HRS Stress Data Overview

Compiled by CHORDS Lab – 10/29/2025 (Draft)

The Health and Retirement Study (HRS) is a nationally representative, longitudinal survey of U.S. adults over age 50, conducted every two years. This HRS Stress dataset compiles self-reported psychosocial stress indicators from 2006–2022 to support research related to chronic stress, stressful life events, and financial strain among older adults.

- **Origins & Partners**
  The HRS is sponsored by the **National Institute on Aging (NIA)** and conducted by the **University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research (ISR)**. Established in 1992**,** it remains one of the most comprehensive and influential longitudinal studies on aging, health, and psychosocial well-being in the United States.

- **Data Sources**
  All variables included in this dataset originate from the **Leave-Behind Psychosocial Questionnaire (LBQ)**, administered as part of the **HRS Core Biennial Data** during each survey wave (2006–2022). These self-administered questionnaires capture participants' subjective experiences of stress, strain, and life events**.**

  Data are specifically sourced from **Section LB: Leave-Behind Questionnaires (Respondent)** of the Core files.

  Links to the official **LBQ Codebooks (2006–2022)** are provided below:

    o 2022 LBQ Codebook
    o 2020 LBQ Codebook
    o 2018 LBQ Codebook
    o 2016 LBQ Codebook
    o 2014 LBQ Codebook
    o 2012 LBQ Codebook
    o 2010 LBQ Codebook
    o 2008 LBQ Codebook
    o 2006 LBQ Codebook

Note: Each measure's HRS variable name changes by wave (e.g., KLB040A in 2006 → SLB035A1 in 2022). **Table 1** below provides the variable mappings and availabilities for all included waves.

Table 1. HRS Stress Measures by Category and Survey Year (2006-2022)

