

American Time Use Survey Fact Sheet



June 2022

<https://www.bls.gov>

What is the American Time Use Survey?

- The American Time Use Survey (ATUS) provides nationally representative estimates of how, where, and with whom Americans spend their time, and is the only federal survey providing data on the full range of nonmarket activities, from childcare to volunteering.
- ATUS data files are used by researchers to study a broad range of issues; the data files include information collected from nearly 228,000 interviews conducted from 2003 to 2021.
- ATUS data files can be linked to data files from the Current Population Survey (CPS). This expands the context in which time-use data can be analyzed and saves taxpayer money because fewer questions must be asked in the ATUS interview.

What are some of the uses of ATUS data?

Economic research

- The Bureau of Economic Analysis has used ATUS data to measure the value of unpaid work, including volunteering and household activities.
- Researchers at the Bureau of Labor Statistics have examined the time Americans spend working at home and how this additional work time can be used to enhance traditional measures of worker productivity.
- Because they are collected continuously, ATUS data have been used to measure changes in the time Americans spend working, doing household production, and in leisure at different points in a business cycle.

Health and safety

- The Bureau of Transportation Statistics has used ATUS data to measure exposure to vehicle accident risk.
- The Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics uses ATUS data as a “use of time indicator” in the publication, *Older Americans: Key Indicators of Well-Being*.
- The Economic Research Service at the Department of Agriculture used ATUS data to examine eating and drinking patterns and how they relate to a person’s overall health. They also have used ATUS data to look at how Americans use food assistance programs.
- Sleep researchers have used ATUS data to measure the tradeoffs Americans make between sleep, work, commuting, and other activities, and how they relate to overall health.
- ATUS data on how much time people spend alone or with others can be used to study social isolation in different groups.

Family and work-life balance

- ATUS researchers study how working parents find the time to balance the demands of childcare, work, leisure, and other activities in their lives
- Researchers use ATUS data to estimate how much time mothers and fathers spend with their children, and how it has changed over time.
- ATUS data show how different groups of Americans spend their leisure time, such as watching television, socializing with their neighbors, and exercising.

International comparisons

- ATUS data were published in the United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Report 2015*. This report compares time use in the United States with time use in other countries across different demographic groups and sheds light on how Americans' well-being is different from those in other nations.
- ATUS data appear in the United Nations database of Sustainable Development Goal Indicators.
- ATUS data have been included in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's *Society at a Glance: OECD Social Indicators*.

Where has research using ATUS data been published?

National media

National newspapers, magazines, television shows, and radio programs regularly use ATUS data to inform the public.

Academic journals

A wealth of papers and professional research has been published in a variety of fields. This research has been published in many academic publications, including the following:

- American Economic Review
- American Journal of Agricultural Economics
- Demography
- Industrial Relations
- Journal of Economic Perspectives
- Journal of Labor Economics
- Journal of Marriage and Family
- Journal of Physical Activity and Health
- Journal of Sleep
- Quarterly Journal of Economics
- Science
- Social Indicators Research

A more complete listing of papers and publications is available at <https://www.bls.gov/tus/research.htm>.

Where can I find ATUS data?

Published estimates

- ATUS news releases include tables of time-use estimates: <https://www.bls.gov/tus/news.htm>.
- Other ATUS time-use estimates are available at <https://www.bls.gov/tus/tables.htm>.
- Charts containing some of the most commonly cited statistics are available at <https://www.bls.gov/tus/charts.htm>.
- ATUS time-use data series can be extracted from LABSTAT, the Bureau of Labor Statistics database. The database contains annual and some quarterly ATUS data series, and is available at <https://www.bls.gov/tus/database.htm>.

Unpublished estimates

Unpublished tables of time-use estimates by age, ethnicity, employment status, educational attainment, marital status, presence and age of household children, and other categories are available upon request by emailing the ATUS staff.

Producing your own estimates

Researchers can produce their own time-use estimates using the ATUS data files that are available for free download on the ATUS Web site (<https://www.bls.gov/tus>). For more detailed information on generating estimates using ATUS data, a "how to" Web page provides guidance: <https://www.bls.gov/tus/howto.htm>.