Donors and Recipients of Time and Money Transfers in "Other, Specify" Responses, 2020 HRS Core

Data Description

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Version 1

October 2025

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Acknowledgement:
This work was supported by the National Institute on Aging (U01AG079065) and a pilot grant from the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Covid Coordinating Center Pilot Grant Program (5U24AG076462). This work also was supported in part by the California Center for Population Research at UCLA (CCPR), which receives core support (P2C-HD041022) from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). We thank the HRS staff, particularly Helen Levy, Abdelaziz Adawe, and Brett Vogel, as well as Anna Wiersma Strauss, who advised us on Spanish responses.

Suggested citation:
Lin, I.-F., Seltzer, J. A., Chin, J. A., Wiemers, E. E., & Hotz, V. J. (2025). *Donors and recipients of time and money transfers in "other, specify" responses, 2020 HRS core*. Health and Retirement Study.

Abstract

This document describes a user-contributed dataset with variables coded from open-ended "other, specify" responses to questions about help given/received in the 2020 HRS COVID-19 module. In this module, respondents were asked to identify who outside their household gave them time and money help and to whom they provided time and money during the pandemic. The resulting dataset, released as four separate data files, translates these confidential open-ended responses into relationship categories recorded in a publicly releasable format. When combined with the 2020 HRS core public-use dataset, these new variables provide a full list of those who gave or received time and money help in response to pandemic-related hardships. Each file corresponds to one of the four combinations of help type (money or time) and direction (received or given). For each respondent who provided a valid "other, specify" response for a given help type and direction, the datasets include indicators identifying the relationship type(s) involved in the help exchange.

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Motivation for the project

In 2020, the HRS added a COVID-19 module to its core survey, asking whether respondents (and their spouse or cohabiting partner) received or gave time or money help to or from kin and nonkin outside the household due to pandemic-related hardship. For each type and direction of help, respondents were first asked a filter question to determine whether they (and their spouse or partner) had received or given such help. If the answer was affirmative, a follow-up question asked them to identify the donors or recipients. Respondents could list as many donors or recipients as applicable, including paid helpers and organizations such as churches. Interviewers used a screen that enabled them to link donors and recipients to individuals with Other Person Numbers (OPNs) in the HRS data when available. Both the response to the filter question and the associated OPNs are available in the HRS-provided public data.

However, not all individuals mentioned by respondents had an associated OPN. In fact, most OPNs assigned by the HRS are limited to respondents' children or stepchildren (including those of the respondent's spouse/cohabiting partner). When donors or recipients did not have an OPN, interviewers recorded respondents' responses as open-ended entries, occasionally adding their own comments. These text responses were not released in the public data. Instead, they were coded as 997 ("other, specify") in the relationship variable. As a result, researchers using the public data cannot determine the relationships between respondents and these donors or recipients, which presents a significant loss of information about the scope and composition of older adults' support networks. Public data show that among respondents who reported providing time help, 86% (n = 2,258) identified at least one recipient coded as 997. The corresponding figures were 64% (n = 1,515) for money help given, 48% (n = 1,096) for time help received, and 53% (n = 340) for money help received. To address this gap, our user-contributed variables provide systematically coded "other, specify" text and interviewer comments to reconstruct the information missing from the public data.

The variables we coded must be combined with variables from the COVID-19 module in the 2020 HRS core public-use dataset for a full array of donors and recipients of help during the pandemic. Our user-contributed data files do not incorporate HRS core variables other than the unique respondent identifiers required to link the contributed data to the HRS core public-use file.

Procedure used to code open-ended text

We coded the open-ended "other, specify" text responses from four transfer questions in the 2020 HRS COVID-19 module: money help received (Question W632), time help received (Question W635), money help given (Question W638), and time help given (Question W641). The raw text data came from survey production records to which the HRS granted access under highly restricted conditions to preserve respondents' confidentiality.

