

Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study Disclosure Control Protocol

To be read by all persons wishing to use the NILS data

The Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study (NILS) is a large-scale data linkage study which has been created by linking individual level administrative and statistical data. The data is managed by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and access to the data is restricted to the 'safe setting' within NISRA headquarters at McAuley House. Any person using NILS data, either in the capacity as a research support officer or researcher, must comply with all confidentiality requirements detailed in the NILS license agreement and NILS Security Policy.

In addition to the confidentiality protocols, certain disclosure control measures will be applied to all output information released to NILS users by support personnel. This is to ensure that no individual can be identified within them. If data are to be released in tabular form, then the NILS support officer must ensure that any information that could potentially identify an individual is aggregated, suppressed or removed as appropriate. The disclosure control protocol includes:

- When releasing tabular data NILS support personnel must ensure that cell counts are 10 or over. If associated data allows the cell to be split then the support officer must aggregate the data to the highest level consistent with the need to explain the results.
- No data on birth dates of NILS members may be released, with the exception of year of birth. Any analyses which require month of birth will be conducted by NILS support personnel. Any derivations requiring the full date of birth will be carried out by the NILS data management team.
- Exposure times may be included in aggregated datasets provided there is more than one event in each cell.
- Sample uniques or individual cases are never allowed.

The following types of data are not routinely released but will be considered by the NILS support personnel on a case-by-case basis. (Note the turn-around time for these type of data may take slightly longer than would generally be the case.)

- Reporting residual values
- Scatter diagrams - particular care should be exercised with extreme values.

Further restrictions will also be placed on the release of any variable considered to be sensitive. These include variables relating to small numbers of people in Northern Ireland (i.e. local-area geographic identifiers, detailed ethnicity, rare causes of death etc.). Other variables, such as religion, may also be treated as sensitive, depending on the context of the research. It should be noted that selection criteria used in extracting data such as sex and age may be disclosive when used in conjunction with other variables.

If a support officer believes that data may be disclosive they must bring this to the attention of the NLS data custodian who will decide on the procedure to follow. In most cases this will require further aggregation of the data.