



Public  
understanding  
of Law  
Survey

## Guide

# Using the Public Understanding of Law Survey (PULS) dataset

# About The Public Understanding of Law Survey

The Public Understanding of Law Survey (PULS) is a state-wide survey exploring how Victorians experience, understand, and engage with the law.

Using a probability sample, 6008 respondents from across Victoria were surveyed face-to-face about their personal experience of navigating the law in Victoria.

The PULS explored questions relevant to:

- people's knowledge of the civil justice system and its institutions
- people's experience of civil legal problems and how they respond to such problems
- how people see the law as relevant in their lives.

Reports and papers from the PULS are available at [puls.victorialawfoundation.org.au](https://puls.victorialawfoundation.org.au)

# How to use the PULS dataset

## Introduction

Congratulations! It looks like you are planning to download and use a fascinating dataset!

This document gives a brief guide to the PULS dataset and its content. Compared to many legal needs surveys (especially those with household grids, multiple problem follow-up, longitudinal structure, or other forms of complex routing), the PULS data is simple and user friendly. It follows a straightforward linear structure without complex routing. Names of variables and the general structure of the dataset follow the PULS annotated questionnaire<sup>1</sup>.

Using the annotated questionnaire in conjunction with the dataset is the easiest way to conduct quick and accurate analyses. If you have further questions about the data and how to use it, contact the VLF research team at [research@victorialawfoundation.org.au](mailto:research@victorialawfoundation.org.au)

## Form of data

The data is available in SPSS and STATA formats. Those who require a different format should contact the VLF research team.

## Contents

The following describes key sections of the dataset and their contents. It is split into core variables and derived variables. Core variables are essentially variables delivered to the VLF by the fieldwork company, Roy Morgan. Derived variables were produced using these core variables to make new variables tailored to typical analyses, such as those in PULS reporting<sup>2</sup>.

Many of the variables needed to conduct common analyses and get started with analysis quickly can be found in the derived variables section, though the core variables are key to creating new bespoke variables or when looking at topics/variables not covered by derived variables.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://www.victorialawfoundation.org.au/research-publications/the-puls-annotated-questionnaire>

<sup>2</sup> See <https://puls.victorialawfoundation.org.au/>; <https://puls.victorialawfoundation.org.au/publications#reports>

## Core variables

### Variables 1 – 13: Technical variables

The first 19 variables include unique identification (useful for merging/restructuring), a range of variables including survey duration, survey date, information on dwelling type, household size, mode of interview, location of interview, and use of showcards.

### Variables 14 – 82: Initial and supplementary demographics

Demographic variables (initial demographics (ID) and supplementary demographics (SD) are grouped together into a single block. Here the structure departs slightly from the annotated questionnaire in that the supplementary demographics which were collected towards the end of the interview are inserted alongside initial demographics for convenience. This section includes digital capability for law items at SD14, which is also a domain of legal capability. Note, that there are further derived demographic variables (used in PULS reports) later in the dataset (see below).

### Variables 83 – 103: Legal capability part 1; knowledge of the content of the law and general legal confidence (GLC)

The first set of legal capability measures are the 15 knowledge items (variables 83 – 97) and the 6 items that make up the GLC scale (variables 98 – 103). Further variables for both are included later in the dataset among the derived variables.

### Variables 104 – 304: Legal needs survey problem identification

Legal needs survey problem identification variables. Further variables summarizing key elements of this section (problem prevalence, number of problems etc.) are included later in the dataset among the derived variables.

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### Variables 305 – 534: Legal needs survey single problem follow-up

Follow-up legal needs survey questions for a single problem per respondent (where respondents reported one or more problems).

### Variables 535 – 540: Catch-all service use

Catch-all service use questions were asked of all respondents and not just in relation to any problem they have been discussing with interviewers.