Each open-ended response could include multiple relationship types. For instance, a respondent could report that they helped their sister, granddaughter, and the people who live next door. To capture this complexity, we constructed a series of dichotomous variables indicating the presence (absence) of help with each relationship type. These new variables incorporate information from both open-ended responses and interviewer comments available to our team.

Development of the coding scheme

Our coding procedure incorporated both deductive and inductive approaches. The deductive component involved developing an initial coding framework informed by prior research on family and nonkin ties. The inductive component entailed iterative refinement of the coding scheme during the production coding process. We carried out the coding in two distinct phases.

The first phase focused on coding responses into broad relationship types. Two investigators and a graduate student developed a preliminary coding scheme that included categories such as *parent*, *child*, *grandchild*, *sibling*, *other family member*, and *nonkin*, each with accompanying descriptions. To test the scheme, each team member independently coded a randomly selected sample of 100 respondents. The team then met to reconcile discrepancies and refine the coding rules. This process was repeated with a second random sample of 100 respondents to further evaluate and improve the scheme. Once finalized, the coding scheme and rules were used to train two additional graduate student coders. The investigative team met with the coders to ensure a shared understanding of the categories and coding procedures before proceeding with full-scale production coding.

The second phase involved disaggregating the broad relationship types from the first phase into more specific subcategories. The initial coding scheme for this phase included finer

distinctions within each relationship type, and additional categories were added inductively during production coding as new relationship types emerged. By the end of this process, the second coding included 70 subcategory relationship codes, capturing nuances such as sex, in-law status, quasi-kin, and non-coresident romantic partners (e.g., boyfriend/girlfriend). For example, the broad category *parent* was disaggregated into mother, stepmother, mother-in-law, father, stepfather, father-in-law, as well as general references such as parent, stepparent, or parent-in-law. However, because many of these detailed subcategories resulted in small cell sizes, the final data release collapses them into broader, sex-stratified relationship codes. For example, mother, stepmother, and mother-in-law were combined into a single category *female parent*. Other family member subcategories were collapsed into vertical and horizontal ties such as aunt or uncle, niece or nephew, and cousin. Nonkin subcategories were grouped into categories including friends, neighbors, and other non-relatives.

Production coding

Initial checks revealed that some open-ended responses were ambiguous or lacked sufficient context for accurate interpretation. To address this, we supplemented the production coding files with a small set of HRS core variables such as respondent's sex, marital and partnership status, presence of a spouse/partner in the household, and whether the interview was completed by a proxy. These variables provided additional context that helped coders interpret ambiguous text responses more accurately.

Production coding was conducted in weekly batches. Each of the "other, specify" text responses and/or interviewer comments was independently coded by at least two team members, including both project investigators and graduate student coders, using the most current version of the coding scheme available at the time. Inter-coder reliability was high, with Cohen's kappa scores above .90 across broad relationship categories. The kappa statistics range from 0 to 1, with 1 indicating perfect agreement (Cohen 1960). Weekly team meetings involving all investigators and coders were held to resolve discrepancies and to make iterative refinements to the coding scheme, such as adding new relationship categories or revising existing definitions. Each time the coding scheme was updated, all previously coded cases were reviewed and revised to align with the latest version. To ensure consistency and accuracy across the full dataset, the codes were revisited at least twice in subsequent rounds of review and data checks.

During production coding, open-ended text responses were organized by respondent rather than by help type, allowing coders to view all "other, specify" responses from the same individual together. This approach facilitated the identification of relationships by enabling coders to link personal names across help types. For example, a name mentioned without a relationship specified in the "money help received" response could be matched to a relationship if the same name appeared as "my sister, [Name]" in the "time help received" response. In cases where both members of a couple were interviewed, as indicated by a shared household ID, their responses also were reviewed together, which sometimes provided additional context for identifying relationships (e.g., when one spouse reported that her sister, [Name], helped and the other spouse reported that they helped [Name] without specifying that person's relationship to the respondent). We did not attempt, however, to reconcile conflicting reports between spouses/cohabiting partners. When a relationship could not be determined from the text responses alone, we consulted HRS staff to check whether the named individual appeared in the respondent's household roster or was a child, which sometimes enabled further relationship classification.

