

ICPSR 4652

**Midlife in the United States
(MIDUS 2), 2004-2006**

Documentation of Age in MIDUS 1 and 2

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Documentation of Age in MIDUS 1 and 2

How age was determined at M1. During M1 data collection, “stated” age was obtained from a household informant during initial Phone screening, while the follow-up Mail questionnaire asked respondents to specify their birth date. During the Phone interview some respondents indicated that their stated age (QL4_1) was wrong. Further, during post-processing of the Mail questionnaire, a respondent’s birth date may have contradicted the information recorded in variable QL4_1. In both such instances, *ages were only corrected if they erred by 5 or more years.*

This discrepancy was discovered during M2. When age at M1 and M2 was compared, there were some cases where the difference between the two was incompatible with the actual time interval between the M1 and M2 phone interviews, which ranged approximately between 8 and 10 years.

How age was determined at M2. During M2 data collection, a stringent methodology was used to validate participant identity and age, including asking the participant for their birth date and confirming their previous address. While this was intended to ensure that the individual being interviewed at M2 was in fact the same person interviewed at M1, this process is subject to error.

Using the updated birth date information obtained at M2, age was recomputed using a standard formula: Birth date was subtracted from phone interview dates to obtain respondent age at M1 and M2 age.¹ The result was rounded down to a whole number. Put another way, the new variables represent the participant’s age as of his or her last birthday prior to the phone interview.

Flagging unreliable ages. For all M2 respondents, the birth date obtained during the M2 phone interview was deemed definitive and was checked against Social Security records where possible. However, this protocol was not immune to error and we have identified a small number of cases where the respondent’s age was deemed unreliable. A number of explanations for this unreliability can be advanced:

- 1) Participants’ recollection may be flawed.
- 2) A different participant with the same name may have been interviewed at M2.
- 3) A relative with a similar birth date or name may have been interviewed at M2.
- 4) Respondents may have deceived the interviewer in order to collect the incentive.
- 5) Interviewer error.

¹ During the M1 phone interview, some individuals offered a “stated” age instead of a birth date. While birth dates were obtained for nearly all M2 respondents, there are some M1 respondents for whom all we have is their “stated” age.

Since we cannot be absolutely certain where the mistake lies, we have flagged these cases so that each researcher can make his or her own decision with regard to these participants' status. The following cases have unreliable ages:

M2ID: 13088, 13757, 15723, 16469, 16687, 18999, 10035, 11235, 13324, 14276

The new variables. To address all of these issues we have created a new age variable for the M1 and M2 datasets. The new M1 age variable (called A1PAGE) replaces the old M1 age variable (QL4_1) and its derivatives (QL4_2, AGE2, AGE_GRP, and AGECAT). Likewise, the new M2 age variable (B1PAGE) replaces the old M2 age variable (B1PRAGE).

We must emphasize that even with the unreliable cases, the age variables have been much improved. The additional birth date information obtained at M2 allowed us to assign ages to about 300 respondents who did not have age data at M1. With the M2 birth dates, age was computed for all but one M2 respondents.