

User Guide for **ELSA COVID-19** Substudy

Waves 1 **and 2**

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1 - Overview of the survey

1.1 Background and aims

The English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) began in 2002. It is a large-scale longitudinal panel study of people aged 50 and over and their partners, living in private households in England. The original sample was drawn from households that had previously responded to the Health Survey for England (HSE) between 1998 and 2001.

This user guide provides an overview of the two waves of the ELSA COVID-19 Substudy, which can be seen as a follow-up study based on the sample of the regular ELSA study. Within the context of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak, all participants for the COVID-19 Substudy were selected from the existing ELSA sample to measure the socio-economic effects/psychological impact of the lockdown on the 50+ population of England.

The ELSA COVID-19 Substudy allows a cross-sectional analysis of the dynamics of the lockdown, enabling too the possibility to link the data collected with previous and future waves of ELSA for longitudinal analysis.

ELSA is the result of collaboration between five institutions which form the ELSA Research team:

- Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, University College London
- Institute for Fiscal Studies
- National Centre for Social Research (NatCen)
- School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester
- Norwich Medical School, University of East Anglia

1.2 Ethical clearance

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University College London Research Ethics Committee.

1.3 Contact details

Any queries related to this study or the data should be sent to: elsadata@natcen.ac.uk

2 - Sample

2.1 ELSA Sample design

The ELSA sample has been designed to represent people aged 50 and over, living in private households in England. The sample is based on respondents who participated in the Health Survey for England (HSE). The original sample was selected from three years of HSE: 1998, 1999 and 2001. The same group of respondents have been interviewed face-to-face in two-yearly waves. In the course of the study, the sample has refreshed at the younger age range to maintain the 50+ design. The sample has been refreshed using HSE participants in waves 3, 4, 6, 7 and 9.

2.1.1 Sample status and eligibility

Across all waves, different types of individuals have taken part in an ELSA interview. At the heart of eligibility to take part in ELSA were so-called ELSA 'Core Members', sampled and weighted to be representative of the 50+ English population. ELSA core members have each met three criteria:

1. Fitted the age eligibility criteria of a given ELSA cohort
2. Participated in the sample-origin HSE survey
3. Participated in the first wave of ELSA when invited to join the study.

In addition to Core Members, all cohabiting partners of Core Members (who were not Core Members themselves) have also always been eligible to take part. These ELSA 'Partners' have further been categorised into four different types to illustrate their relative age range and duration of co-habitation with the Core Member: 'Core Partners', 'Young Partners', 'Old Partners' or 'New Partners'.

2.2 COVID-19 Substudy sampling approach

All participants for the COVID-19 substudy were selected from the existing ELSA sample.

Study participants issued to the first wave who were still eligible ahead of the second wave and did not request to leave the COVID-19 Substudy or the ELSA study were issued to the second wave.

	Wave 1	Wave 2
Issued study participants	9,525	9,150
Issued core members	7,689	7,465
Completed survey interviews	7,040	6,794
Productive core members	5,825	5,338



2.2.1 Proxies

Differently from the standard ELSA waves, Proxy interview were not permitted in the ELSA COVID-19 Substudy. However, it was possible for eligible respondents who needed assistance with web completion to seek help from other people.

3 - Survey content

3.1 Details of survey content – overview

The first wave of the ELSA COVID-19 Substudy aimed to understand the immediate impact of the COVID-19 crisis on health, access to health and social care, financial circumstances, mental wellbeing, and social activity in the older population in England. It also aimed to set a baseline for a second wave, which looked to assess what changes had taken place in mental and physical health, finances, and social experience of the older population by the end of 2020.

The findings from the substudy can also be combined with current and future waves of ELSA to examine many of the immediate and long-term impacts of COVID-19.

3.2 Questionnaire content

All content was proposed by topics experts within the ELSA research team, with final questionnaire content agreed collectively by the group.

The questionnaire covers the following topic areas:

- Demographics
- Mental Health
- Financial security
- COVID-19-related health
- Employment and work
- Financial situation
- Volunteering and Care
- Physical Health and health behaviours
- Social connection isolation and technological inclusion
- Income, pensions and retirement

The full questionnaire for both waves can be accessed from the ELSA website (<https://www.elsa-project.ac.uk/>) and it is also available on the UK Data Archive (UKDS).