Although core variables were used during production coding to help clarify ambiguous text responses, their use was intentionally limited. Specifically, we did not attempt to reconcile the donors or recipients identified in the "other, specify" responses with information from the HRS core data. For example, if a respondent reported helping a parent, we coded it as such without verifying whether either parent was listed as living in the core data, nor did we attempt to determine which parent was being referenced. Even if only a mother was recorded as living in the core data, the response was coded as *parent* in the first coding phase and *general parent* in the second coding phase, rather than inferring *female parent* based on information in the core data. This coding approach of avoiding validation from the HRS core data was applied consistently across all relationship categories. We adopted this approach because the availability of information varied substantially across relationship types. Reconciling only certain categories (e.g., parents), where more complete data were available, could introduce systematic bias against other categories with less information (e.g., siblings, nieces, and nephews).

We also accounted for interviewer recording styles and Spanish-language interviews. In additional rounds of code checking, we reviewed responses by interviewer ID to try to resolve

ambiguous responses. For Spanish interviews, HRS staff provided English translations, and a bilingual graduate student reviewed these translations. In some cases, these checks prompted revisions to our coding decisions about specific responses.

Data cleaning and finalization

After production coding, we reviewed the data for potential duplicate mentions, that is, instances in which the same individual might be represented in both the public data and the "other, specify" responses. We began by identifying cases in which the same relationship type appeared in both datasets for the same respondent and help type. We then examined additional details (e.g., asked HRS staff to check internal records if a personal name was in the text response and compared sex of OPN'd and "other specify" responses). Based on this additional information we determined whether the entries likely referred to the same person. If strong evidence supported a match, we classified it as a duplicate mention and removed the corresponding record from the "other, specify" dataset for that relationship type.

In some cases, however, an apparent overlap between the public data and our "other, specify" dataset did not reflect the same individual. When evidence indicated that the two records referred to different people within the same relationship category, we retained the "other, specify" record. For instance, if a respondent's open-ended text response mentioned two siblings but only one was linked to an OPN in the public file, we kept the additional sibling entry to account for the unlinked individual. Thus, when the same relationship type appears in both the public and "other, specify" datasets for a given respondent and help type, it typically reflects exchanges with two or more distinct individuals in that category. It was not possible, however, to determine the exact number of helpers or recipients in the open-ended responses because of ambiguous plural references (e.g., "friends helped me," "siblings"). Thus, the new variables we created indicate whether at least one of a given relationship type was mentioned.

To align with the survey questions, which explicitly asked about help exchange with individuals outside the household, we excluded donors and recipients mentioned in the open-ended responses and/or interviewer comments as clearly residing with the respondent at the time of the survey. We also closely reviewed proxy responses to identify potential coresident proxies listed as donors or recipients. However, we did not assess coresidence status for donors and recipients identified by an OPN in the public data; data users can access this information

themselves and decide whether to exclude these cases from their analyses. For consistency with our coding procedures, we recommend doing so.

In some cases, removing potential duplicate mentions and/or coresident donors and recipients resulted in a response no longer qualifying as an out-of-household help exchange. These adjustments, possible only through additional information from open-ended text responses, are flagged in the user-contributed dataset for data users. Such changes may affect the values of publicly available variables, including the presence of the 997 "other, specify" code used to identify donors and recipients, as well as the filter variables (Questions W631, W634, W637, and W640) that precede the donor and recipient identification questions in the COVID-19 module. We did not directly alter any variables in the public data. Instead, we created new variables in the user-contributed dataset: `any_997` and `helpflag`. The variable `any_997` indicates whether the 997 "other, specify" code remains applicable after our review of the text responses. The variable `helpflag` indicates whether the respondent should be treated as having engaged in that type and direction of help based on the text responses and a check (described below) on whether or not someone with an OPN was reported in the public data for that help type and direction.