| CHORDS | | | Variable Codes and Availability by HRS Survey Year | | | | | | | | |
Category	Variable ID	Survey Item (LBQ Question)	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020	2022
End-of-Month Financial Strain	eomfs	Q35. Difficulty paying bills	KLB039B	LLB040	MLB040	NLB040	OLB035	PLB035	QLB035	RLB035	SLB035
Ongoing Chronic Stressors	ocs_01	Q35A1. Self health problems	KLB040A	X	MLB040A_A	NLB040A_A	OLB035A_1	PLB035A_1	QLB035A_1	RLB035A1	SLB035A1
	ocs_02	Q35A2. Physical/emotional problems in spouse/child	KLB040B	X	MLB040A_B	NLB040A_B	OLB035A_2	PLB035A_2	QLB035A_2	RLB035A2	SLB035A2
	ocs_03	Q35A3. Drug/alcohol problems family member	KLB040C	X	MLB040A_C	NLB040A_C	OLB035A_3	PLB035A_3	QLB035A_3	RLB035A3	SLB035A3
	ocs_04	Q35A4. Difficulties at work	KLB040D	X	MLB040A_D	NLB040A_D	OLB035A_4	PLB035A_4	QLB035A_4	RLB035A4	SLB035A4
	ocs_05	Q35A5. Financial strain	KLB040E	X	MLB040A_E	NLB040A_E	OLB035A_5	PLB035A_5	QLB035A_5	RLB035A5	SLB035A5
	ocs_06	Q35A6. Housing problems	KLB040F	X	MLB040A_F	NLB040A_F	OLB035A_6	PLB035A_6	QLB035A_6	RLB035A6	SLB035A6
	ocs_07	Q35A7. Problems in relationship	KLB040G	X	MLB040A_G	NLB040A_G	OLB035A_7	PLB035A_7	QLB035A_7	RLB035A7	SLB035A7
	ocs_08	Q35A8. Regularly help ailing friend/family	KLB040H	X	MLB040A_H	NLB040A_H	OLB035A_8	PLB035A_8	QLB035A_8	RLB035A8	SLB035A8
Perceived Stress Scale	pss_01	Q35B1. Upset because of something unexpected	X	X	X	X	X	X	QLB035B1	RLB035B1	SLB035B1
	pss_02	Q35B2. Unable to control important things	X	X	X	X	X	X	QLB035B2	RLB035B2	SLB035B2
	pss_03	Q35B3. Felt nervous and stressed	X	X	X	X	X	X	QLB035B3	RLB035B3	SLB035B3
	pss_04	Q35B4. Felt confident about handling problems	X	X	X	X	X	X	QLB035B4	RLB035B4	SLB035B4
	pss_05	Q35B5. Felt things were going your way	X	X	X	X	X	X	QLB035B5	RLB035B5	SLB035B5
	pss_06	Q35B6. Could not cope with all the things	X	X	X	X	X	X	QLB035B6	RLB035B6	SLB035B6
	pss_07	Q35B7. Able to control irritations in life	X	X	X	X	X	X	QLB035B7	RLB035B7	SLB035B7
	pss_08	Q35B8. Felt you were on top of things	X	X	X	X	X	X	QLB035B8	RLB035B8	SLB035B8
	pss_09	Q35B9. Angered; things were outside your control	X	X	X	X	X	X	QLB035B9	RLB035B9	SLB035B9
	pss_10	Q35B10. Felt difficulties were piling up	X	X	X	X	X	X	QLB035B10	RLB035B10	SLB035B10
Stressful Life Event (Last 5 Yrs)	sle_01	Q37B1. Involuntarily lost a job	KLB038A	LLB038A	MLB038A	NLB038A	X	X	X	RLB037B1	SLB037B1
	sle_02	Q37B1A. What year (job loss)	KLB038AY	LLB038AY	MLB038AY	NLB038AY	X	X	X	RLB037B1A	SLB037B1A
	sle_03	Q37B2. Unemployed and looking for work	KLB038B	LLB038B	MLB038B	NLB038B	X	X	X	RLB037B2	SLB037B2
	sle_04	Q37B2A. What year (unemployed self)	KLB038BY	LLB038BY	MLB038BY	NLB038BY	X	X	X	RLB037B2A	SLB037B2A
	sle_05	Q37B3. Anyone else unemployed	KLB038C	LLB038C	MLB038C	NLB038C	X	X	X	RLB037B3	SLB037B3
	sle_06	Q37B3A. What year (other unemployed)	KLB038CY	LLB038CY	MLB038CY	NLB038CY	X	X	X	RLB037B3A	SLB037B3A
	sle_07	Q37B4. Moved to a worse residence	KLB038D	LLB038D	MLB038D	NLB038D	X	X	X	RLB037B4	SLB037B4
	sle_08	Q37B4A. What year (moved worse)	KLB038DY	LLB038DY	MLB038DY	NLB038DY	X	X	X	RLB037B4A	SLB037B4A
	sle_09	Q37B5. Robbed or home burglarized	KLB038E	LLB038E	MLB038E	NLB038E	X	X	X	RLB037B5	SLB037B5
	sle_10	Q37B5A. What year (robbed/burglarized)	KLB038EY	LLB038EY	MLB038EY	NLB038EY	X	X	X	RLB037B5A	SLB037B5A
	sle_11	Q37B6. Victim of fraud	X	LLB038F	MLB038F	NLB038F	X	X	X	RLB037B6	SLB037B6
	sle_12	Q37B6A. What year (fraud)	X	LLB038FY	MLB038FY	NLB038FY	X	X	X	RLB037B6A	SLB037B6A

Note: The *CHORDS Variable ID* column lists CHORDS Lab's standardized variable names for each survey item, used to harmonize measures across HRS waves. Cells containing a grayed-out "X" indicate that the item was **not included** in that survey year.

Dataset Construction

The **HRS Stress Dataset Builder** (HRS_stress_dataset_construction.Rmd) compiles these measures into a harmonized format. Users can choose between:

1. **Longitudinal Mode (2006–2022)** – merges all waves into a single long-format dataset.

2. **Single-Year Mode (custom)** – extracts measures for a specific wave (e.g., 2016 only).

Both modes rely on local copies of the HRS Core data files as described in the **HRS Data Access Guide** (HRS_stress_data_access.md).

Geographic coverage

HRS data are nationally representative of U.S. adults aged 50+, weighted to reflect the population distribution. Geographic identifiers (state, region, ZIP) are restricted-access and not available in the public-use dataset.