4 - Fieldwork and response

4.1 Fieldwork – overview

The fieldwork structure of ELSA COVID-19 survey adopted a sequential mixed-mode strategy, where study participants were firstly invited to take part to the study online (CAWI) and, only after they were offered enough time and opportunities to complete online, they were contacted by an interviewer and invited to complete the survey on the phone (CATI).

The first wave of the substudy lasted 54 days (7 weeks and 5 days), with the survey launching on the 3rd June 2020 and closing on the 26th July 2020. The CATI fieldwork started on the 29th June and lasted for 4 weeks, with a smaller number of study participants being assigned to the telephone interviewers two weeks earlier than the others (Early CATI group).

The second wave launched on the 4th November 2020 and closed on the 20th December 2020, lasting for a total of 47 days (6 weeks and 5 days). CATI fieldwork launched on the 11th November 2020, 7 days after the beginning of the Web fieldwork.

The variable **INTERVIEWMODE** identifies survey mode in both datasets:

	Web interviews	CATI interviews
Wave 1	5,791	1,249
Wave 2	5,652	1,142

Communication about the survey was carried out across three different channels in both waves: mail, email and text messages.

5 - Weighting, clustering and stratification

5.1 Clustering and stratification

Where possible we recommend that analysis be conducted on weighted data since this will help to minimise bias from differential non-response amongst key subgroups. Similarly, with complex sample designs such as ELSA, the effects of clustering and stratification on standard errors should be taken into account when conducting analyses.

Analysts should use the following cluster and stratification variables in the ELSA COVID-19 Substudy as well as the relevant weight:

- **Cluster variable:** IDAHHCVW1
- **Stratification variable:** RGN_ARCH

5.2 Cross-sectional weights

Two cross-sectional weights were created for each wave: one for core members taking part in the COVID-19 survey and one for core members and their partners. Both weights were restricted to those living in England and aged 52+ at the time of the COVID-19 survey. Cross-sectional weights were scaled to have a mean of one.

When running weighted analyses, researchers should remember to exclude the respondents with zero or 'system missing' weights from the un-weighted base, if quoted. When using the core-member-only cross-sectional weights, the data for Partners can be used as supplementary information for Core Members.

Cross-sectional weights		
	Variable name	n
Wave 1 dataset		
Core members only	WTFIN1	5,785
Core members and their partners	WTFIN2	6,845
Wave 2 dataset		
Core members only	WTFIN1	5,558
Core members and their partners	WTFIN2	6,610

5.3 Longitudinal weights

Individual-level changes (for ELSA core members) between ELSA Wave 9 and the COVID-19 Substudy waves, or between the two waves of the COVID-19 Substudy, should be analysed using the correct longitudinal weights. Four different longitudinal weights can be found in the ELSA COVID-19 datasets.

Two of the four weights are designed for analysis of individual-level change between ELSA wave 9 and a single wave of the COVID-19 survey. Both of these weights adjust the wave 9

cross-sectional weight to account for differential non-response to each COVID-19 study (separately).

COV19LWGT is designed for analysis of individual-level change between ELSA wave 9 and wave 1 of the COVID-19 study. It is the product of a (trimmed) non-response weight and the wave 9 cross-sectional weight. (The non-response weight adjusts for non-response to wave 1 of the COVID-19 study, contingent on response to ELSA wave 9.)

COV19LWGT2 is designed for analysis of individual-level change between ELSA wave 9 and wave 2 of the COVID-19 study. It is the product of a (trimmed) non-response weight and the wave 9 cross-sectional weight. (The non-response weight adjusts for non-response to wave 2 of the COVID-19 study, contingent on response to ELSA wave 9.) **COV19LWGTW2**, therefore, is for all respondents to wave 2 of the COVID-19 study who took part in ELSA wave 9, irrespective of response to wave 1 of the substudy.

COV19LWGTW2B on the other hand is designed for analysis of individual-level change between ELSA wave 9 and *both* waves of the COVID-19 Substudy. In other words, **COV19LWGTW2B** is for respondents to wave 2 of the COVID-19 study, who took part in wave 1 of the substudy and in ELSA wave 9. It is the product of a (trimmed) non-response weight and **COV19LWGT**, the longitudinal weight for the first wave of the COVID-19 Substudy. The non-response weight adjusts for non-response to the second wave of the COVID-19 Substudy, contingent on response to wave 1 and ELSA wave 9.

