

[Transcripts] Part 1. Monitoring the Future (MTF) Form-Specific Topics

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Welcome to the Monitoring the Future video tutorial, “Form-Specific Topics.” This is Part 1 of the tutorial.

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In this tutorial, you will learn about the subject areas covered in MTF surveys and the resources available to help you explore them.

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Before getting started, we will review some terminology that is covered in the “Introduction to MTF” video.

BX indicates 8th and 10th grade data. BY refers to 12th grade data. FU is for young adult follow-up data, and FZ is for midlife and older adult follow-up data starting at age 35.

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The Main study is annual cross-sectional surveys of 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students. The Longitudinal Panel study consists of longitudinal follow-up surveys of selected 12th graders.

MTF questions are divided into different survey forms. Form-specific variables are available only on particular forms.

NAHDAP stands for the National Addiction and Health Data Archive Program, which disseminates MTF data. For more details, please watch the first video tutorial, “Introduction to MTF.”

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Next, let’s look at the MTF subject areas.

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MTF surveys cover many topics with a wide variety of questions.

They are not only about substance use; they also include topics on public opinions, psychological aspects, social problems, and health.

Here is a list of subject areas included in the MTF surveys: drugs, education, work and leisure, sex roles and family, population concerns, conservation, materialism, equity, religion, politics, social change, social problems, major social institutions, military, interpersonal relationships, race relations, concern for others, happiness, other personality variables, background, deviance and victimization, and health.

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Subject areas are broad categories. Each subject area includes various subtopics. For example, under “A. Drugs,” subtopics include Use of various licit and illicit drugs, Exposure to drug use, Availability of drugs, Expected future use, Conditions of use (e.g., alone, with others, at school), Reasons for use, abstinence, and stopping, Drug problems (e.g., driving, tickets, accidents after use, others), Sources of help, treatment regarding drugs, Drug use awareness, Drug education and communication, Own attitudes regarding drugs and drug users, Others’ attitudes regarding drugs and drug users, Legal issues regarding drugs, Risk of drug harms, Role models in the larger environment, Promotional activities.

The subtopics listed here in the blue box (with the subtopics: Use of various licit and illicit drugs, Exposure to drug use, Availability of drugs, Expected future use, Conditions of use (e.g., alone, with others, at school), Reasons for use, abstinence, and stopping, Drug problems (e.g., driving, tickets, accidents after use, others), Sources of help, treatment regarding drugs, Drug use awareness, Drug education and communication, Own attitudes regarding drugs and drug users, Others’ attitudes regarding drugs and drug users, Legal issues regarding drugs, Risk of drug harms, Role models in the larger environment, Promotional activities) can be expanded further, meaning that some subtopics contain multiple questions. We will cover details on exploring the subtopics later.

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For another example, under “Q. Other Personality Variables,” subtopics include Attitudes about self, self-esteem, Locus of control, Loneliness, Risk taking, Trust in others, Importance placed on various life goals, social, political, cultural orientation, hostility, and boredom.

Again, some subtopics have multiple questions, while others may include only one.

The same subject areas are used for all MTF surveys; in other words, subject areas are not specific to a certain cohort or grade, but are universal across all MTF surveys.

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Several resources are available to help researchers understand and explore the various topics in MTF surveys.

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These are: User Guide, Overview of Subject Areas document, Cross-Time Index document. For the Main study, “variable search” on the MTF NAHDAP website or “Codebooks.” For the Longitudinal Panel study, “Question and Response History” document.

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First, the User Guide. This is essential documentation for using MTF data.

For the Main study, year-specific User Guides can be downloaded from each study website in NAHDAP. Before 2023, the User Guide was part of the document titled “Codebook.”

For the Longitudinal Panel study, you can download the User Guide from the MTF panel series website or from each MTF panel study website in NAHDAP.

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The User Guide provides information on MTF terminology, data collection, variables, yearly highlights, and weighting.

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Next, the Overview of Subject Areas document. The overview documents are posted on the NAHDAP website for the MTF Main study series or MTF Longitudinal Panel study series.

This slide shows the Main study. You can download the “Overview of Subject Areas for 8th, 10th, and 12th Grades” under “For Researchers” on the MTF Main study series website.

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Similarly, you can download the “Overview of Subject Areas for the MTF Longitudinal Panel data” under the “For Researchers” section on the MTF Panel series page.

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Let’s look at one of the overview documents together.

Here, you see an Overview of the Subject Areas for BY, the 12th grade surveys. In the file, the first row of each table displays the subject code, subject area key, and forms.

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The first subject area key here is subject code “A”, and subject area key “Drugs”.

Under “A. Drugs”, there are many subtopics such as ‘A01. Use of various licit and illicit drugs’, ‘A02. Exposure to drug use’, ‘A03. Availability of drugs’, ‘A04. Expected Future Use,’ ‘A05. Conditions of Use’, and ‘A06. Reasons for Use, Abstinence, and Stopping’.

