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An ESRC Data
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Better Knowledge Better Society

Data Brief 7: National
Survey for Wales 2012-2015

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Introduction

The National Survey for Wales is the Welsh Government's major survey of the general population in Wales. Each year, a representative sample of around 14,500 people across Wales take part in the survey. The National Survey covers a wide range of topics with a particular focus on well-being and people's views of public services in Wales. This data brief summarises the data items that are available to researchers and the particular issues surrounding the use of the National Survey.

Arolwg Cenedlaethol Cymru yw arolwg mawr Llywodraeth Cymru o'r boblogaeth gyffredinol yng Nghymru. Bob blwyddyn, mae sampl cynrychiadol yn cynnwys oddeutu 14,500 o bobl ledled Cymru yn cymryd rhan yn yr arolwg. Mae'r Arolwg Cenedlaethol yn mynd i'r afael ag ystod eang o bynciau gan ganolbwyntio ar les a safbwyntiau pobl am wasanaethau cyhoeddus yng Nghymru. Mae'r briff data hwn yn crynhoi'r eitemau data sydd ar gael i ymchwilyr a'r materion penodol sy'n ymwneud â defnydd yr Arolwg Cenedlaethol.

The National Survey for Wales 2012 – 2015 includes around 14,500 people a year across the whole of Wales¹, and is a key source of information about life for the population of Wales. The survey covers a wide range of topics with a focus on well-being and people's views and experiences of public service provision in Wales.

Data from the National Survey for Wales are made available to researchers in an anonymised format via the ESRC UK Data Archive (Study Number 7320, 7552, 7767). For the purposes of data linking, linkable data sets can be accessed directly from the Secure Anonymised Information Linkage (SAIL) Databank at Swansea University.

The National Survey ran from 2012 to 2015 in its current format, replacing the Living in Wales Survey, which ran from 2004 to 2008 (held at the UK Data Archive under Study Number 33397). Additionally, there was a pilot of the National Survey for Wales in 2009-10 (Study Number 6720), however the sampling frame and methodology used differ to the National Survey 2012 - 2015 as outlined in this data brief.

An expanded version of the National Survey, beginning in 2016, will cover similar topics as well as a selection of topics from four other surveys. These are the Welsh Health Survey, the Active Adults Survey, the Arts in Wales Survey and the Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey, all of which come to an end in 2014 or 2015. The first results from the new design will be published in June 2017 and will be available via the UK Data Archive shortly afterwards.

¹ <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/national-survey/?lang=en>

Structure and Content

The National Survey for Wales 2012 - 2015 ran continuously, however the data are disaggregated for research purposes into financial years (April to March). The survey itself involved a 25 minute face-to-face interview in respondent's homes. The sample for the National Survey relates to individuals in households who are aged 16 years and over.

In order to ensure that at least 600 interviews were completed in each Local Authority, households were initially over sampled. Therefore a stratified random sample of 25,000 addresses was selected from the Royal Mail's list of addresses. The face-to-face interview then took place with one randomly selected adult in each household. Any business addresses were removed from the list therefore only residential properties were selected. There was no replacement of individuals or addresses.

Interviewers were required to make a dwelling unit selection in cases where a sampled address was split into more than one dwelling. This involved coding the number of dwellings at the address (both occupied and unoccupied) and using pre-defined techniques in order to randomly select a dwelling unit. The same process was used to select a household unit if multiple households were found within one address unit.

The achieved sample size collected each year was roughly 14,500 individuals (Table 1), which was based on a response rate of roughly 70 per cent². These figures are sufficient to allow detailed analysis at national level and for basic demographic analysis to be conducted at a Local Authority level. Weighting can be applied to data to make the data representative of the adult population in Wales.

The survey itself consists of a single questionnaire developed by the Welsh Government with refinement of questions taking place over the years. For example the 2012-13 survey included standard questions for measuring wellbeing developed by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The 2013-14 survey replaced

these questions with standard measures that were included in the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions survey during 2013. By using these questions it made comparing results on wellbeing from the National Survey easier with other European countries.

In addition to general demographic questions, subject areas explored in the National Survey include the following:

- ▶ Children and Education
- ▶ Welsh Government
- ▶ Active Travel
- ▶ Health and Social Care
- ▶ Internet and Media
- ▶ Local Area and Environment
- ▶ Well-being and Finances
- ▶ Work and Leisure
- ▶ Access to and experience of using public services

However data are also collected on other areas on an ad hoc basis. For example in 2014-15, additional questions were asked on pet welfare, material deprivation and on those in the Armed Forces (either currently or formerly serving)³.

Accuracy and Limitations of the National Survey for Wales 2012 - 2015 Data Collection

There are a core set of questions relating to demographics and service use that are consistently worded, allowing for a comparison of responses over time. However other topics change from year to year.

Unlike the Welsh Health Survey which collects data on children within households, in addition to adults (see separate data brief), the National Survey for Wales 2012 - 2015 was limited to those over the age of 16 years old. It therefore does not offer insight in young people's experiences and perceptions of living in Wales. However questions were asked in relation to young people, though this was from the parent/legal guardian's perspective

e.g. those relating to child material deprivation asked in 2014-15.

As with any other survey, data on service use are self-reported and may be prone to respondent error.

Observations

As the sampling frame for the National Survey attempted to gain a similar number of responses from each Local Authority in Wales, the achieved sample size has remained fairly consistent at roughly 14,500 individuals (Table 1). Table 1 gives an overview of the sample size for the National Survey in its current form, since 2012. Data are available from the Data Archive from January 2012 (Study Number 7320) to March 2015.

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the 2014-15 sample by gender and age in order to give an indication of the potential sample size available for analysis.