Finally, users looking at individual-level changes between the first and the second wave of the COVID-19 Substudy (without reference to participation in ELSA wave 9) can use the **COV19LWGTW2C** weight. This was computed as the product of a trimmed non-response weight for the second wave of the COVID-19 Substudy (this time contingent on response to wave 1 but without reference to ELSA wave 9) and **WTFIN1**, the core-member only cross-sectional weight from the first wave of the substudy.

As all the longitudinal weights are for core members only, they are not available for Partners. Consequently, Partners data can only be used as supplementary information for Core Members in longitudinal analyses of the ELSA COVID-19 Substudy.

Longitudinal weights		
	Variable name	n
Wave 1 dataset		
ELSA participants taking part in ELSA W9 and ELSA COVID-19 W1	COV19LWGT	5,583
Wave 2 dataset		
ELSA participants taking part in ELSA W9 and ELSA COVID-19 W2	COV19LWGTW2	5,378
ELSA participants taking part in ELSA W9 and both waves of ELSA COVID-19	COV19LWGTW2B	5,146
ELSA participants taking part in both waves of ELSA COVID-19	COV19LWGTW2C	5,305

6 - Dataset information

6.1 Datafiles available at the UKDS

6.1.1 ELSA COVID-19 datasets

The only ELSA COVID-19 datasets available via the UKDS at the time of writing this user guide are released under End User Licence (EUL). They include the geographical variables **RU11IND_ARCH** (2011 Census rural-urban classification) and **RGN_ARCH** (Region, formerly GOR).

New datafiles including sensitive or disclosive variables might be released in the future under Special Licence or Special Accesses conditions. An updated list of the published datafiles can be reviewed on the [UKDS website](#) or on the [ELSA project website](#). If you are interested in accessing non-archive data, please see section 6.1.3 below.

6.1.2 ELSA datasets

For Waves 0–9, the UK Data Service contains a single ELSA data file containing the majority of variables relating to the ELSA interviewer visit, accessible to holders of the UKDS End User Licence (EUL). Sensitive or disclosive variables (such as geographical variables or pension information) have been removed from the EUL datasets and are available under different access conditions (Primary Special Licence datasets and Primary Special Access datasets).

In addition to the main ELSA datasets for Waves 0–9, there are a number of additional ELSA datafiles available (under EUL) via the UKDS.

A detailed outline of variables available within each ELSA dataset is available in the Questionnaire & Data Documentation available via the [UKDS website](#).

6.1.3 Access to non-archived data

Any further variables not included in the archived datasets may be requested via the NatCen Data Release Panel. Please contact the ELSA Data Manager at elsadata@natcen.ac.uk for more details.

6.2 Order and content of the main interview dataset

The ELSA COVID-19 datasets are individual level files. The main group of respondents for analysis is the Core Members and data on Partners can be used as characteristics of the Core Members (i.e. to provide supplementary information). Partners can be analysed as individuals in their own right only using the correct cross-sectional weight or in unweighted analysis.

The datasets contain variables in the following order:

- Serial numbers and sample variables (e.g. cohort and type)
- Survey completion variables (e.g. interview mode, interviews at previous waves)

- Variables in the questionnaire (in the order they appear in the interview). A small number of additional derived variables that are associated with particular questionnaire variables are located alongside these variables in the data.
- Demographics and other variables not in the questionnaire.