For example, if the only individual (or all individuals) mentioned in the "other, specify" text was a duplicate of someone already identified through an OPN in the public data, we coded `any_997` as 0 (i.e., the 997 code is not applicable), indicating that no additional "other, specify" individuals were identified in the open-ended text. However, if at least one individual mentioned was not a duplicate, `any_997` was coded as 1. In both cases, `helpflag` remained coded as 1 because the respondent still reported providing or receiving that type of help through the individual(s) via an OPN.

In another scenario, if the only individual (or all individuals) identified in the "other, specify" text were deemed invalid as donors or recipients due to coresidence with the respondent, `any_997` was coded as 0. If some individuals were coresident but others were not, `any_997` was coded as 1. When `any_997` was coded as 0 due to the exclusion of coresident mentions, we then assessed how this affected the filter question. If an OPN was present in the public data, `helpflag` was coded as 1, indicating that the help type remained valid for the

respondent, even though the "other, specify" entry was not applicable. If no OPN was present, `helpflag` was coded as 5, indicating that the respondent did not report any qualifying help of that type. As with other cases, we did not assess the coresidence status of individuals linked via an OPN because data users can determine this independently using the public data.

Data description

Four datasets are released, one for each type and direction of transfer: time help received (time_received_v1, n = 1,108), money help received (money_received_v1, n = 343), time help given (time_given_v1, n = 2,261), and money help given (money_given_v1, n = 1,528). Each dataset contains one record per respondent; therefore, the number of observations in each file reflects the number of respondents who provided a valid "other, specify" response for that specific type and direction of help. As noted earlier, we made an exception for respondents with `any_997` = 0 (997 code not applicable) or `helpflag` = 5 (help type not present). These respondents are retained in the user-contributed data even though they do not identify any valid donor or recipient or the corresponding help type is no longer applicable to them. Their inclusion provides data users with information that would not be available to them without access to the open-ended responses reviewed by our team.

All four datasets contain the same set of variables, summarized in Table 1. The variables `hhid` and `pn` are unique identifiers that can be used to merge these datasets with the public data. The variable `helptype` distinguishes each help type and direction, so it varies across the four datasets. The variables `any_997` and `helpflag` are the corrected "other, specify" (997) code and the help filter, respectively, as determined by the investigative team. The remaining variables are relationship indicators, coded as 1 if the respondent reported giving or receiving help from someone in that relationship category, and 0 otherwise. These indicators are not mutually exclusive, as respondents could mention multiple donors or recipients in their "other, specify" response text. As a result, a single respondent may have a value of 1 in more than one relationship type. The final released dataset includes codes from broad categories (coded in the first phase) and more detailed subcategories (coded in the second phase). For example, a respondent coded as having a help exchange with a parent (= 1) in the variable from the first coding phase will also have at least one corresponding subcategory code set to 1 in the set of variables in the second coding phase (e.g., female parent, male parent, or general parent). All

broad categories have corresponding subcategories, except for “not elsewhere classified” and “paid help” categories.

Merging with public data

To accurately capture the scope and composition of older adults’ support networks, data users should combine the user-contributed data with the public data. Each file is merged one-to-one with the public data using `hhid` and `pn` as unique identifiers. There should be no cases that appear in the user-contributed data but are missing from the public data (May 2023, Final V1.0)

Table 1. List of Variables in Each Dataset for Help Given or Received, 2020 HRS COVID-19 Module