Variables 541 – 603: Legal capability part 2; practical legal literacy (PLL), perceived relevance of law (LAW), narratives of law, perceived inaccessibility of lawyers (PIL), trust in lawyers,

This section covers PLL items (variables 541 – 546), LAW Scale items (variables 547 – 554), narratives of law items (variables 555 – 566), PIL items (variables 567 – 576), trust in lawyers items (variables 577 – 603). Further variables for each domain of capability are included later in the dataset among the derived variables (see below).

## Derived variables

### Variables 604 – 631: Derived problem experience variables

Simple summaries of the legal needs problem identification questions covering prevalence of each problem type, number of problems for each problem type, number of problems overall (coded in several ways), and importantly, the problem type considered in the follow-up L2 legal needs questions (variable 631 – L2MainProblem).

### Variables 632 – 655: Derived demographic variables

A selection of derived demographic variables that are ready for analysis and are routinely used in PULS reporting. Note that the x and z's used in variable names are to aid navigation when conducting analyses.

### Variables 656 – 659: Weights

These are the weights which should be assigned when conducting analyses. More detail on their construction can be found in the PULS technical report<sup>3</sup>. It is very important to assign the correct weight in analyses, with the key distinction being between PERSON (respondent is the unit of observation) and PROBLEM (problems are the unit of observation) level analyses. There are four weights:

- i) **WEIGHTpersonlevelSTATEWIDE** – use when conducting PERSON-level analysis state-wide (i.e. the unit of observation is respondents). For example, what percentage of people have problems, or what people's general legal confidence is.
- ii) **WEIGHTpersonlevelCITIESRRR** – for use in PERSON-level analysis where you do not want regional/rural areas to be weighted down. PULS oversampled in regional and rural areas, and whereas i) assigns such areas smaller weights to produce Victoria-wide estimates, this weight does not. Use when analysing at a person-level, but seeking to look at regional/rural areas specifically (or contrast them with major cities). For example, problem prevalence in regional or rural areas.
- iii) **WEIGHTproblemlevelSTATEWIDEcap** – use when conducting PROBLEM-level analysis state-wide (i.e. the unit of observation is problems). For example, what percentage of problems involved legal advice, the extent to which problems resulted in adverse consequences. Used for the follow-up legal needs survey questions (610– 637).
- iv) **WEIGHTproblemlevelCITIESRRRcap** – for use in PROBLEM-level analysis where you do not want regional/rural areas to be weighted down.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.victorialawfoundation.org.au/research-publications/puls-technical-report>

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### Variables 660 – 725: Derived legal capability variables

Derived legal capability variables, ready for analysis, and replicating those used in PULS reporting. Includes knowledge (variables 660 – 693), GLC (variables 694 – 697), PLL (variables 698 – 700), LAW Scale (variables 701 – 704), narratives of law (variables 705 – 712), PIL (variables 713 – 716), trust in lawyers (variables 717 – 718), digital capability for law (variables 719 – 720), as well as composite capability measures (variables 721 – 725).

### Variables 726 – 731: Broad problem-solving strategy

Variables used to capture how people responded to their problems in simple terms. Variables 726 – 729 cover core actions (which are not mutually exclusive, before two composite strategy variables (variables 730 – 731) where particular actions are prioritised.

### Variables 732 – 733: Legal need

Measures of whether legal need existed and whether it was met (problem level) using the method set out in PULS volume 1 and recent global guidance<sup>4</sup>. Version 1 defines expert help as only including legal advice, whereas version 2 allows expert help to include other types of independent advisers.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://puls.victorialawfoundation.org.au/publications/everyday-problems-and-legal-need> and <https://www.oecd.org/governance/legal-needs-surveys-and-access-to-justice-g2g9a36c-en.htm>

# Victoria **Law** Foundation

The Public Understanding of Law Survey is a Victoria Law Foundation project.

Victoria Law Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation supporting better justice for all Victorians through research, education and grants.

[www.victorialawfoundation.org.au](http://www.victorialawfoundation.org.au)