6.2.1 Demographics

The ELSA COVID-19 datasets include three types of demographic variables:

- Variables that were fed-forward from ELSA wave 9 and were not subsequently updated. These are:
 - Sex
 - Age
 - Formal education achieved (W1 only).
- Variables that were fed-forward from ELSA wave 9 and asked during the COVID-19 Substudy if the information was missing (missing values). These are:
 - Ethnicity
 - Relationship status (W1 only).
 - Tenure (W1 only).
 - Long standing illness, disability or infirmity (W1 only).
 - Long standing illness, disability or infirmity limiting activities (W1 only).
 - Long standing illness, disability or infirmity limiting paid work (W1 only).
 - Temporary long-standing illness, disability or infirmity (W1 only).
 - Private insurance coverage (W1 only).
- Variables that were asked to, or updated for, all sample in the ELSA COVID-19 Substudy. These are:
 - Household grid.
 - Relationship status (W2 only).
 - Tenure (W2 only).
 - Long standing illness, disability or infirmity (W2 only).
 - Long standing illness, disability or infirmity limiting activities (W2 only).
 - Long standing illness, disability or infirmity limiting paid work (W2 only).
 - Temporary long-standing illness, disability or infirmity (W2 only).
 - Private insurance coverage (W2 only).
 - Region.
 - IMD quintile.
 - Urban/rural index.

Please note that the question structure and the categories of the relationship status variable differ between ELSA W9 and the COVID-19 Substudy. Consequently, the relationship status variable in the W1 dataset only includes cases who were asked the relationship status question. The decision on how to combine the relationship status in the first wave of the COVID-19 Substudy with ELSA W9 data is left to the discretion of the data user.

6.3 Serial numbering

Constant Individual Serial Number

All the ELSA data files deposited in the archive contain a unique individual analytical serial number (**IDAUNIQ**) to enable users to link the different files. Each respondent has a unique value for **IDAUNIQ**, which will remain constant across all datasets at all waves.

6.4 Missing values

The following missing value codes are used in the ELSA COVID-19 datasets:

Table 6.1: Missing value codes in interviewer datasets

Code	Description
-9	Prefer not to say
-8	Don't know
-6	Not asked
-3	Routing error
-1	Item not applicable

Please note that the following wave 1 question (found at the variable **CvMhCed_CvMhCed8_q**) was added to the question on 24th July:

“Now think about the past week and the feelings you have experienced. Answer yes if the following was true for you much of the time during the past week”

“You felt sad”

Yes/No

All cases before this date are coded -6 “Not asked”

The routing error code was used only in the question **CvLookG** in the wave 2 dataset. Due to this routing error, study participants who reported in W1 caring for someone in another household before the beginning of the outbreak were not asked in W2 about changes in the amount of care offered.

7 - Appendix

7.1 COVID-19 Study topics vs last three CAPI waves

7.1.1 Demographic data

	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9	COVID-19 Study
Demographic data				
Household membership	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tenure	✓	✓	✓	✓
House structure	✓	✓	✓	✓
Relationship status	✓	✓	✓	✓*
Ethnic group	✓	✓	✓	✓
Disability and long-standing illness	✓	✓	✓	✓
* Change in question structure and categories at ELSA COVID-19.				

7.1.2 Health, health behaviour and healthcare

	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9	COVID-19 Study
Mental Health				
Psychiatric and emotional problems	✓	✓	✓	✓
Perceived wellbeing yesterday	✓	✓	✓	✓
Quality of life (CASP-12)	✓	✓	✓	✓
COVID-19 morbidity				
Self-Isolation during outbreak				✓
Presence of COVID-19 symptoms				✓
COVID-19 testing				✓
Hospitalisation due to COVID-19				✓
COVID-19 deaths in social circle				✓
Healthcare during COVID-19 outbreak				
NHS & GP COVID-19 advise				✓
Cancelled operation or treatment since COVID-19 outbreak				✓
GP contact				✓
Access to medications				✓
Access to medical support during outbreak				✓
Self-reported health and health-related behaviours				
Amount of active/passive activities since				✓

COVID-19				
Whether smoking	✓	✓	✓	✓ *
Change in smoking amount before and during COVID-19 outbreak				✓
Whether drinking	✓	✓	✓	✓ **
Change in drinking amount before and during COVID-19 outbreaks				✓
Weight		✓	✓	✓
General perceived health	✓	✓	✓	✓ ***
Quality of sleep		✓		✓ ****
New health condition				✓
<p>* Change in question wording at ELSA COVID-19. ** Change in question wording at ELSA COVID-19. *** Question change from current health at waves 7,8,9 to past health at ELSA COVID-19. **** Scale change at ELSA COVID-19: Excellent/ Very Good/ Good/ Fair/ Poor vs. Very Good/ Good/ Fairly Bad/ Very Bad at waves 7, 8, 9.</p>				