As an example of the data available, Table 3 gives a breakdown of derived variables from the survey, including: area type (urban/rural), highest qualification, economic activity, household type, and Welsh Language ability (Speak, read and write Welsh).

² Response rate in 2014-15 was 64 per cent.

³ An overview of these topics is provided on the Data Archive, Study Number 7320, 7552, 7767

Table 1: Number of cases within National Survey for Wales 2012 - 2015

Year	Total
2012 (Jan - March)	3,558
2012-13	14,552
2013-14	14,771
2014-15	14,285

Table 2: National Survey for Wales 2014-15 sample, split by age and gender (Unweighted)

	Male	Female
16-29	761	1,033
30-39	750	1,149
40-49	943	1,214
50-59	1,034	1,321
60-69	1,300	1,492
70 and over	1,473	1,815
Total	6,261	8,024

Table 3: Breakdowns for area type, highest qualification, household type, economic activity and Welsh Language; National Survey for Wales, 2014-15 (Unweighted)

		Number	Per cent (nonmissing)
Area Type	Urban	9,996	70
	Rural	4,289	30
Qualifications	No Qualifications	2,799	21
	Below NQF Level 1	1,322	10
	NQF Level 1	2,701	20
	NQF Level 2	2,023	15
Household Type	NQF Level 3	4,462	34
	Single pensioner	2,463	17
	Married couple pensioner (no deps.)	2,205	15
	Single person, not a pensioner (no deps.)	1,664	12
	Two adult household	2,982	21
Economic Activity	Two adult household with children	2,640	18
	Single parent household	1,313	9
	Other households	1,018	7
	In employment	6,852	48
Welsh Language	Unemployed	548	4
	Economically inactive	6,852	48
	Speak, read, and write in Welsh	2,244	16

Consent to Linkage

Consent to link the National Survey to other data sources was obtained from 2012-13 onwards. Consent to data linkage was also asked as part of the January to March pilot in 2012⁴. Consent does not have a time limit set⁵, and linkage can therefore be conducted for the foreseeable future.

The consent to link rate for the National Survey was roughly 64 percent (9,303 cases) of the achieved survey sample in 2012-13, 66 percent (9,795 cases) in 2013-14⁶, and 65 percent (9,289 cases) in 2014-15. Data can therefore be pooled for several years in order to obtain a linkable sample of over 28,387 cases – as at 2015.

In order to explore bias arising from difference in rates, Table 4 provides age and gender profiles for the total National Survey 2014-15 sample available from the Data Archive, compared to data available on SAIL where consent to link has been given. As can be seen, there are only minor percentage point differences between the two samples.

Table 4: Age and gender for National Survey for Wales 2014-15 data comparing total achieved sample with those where consent to link was given (on SAIL); Unweighted

	Achieved Sample (%)	Consent to link in SAIL (%)
16-29	13	13
30-39	13	14
40-49	15	16
50-59	16	17
60-69	20	20
70 and over	23	21
Male	44	45
Female	56	55
Total (n)	14,285	9,289

⁴ http://www.esds.ac.uk/doc/7320/mrdoc/pdf/7320_nsfwtechnicalreport.pdf

⁵ <http://www.adls.ac.uk/2012/08/29/consent-forms-for-study-and-survey-linkage/>

⁶ <http://llyw.cymru/docs/caecd/research/2015/151217-review-capability-secure-anonymised-information-linkage-database-en.pdf>

Examples of Research Using the National Survey

The results from the National Survey are used predominantly by the Welsh Government for statistical purposes to produce a range of publications⁷. Research on a range of social issues using the National Survey has been commissioned by the Welsh Government, with these studies relating to wellbeing⁸, satisfaction with education⁹ and digital inclusion¹⁰. Outside of these commissioned studies, the use of the survey has been limited in academic research. However as an example of potential uses the predecessor to the National Survey, the Living in Wales survey, has been used in order to explore the effects of regional unemployment and inactivity on earnings¹¹, as well as for mapping neighbourhoods based on attitudinal data¹².

The National Survey has not been used extensively as a linked resource, however it has potential for researchers examining social conditions in Wales.

For example, with the addition of material deprivation questions in 2014-15, the survey could be linked to child educational outcomes at the household level, in order to explore whether household deprivation influences educational achievement. Alternatively, the experiences of using public services, such as A&E, could be linked to administrative data on use of health services. This would then allow for an exploration of whether treatment outcomes and the rating of service experience are associated.

The Administrative Data Research Centre Wales (ADRC-W) is one of four UK centres that along with the Administrative Data Service make up the Administrative Data Research Network (ADRN). The ADRN provides a safe, secure and transparent data linkage service for accredited, approved research using de-identified UK administrative data.

ADRC-W does not hold datasets. It works closely with government departments to make them available to researchers but this is negotiated on a case by case basis.

This report may be cited as: ADRC-W (2016) National Survey for Wales 2012-2015. Administrative Data Research Centre Wales, Data Brief No. 7.

This report, along with other titles in this series is downloadable free from ADRN at <https://adrn.ac.uk/about/research-centre-wales/resources/> or by emailing ADRCWales@Swansea.ac.uk.

⁷ <https://stats.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/National-Survey-for-Wales>

⁸ <http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2014/140430-national-survey-wellbeing-wales-2012-13-en.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/WGNS01/WGNS01.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2014/140515-national-survey-wales-2012-13-digital-inclusion-en.pdf>

¹¹ Carey, J. (2012) The Welsh Wage Curve and the Issue of Inactivity. *Contemporary Wales*. 25(1):147-172

¹² Orford, S. and Jones, S. (2010) Mapping Welsh neighbourhood types classified using attitudinal data from the national Living in Wales survey. *Journal of Maps*. 346-353.