Variable name	Description	Values
hhid	Household ID number	
pn	Person ID number	
helptype	Indicates the type and direction of help. Each data file contains different values for this variable, corresponding to the specific help type and direction represented.	1. Money help received 2. Time help received 3. Money help given 4. Time help given
any_997	Indicates whether the 997 ("other, specify") code applies to the specific type and direction of transfer	0. Code 997 not applicable 1. Code 997 applicable
helpflag	Indicates whether a respondent engaged in a specific type and direction of transfer based only on the "other, specify" text responses and interviewer comments; users should combine this variable with the HRS core variable for whether the specific type and direction of exchange occurred (See core variables corresponding to Questions W631 [money help received], W634 [time help received], W637 [money help given], and W640 [time help given]).	1. Yes 5. No
parent	Engaged in help with a parent, including sex-specific (mother/father), step-, and in-law relationships	0. No 1. Yes
child	Engaged in help with a child, including sex-specific (daughter/son), step-, and in-law relationships	0. No 1. Yes
grandchild	Engaged in help with a grandchild, including sex-specific (granddaughter/grandson), step-, and in-law relationships	0. No 1. Yes
sibling	Engaged in help with a sibling, including sex-specific (sister/brother), step-, half-, and in-law relationships	0. No 1. Yes
otherfamily	Engaged in help with other family members, including both horizontal and vertical ties such as aunt/uncle, niece/nephew, cousin, grandparent	0. No 1. Yes

nonkin	Engaged in help with non-relatives such as friends, neighbors, co-workers, strangers, as well as organizations such as churches, volunteer groups	0. No 1. Yes
paidhelp	Received time help purchased from paid sources, such as hired caregivers or delivery services. **This category is only available for Time Help Received**.	0. No 1. Yes
nec	"Not elsewhere classified." Engaged in help with named individuals whose relationship could not be identified from the text response or HRS name roster	0. No 1. Yes
femaleparent	Disaggregated from "parent," including mother, stepmother, and mother-in-law	0. No 1. Yes
maleparent	Disaggregated from "parent," including father, stepfather, and father-in-law	0. No 1. Yes
generalparent	Disaggregated from "parent," including parent, stepparent, and parent-in-law whose sex cannot be identified from the text response	0. No 1. Yes
femalechild	Disaggregated from "child," including daughter, stepdaughter, and daughter-in-law	0. No 1. Yes
malechild	Disaggregated from "child," including son, stepson, and son-in-law	0. No 1. Yes
generalchild	Disaggregated from "child," including child, stepchild, and child-in-law whose sex cannot be identified from the text response	0. No 1. Yes
femalegchild	Disaggregated from "grandchild," including granddaughter, step-granddaughter, and granddaughter-in-law	0. No 1. Yes
malegchild	Disaggregated from "grandchild," including grandson, step-grandson, and grandson-in-law	0. No 1. Yes
generalgchild	Disaggregated from "grandchild," including grandchild, step-grandchild, and grandchild-in-law whose sex cannot be identified from the text response	0. No 1. Yes
femalesibling	Disaggregated from "sibling," including sister, stepsister, half-sister, and sister-in-law	0. No 1. Yes
malesibling	Disaggregated from "sibling," including brother, stepbrother, half-brother, and brother-in-law	0. No 1. Yes

generalsibling	Disaggregated from "sibling," including sibling, stepsibling, half-sibling, and sibling-in-law whose sex cannot be identified from the text response	0. No 1. Yes
auntuncle	Disaggregated from "otherfamily," including aunt, uncle and spouse/cohabiting partner's aunt and uncle	0. No 1. Yes
niecenephew	Disaggregated from "otherfamily," including niece, nephew and spouse/cohabiting partner's niece and nephew	0. No 1. Yes
cousin	Disaggregated from "otherfamily," including cousin and spouse/cohabiting partner's cousin	0. No 1. Yes
generalotherfam	Disaggregated from "otherfamily," including mentions of relatives and other family members not already included in specific variables, such as grandparents	0. No 1. Yes
friend	Disaggregated from "nonkin"	0. No 1. Yes
neighbor	Disaggregated from "nonkin," including neighbors, people in the building or neighborhood	0. No 1. Yes
nonkinother	Disaggregated from "nonkin," including co-workers, people at church, churches, volunteer organizations, strangers	0. No 1. Yes

Notes: Some categories include responses that are substantively interesting but too few in number to justify separate coding. For example, "child" includes adopted children and a grandchild's mother or father; "nonkin" encompasses ex-spouses and foster children. The category "not elsewhere classified" (nec) also includes a small number of vague pronoun references, such as "they."