Furthermore, under each subtopic, additional subjects are included. The subtopic “A01. Use of various licit or illicit drugs” includes ‘A01a. Number of uses in lifetime’, ‘A01b. Number of uses in last 12th months’, ‘A01c. Number of uses in last 30 days’, ‘A01d. Quantity used’, ‘A01e. How high? How often?’, ‘A01f. How long high?’, ‘A01g. Incidence of first use’, ‘A01h. Use with other drugs’, ‘A01i. Tried to stop’, ‘A01j. Use on doctor's orders?’, ‘A01k. Bad trip?’, ‘A01l. Kinds of drugs’, ‘A01m. Cost’, ‘A01n. Source’, and ‘A01o. Non-alcoholic drinks (Caffeine, soda, energy drinks, etc.)’.

This overview is very helpful, but it only displays the key subject areas and subtopics, not the actual questions. So, we don’t know exactly which questions were asked under each subject area and subtopic. For example, what does “A02a. Friends’ use” mean? What is the exact question text for this subtopic?

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To find details for each subject area, such as question text, response options, and the specific years in which questions were asked, we need another document: the “Cross-Time Index.”

This document is included with your download of MTF public-use data from NAHDAP. It is also available for download from the NAHDAP MTF study series website, under the “For researchers” section.

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From here, I will show you how to use the Cross-Time Index to find details.

First, carefully read the section “Using the Cross-Time Question index” at the beginning of the document.

It explains important information about subject areas, variable labels, and the Item Reference Number, as well as what the column headings mean in the Cross-Time Index.

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On the next page, you will see these instructions:

Section Number 1 indicates the subject area - for example, “A01a. Drugs. Number of uses in lifetime.”

Number 2 indicates the IRN, item reference number.

Number 3 is for the variable label, and Number 4 indicates the cohort.

Number 5 indicates the form in which each variable is included.

Number 6, “first year” and “last year,” represents the first and most recent year when a question was included in the MTF surveys.

Number 7 indicates changes – if and when a change to questions or response options occurred.

Number 8 shows the location of each variable in the questionnaires by year.

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Suppose we are interested in politics. Let’s find the subject area “H. Politics” in the Cross-Time Index.

Specifically, let’s look up “H05. Voting and political activism,” which is one of five subtopics under “H. Politics.” (Five subtopics include H01. Political interest and preferences, H02. Attitudes toward governmental policies and practices, H03. Views about the role of citizens in government (See also I02), H04. Confidence in government, H05. Voting, political activism).

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In the Cross-Time Index document (which is available as a PDF or an Excel file), I searched for the subtopic “voting, political activism”.

Under this topic, there are several variables with different IRNs, variable labels, cohorts, forms, and questionnaire locations.

This is useful because it shows that this subject area includes several questions with different IRNs. However, the index still does not provide the exact question text or response options.

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MTF provides additional resources with full question text and response options.

For the Main study, you can use the NAHDAP study homepage or the Codebook.

For the Longitudinal Panel study, you can use the “Question and Response History” document, which can be downloaded from the NAHDAP study homepage.

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Let’s search for the question text for one variable from “H. Politics” in the MTF Main study.

In the Cross-Time Index document, I copied the variable label “VOTE, MAJOR IMPACT.”

Then, in the Variable Search tab on the MTF Main Study website, I searched for that variable label.

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From the search results, I clicked one of the variable names (“V1675”).

After clicking the variable name (V1675), you will see the question text (“These next questions ask your opinions about a number of different topics. How much do you agree or disagree with each statement below? The way people vote has a major impact on how things are run in this country) and response options (disagree, mostly disagree, neither, mostly agree, agree, missing), along with their distribution (disagree, n=182, 8.1%; mostly disagree, n=251, 11.2%; neither, n=393, 17.5%; mostly agree, n=663, 29.6%; agree, n=711, 31.7%; missing n=42, 1.9%).

Please keep in mind that choosing one of the variable names from the search results will show the VOTE MAJOR IMPACT variable for only one year (here it’s 2000) and from one form.

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For the Longitudinal Panel study, you will need “Question and Response History” document. You can download it from the NAHDAP study homepage, under the “For researchers” section.

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Similar to what we did earlier for the Main study, I searched for one of the variable labels from the document (VOTE->MAJ IMPCT).

You will get a result that includes IRN (01610), variable label (VOTE->MAJ IMPCT), cohort (BY, FU), form (1), first year (1975 for BY; 1976 for FU) and latest year (2024), as well as question text (for both BY and FU: How much do you agree or disagree with each statement below? The way people vote has a major impact on how things are run in this country?) and response options (1=disagree, 2=mostly disagree, 3=neither, 4=mostly agree, 5=agree).

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Some important tips for utilizing these different MTF resources:

First, subject areas are used for all MTF surveys. Subject areas are not specific to a certain cohort or grade; they are universal across MTF surveys.

Question text and variable names may change across years, but the Item Reference Number, IRN, does not. The IRN is a unique identifier assigned to a question across all grades, ages, forms, and years of the MTF surveys.

Core variables are important, key variables in MTF. Form-specific variables are included on a single form or a few forms, but not on all forms.

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To get started with MTF data for your research, check the available MTF resources to determine whether the data can answer your research questions.

These resources include the User Guide, the MTF Overview of Subject Areas document, the Cross-Time Index document, the NAHDAP MTF website or codebook, and the Question and Response History document.

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This concludes the web tutorial, "Overview of MTF Form-Specific Topics, Part 1."

Part 2 is available on monitoringthefuture.org under the Video Tutorials section.

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