sex and Government Office Region: percentage of persons who reported:
	(a) long-standing illness or disability
	(b) limiting long-standing illness or disability
	(c) restricted activity in the 14 days before interview due to illness or injury (acute sickness)
7.11	Chronic sickness: rate per 1000 reporting long-standing condition groups, by sex
7.12	Chronic sickness: rate per 1000 reporting long-standing condition groups, by age
7.13	Chronic sickness: rate per 1000 reporting selected long-standing condition group, by age and sex
7.14	Chronic sickness: rate per 1000 reporting selected long-standing conditions, by sex and age
7.15	Chronic sickness: rate per 1000 reporting selected long-standing condition groups, by socio-economic classification of household reference person
7.16	Chronic sickness: rate per 1000 reporting selected long-standing condition groups, by sex and age and socio-economic classification of household reference person
7.17	Trends in consultations with an NHS GP in the 14 days before interview by sex and age: 1972 to 2009
7.18	Average number of NHS GP consultations per person per year by sex and age: 1972 to 2009
7.19	NHS GP consultations: trends in site of consultation: 1971 to 2009
7.20	Percentage of persons who consulted an NHS GP in the 14 days before interview by sex and site of consultation, and by age and site of consultation
7.21	NHS GP consultations
	(a) Percentage of persons who consulted a doctor in the 14 days before interview by sex, age and economic activity status
	(b) Average number of consultations per person per year, by sex, age and economic activity status
7.22	Percentage of persons consulting an NHS GP in the 14 days before interview who obtained a prescription from the doctor, by sex, age and socio-economic classification of household reference person
7.23	GP consultations: consultations with a doctor in the 14 days before interview by sex of person consulting and whether consultation was NHS or private
7.24	Trends in reported consultations with a practice nurse by sex and age: 2000 to 2009
	(a) percentage consulting a practice nurse in the 14 days before interview
	(b) average number of consultations with a practice nurse per person per year
7.25	Percentage of children using health services other than a doctor in the 14 days before interview

7.26	Trends in percentages of persons who reported attending an outpatient or casualty department in the 3 months before interview by sex and age: 1972 to 2009
7.27	Trends in day-patient treatment in the 12 months before interview by sex and age: 1992 to 2009
7.28	Trends in inpatient stays in the 12 months before interview by sex and age: 1982 to 2009
7.29	Average number of nights spent in hospital as an inpatient during the 12 months before interview, by sex and age
7.30	Inpatient stays and outpatient attendances
	(a) average number of inpatient stays per 100 persons in a 12-month reference period, by sex and age
	(b) average number of outpatient attendances per 100 persons per year, by sex and age

Notes to tables

1. **Harmonised outputs:** where appropriate, tables including marital status, living arrangements, ethnic groups, tenure, economic activity, accommodation type, length of residence and general health have adopted the harmonised output categories described on the Office for National Statistics website. However, where long established time series are shown, harmonised outputs may not have been used.
2. **Classification variables:** variables such as age and income, are not presented in a standard form throughout the report partly because the groupings of interest depend on the subject matter of the chapter, and partly because many of the trend series were started when the results used in the report had to be extracted from tabulations prepared to meet different departmental requirements.
3. **Non-response and missing information:** the information from a household which co-operates in the survey may be incomplete, either because of a partial refusal (for example, to income), or because information was collected by proxy and certain questions omitted if considered inappropriate for proxy interviews (for example, marriage and cohabitation data), or because a particular item was missed because of lack of understanding or an error.

Households that did not co-operate at all are omitted from all the analyses; those who omitted whole sections (for example, marriages) because they were partial refusals or interviewed by proxy are omitted from the analyses of that section. The 'no answers' arising from the omission of particular items have been excluded from the base numbers shown in the tables and from the bases used for percentages. Socio-economic classification and income variables are the most common variables which have too many missing answers to ignore.

4. **Base numbers:** The reliability of estimates with a small base were investigated. Shaded figures indicate the estimates are unreliable and any analysis using these figures may be invalid. Any use of these shaded figures must be accompanied by this disclaimer.
5. **Percentages:** A percentage may be quoted in the text for a single category that is identifiable in the tables only by summing two or more component percentages. In order to avoid rounding errors, the percentage has been recalculated for the single category and therefore may differ by one percentage point from the sum of the percentages derived from the tables.

The row or column percentages may add to 99% or 101% because of rounding.

6. **Conventions:** The following conventions have been used within tables:
 - .. data not available
 - category not applicable
 - 0 less than 0.5% or no observations

7. **Statistical significance:** Unless otherwise stated, changes and differences mentioned in the text have been found to be statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence level.
8. **Mean:** Throughout the report the arithmetic term 'mean' is used rather than 'average'. The mean is a measure of the central tendency for continuous variables, calculated as the sum of all scores in a distribution, divided by the total number of scores.
9. **Weighting:** All percentages and means presented in the tables in the substantive chapters are based on data weighted to compensate for differential non-response. Both the unweighted and weighted bases are given. The unweighted base represents the number of people / households interviewed in the specified group. The weighted base gives an estimate in thousands.

Trend tables show unweighted and weighted figures for 1998 to give an indication of the effect of the weighting.

Missing answers are excluded from the tables and in some cases this is reflected in the weighted bases, that is, these numbers vary between tables. For this reason, the bases themselves are not recommended as a source for population estimates.

Reference to technical appendices

The General Lifestyle Survey is supported by a number of technical appendices that provide information about the methodology that is used on the survey. The appendices can be accessed by clicking on the references below.

A. Definitions and Terms

B. Sample Design and Response

C. Sampling Errors

D. Weighting

E. Household and Individual Questionnaires

F. Summary of main topics included in GHS/GLF questionnaires: 1971 to 2009