

National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles - Natsal

Key contact details:

The Natsal project is managed by a multi-disciplinary team of researchers (UCL, LSHTM, University of Glasgow, NatCen) and is funded by the Wellcome Trust, with contributions from the Economic and Social Research Council and the National Institute of Health Research.

The project team can be contacted at natsal@ucl.ac.uk

Natsal data dictionary:

Natsal is a cross-sectional study currently in its fourth round of data collection. The first round was in 1990 in response to the emerging HIV/AIDS epidemic, providing reliable information on the sexual behaviours and attitudes of people living in Britain at that time. Since then Natsal surveys have been conducted roughly every 10 years with Natsal-2 in 2001, Natsal-3 in 2010, and Natsal-4 in 2024 (data from this latest survey is expected to be made available by late 2025).

The surveys use a probability sampling method to randomly select people from across Great Britain to take part, meaning the results are broadly representative of the British general population. Natsal surveys are among the largest and most detailed scientific studies of sexual behaviour in the world. So far, over 45,000 people have taken part in Natsal surveys, spanning those born through much of the 20th Century. The consistent methodology and repetition of the surveys has made it possible to look at differences in sexual behaviour over time, capturing the dramatic changes in sexual attitudes and lifestyles in Britain, such as earlier sexual debut, increasing partner numbers and same sex experience. Natsal provides evidence of the context, influences and consequences of sexual lifestyles and the surveys continue to be vital for informing; national and international sexual health interventions, strategies, guidelines, and sex and relationship education.

Natsal surveys are administered by an interviewer face-to-face in the participant's home. It is a computer-assisted interview, with self-completion sections used for more sensitive topics. In addition, a biological sample element was included in Natsal-2 and Natsal-3, which involved obtaining consent from participants.

Further details on [methodology, variables and questionnaire content](#) for each of the different Natsal surveys can be found here.

Natsal-4 is the latest survey and was conducted in England, Wales and Scotland within the general population aged 16 – 59 years. Data collection is now complete, with over 8,000 people interviewed. Natsal-4 will provide updated data on sexual lifestyles in the context of today's society, where there have been significant societal, individual-level and technological changes, along with shifts in public health priorities and service delivery, influencing sexual attitudes, lifestyles and health outcomes.

Accessing Natsal data:

Data from Natsal-1, Natsal-2 and Natsal-3 have all been deposited with the UK Data Service (UKDS) and is available to access for registered users. The Natsal Covid-19 study data is also available through UKDS.

UKDS hosts the largest trusted digital archive of economic, social and population data in the UK and specialises in data curation, data literacy and actively managing long-term access to high quality data, transforming social science research, teaching and learning.

Natsal-1, Natsal-2, Natsal-3, and the Natsal Covid-19 study datasets are classed as Safeguarded data, a data access level designated by the data provider based on the detail, confidentiality and sensitivity of the data. How a specific dataset can be accessed will vary according to the access level. Safeguarded datasets can be downloaded by registering with UKDS and accepting the End User Licence. Some Safeguarded data may have additional conditions attached which will be made clear on the data catalogue when accessing the chosen Natsal study. It is also worth noting that biological samples data collected through Natsal-2 and Natsal-3 are classed as Controlled data and have stricter access arrangements. Further information about [how to access Controlled data within UKDS](#) can be found here.

To access Natsal Safeguarded data you will need to be registered with UKDS. Researchers, students and teachers from any discipline, organisation, or country may register with the UKDS and obtain data.

Registering with UKDS:

If you are based at a UK institution of higher or further education, or if your institution is part of the UK Access Management Federation (UKAMF) and is on the Federation Identity Providers Asserting User Accountability list, you can register using your usual institutional credentials via the UKDS login page. The registration process is as follows:

Step 1: UKDS login page ([UK Data Service](#))

Step 2: Choose your organisation from the list on the login page

Step 3: Enter your usual institutional credentials to login

Step 4: Complete the registration form

Step 5: Agree to the End User Licence which outlines the terms and conditions of use

Step 6: Once registration is complete you will be able to download and request access to data

Further information about the [registration and login process](#) can be found here. You will also find guidance on registering if your institution is not a member of UKAMF or you are a personal user.

Once registered you will have access to Natsal data. Outlined below are the steps to access, download, and order data from UKDS.

Step 1: Using the UKDS data catalogue, locate the study/dataset you wish to access

Step 2: Select 'Add to account'

Step 3: If data status is 'Active' the 'Action' button will allow you to download the data

Step 4: If the data status is 'Request Access' you will need to complete the actions required to gain access

Step 5: When all actions have been completed and the data is available the status will change to 'Active' where you can choose 'Action' to download the data

Further information on [downloading and ordering data from UKDS](#) can be found here.

Datasets in the UKDS main collection are usually made available in the following formats: SPSS, Stata or TAB.

Cost of access:

Accessing Natsal data from UKDS is free of charge. Data access is not charged if for non-commercial use.

Additional information:

Further information about the Natsal projects can be found here: [About – NATSAL](#)

Reviewed on 27/01/2025

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