7.1.3 Content of the economics data

	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9	COVID-19 Study
Employment				
Employment status	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hours worked	✓	✓	✓	✓
Risk of infection at current workplace				✓
Hours worked from home				✓
Essential work				✓
Impact of COVID-19 on work				✓
Applied for government financial support				✓
Reason for having stopped working				✓
Current salary as percentage of previous salary				✓
Perceived likelihood to return to previous employment				✓
Leave expectation				✓
Overall financial situation				
Financial situation before the COVID-19 outbreak				✓
Current financial situation compared to the one before the COVID-19 outbreak				✓
Relative financial impact due to COVID-19				✓
Food, job and financial security				
Worries about food security during the COVID-19 outbreak				✓
Food access since COVID-19 outbreak				✓
Worries about having essential items				✓

during COVID-19 outbreak				
Worries about job security	✓	✓	✓	✓ *
Health insurance	✓	✓	✓	✓
* Change in question wording and scale at ELSA COVID-19 study.				

7.1.4 Volunteering and care

	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9	COVID-19 Study
Volunteering and care				
Whether cared for someone weekly before the COVID-19 outbreak	✓	✓	✓	✓ *
Whether person cared for lives with respondent	✓	✓	✓	✓ **
Change in the amount of care provided before and during COVID-19 outbreak				✓
The number of the days the respondent cared for someone in the past week				✓
Change in the amount of voluntary work undertaken since the COVID-19 outbreak				✓
HSE volunteering				✓
Whether received care at home			✓	✓ ***
Change in amount of care received since the COVID-19 outbreak				✓
Whether care needs met since COVID-19 outbreak				✓
* Change in time frame. Whether looked after someone before COVID-19 outbreak vs. whether looked after someone last week in Waves 7, 8, 9.				
** Different answers, same meaning. Whether person cared for lives with the respondent – ‘My household/ Another household’ at ELSA COVID-19 study, ‘Yes/No’ at Waves 7, 8, 9.				
*** Change in question wording and time frame. Whether received care at home in the past month at ELSA COVID-19, vs. whether received care at home in the past two years from anyone except family and friends.				

7.1.5 Social networks and isolation

	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9	COVID-19 Study
Social networks and isolation				
Easiness to access bank, supermarket, hospital, pharmacy (COVID-19 study)	✓			✓ *
Internet use	✓	✓	✓	✓ **
Activities for which Internet was used	✓	✓	✓	✓ ***
Whether would like to use internet more frequently				✓
Reason why not using internet more				✓
Measures of Loneliness	✓	✓	✓	✓

Relationship with partner – 7 items	✓	✓	✓	✓
Whether relationship with partner is close	✓	✓	✓	✓
Communication at distance with immediate family, relatives and friends	✓	✓	✓	✓ ****
<p>* Added new answer option: Pharmacy.</p> <p>** Change in question wording for outbreak context. New answer option added 'more than once a day'.</p> <p>*** Change in answer wording and new answer options added: 'Finding information on health-related issues' and 'Getting information about Government services'.</p> <p>**** New answer option added: 'Video-calling'.</p>				

7.1.6 Income

	Wave 7	Wave 8	Wave 9	COVID-19 Study
Income and Spending				
Change in income due to COVID-19 outbreak				✓
Adjustments to lower income change				✓
Benefits claim				✓
Payment holidays				✓
Whether offered financial assistance as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak				✓
Whether received financial assistance as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak				✓
Chances to move out of current home	✓	✓	✓	✓
Chances to run out of money for covering needs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pensions and retirement				
Private pension	✓	✓	✓	✓ *
Perceived pension value change due to COVID-19 outbreak				✓
Pension drawdown arrangement or pension fund	✓	✓	✓	✓ **
Change in pension drawdown arrangement or pension fund value due to COVID-19 outbreak				✓
Change in amount withdrawn from pension fund as a result of COVID-19 pandemic				✓
Change in expected retirement age due to COVID-19 outbreak				✓
<p>* A different question was used to record whether respondent has a private pension. WPPENT used at Waves 7, 8, 9.</p> <p>** A different question was used to record whether respondent has a drawdown arrangement or other fund. WPREC used at Waves 7, 8, 9.</p>				