

The logo for the National Child Development Study, consisting of the lowercase letters 'ncds' in a bold, rounded, pink font.

National Child  
Development Study



# Insights from your lives

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A woman with long dark hair, wearing a green jacket, is walking on a paved path outdoors. She is smiling and looking towards two children. In the center, a young boy with light brown hair, wearing a blue school uniform, is smiling broadly at the camera. To his right, a young girl with long brown hair, wearing a pink jacket over a dark school uniform, is walking away from the camera. The background shows a residential street with brick houses and greenery.

# The secret to a happy life

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## **NCDS findings have shown how a happy start to life can set people up for a brighter future.**

Over the years, NCDS has revealed a huge amount about how our experiences growing up can echo through time and shape our adult lives. In one recent study, published in 2019, researchers investigated the factors which can affect children's chances of leading a satisfied life later on.

The research team, from Aix-Marseille University, Chulalongkorn University in Thailand and Paris School of Economics, drew on information collected about you when you were growing up and about your adult lives up to age 50. They found that having good emotional health during childhood and adolescence

had the biggest impact on future life satisfaction. This was partly explained by the fact that happy children tended to go on to do well in their careers, get married and have good physical and mental health in adulthood, all of which contributed to people feeling satisfied with life.

It was a similarly good news story for children with strong cognitive ability and for those raised in better-off, stable home environments. They were also more likely to have higher levels of life satisfaction as adults.

These findings show how adult wellbeing can have very long roots and they emphasise the importance of addressing any emotional problems in childhood early on.

# Feeling the squeeze

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**Many of you devote time to supporting your parents as they get older and lots of you also regularly look after grandchildren. But a new study has found that those who make the biggest time commitment to their parents are also the most likely to lend a hand with childcare.**

When we surveyed you at age 55, almost 3 in 10 (29%) of you were fortunate enough to have at least one living parent or in-law and at least one grandchild. A study by a team of researchers from Southampton University and Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, published last year, looked into the experiences of people in this group, who potentially have dual caring responsibilities – the so-called ‘sandwich generation’.

Of those with at least one parent or in-law and at least one grandchild, around half

spent time looking after both generations. Women were more likely than men to help with grandchildren, while men were slightly more likely than women to spend time caring for parents or in-laws. Only a small proportion (13% of men and 10% of women) said they didn’t have any caring responsibilities for either generation.

Women tended to devote more time to caring for family members overall, and to the younger generation in particular, compared to men. For example, 17 per cent of women and 11 per cent of men spent more than 20 hours a week looking after grandchildren.

The researchers found that it was those who spent the most time looking after parents (ten or more hours a week) who were the most likely to regularly help out with grandchildren. In fact, providing this much support to the older generation trebled people’s chances of caring for the younger generation as well.

The information you share with us when we next talk to you, for the Life in Your Early 60s Survey, will help us understand even more about how your generation balance the different caring responsibilities in your lives.



# Understanding social mobility

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**A recent study has shown how moving from the North to the South East meant career progression for many of your generation, but came with an emotional price for some.**

NCDS has long been an indispensable source of evidence for researchers and policymakers who want to understand how people move up and down the social ladder. One recent piece of research has looked at how relocating from one part of the country to another impacted on your generation's progress in life.

## What we asked you

When you were growing up, we recorded what your dads did for work and where you lived. Through the years, you've kept us updated on your careers and the different places you've moved to.

Not long after the Age 50 Survey, a small number of you took part in special in-depth interviews so we could gather more detailed information about your lives and explore different issues, including social identity.

## Moving down to move on up

Using NCDS information, researchers at the University of Manchester and Loughborough University examined the part geography plays in people's life histories. They found that people of your generation who moved to London and the South East from other parts of the country increased their chances of rising up the social ladder. People from working class backgrounds in the North almost doubled their chances of securing a managerial or professional position by moving to the South East. Two thirds in this group got a job at this higher level, moving them up the ladder, compared to just over one third of those who stayed put.

But it was those who moved from the Midlands who reaped the most rewards. Around 7 in 10 working class 'migrants' from this region got a managerial or professional position when they relocated to the South East. By comparison, around 3 in 10 of their peers got a job at this level if they stayed closer to home.

Working class newcomers from both the North and the Midlands tended to fare even

better in the South East than the locals. Only around one third of working class people from the South East who stayed in the region secured a managerial or professional job.

## An emotional journey

The South East has been described as an 'escalator' region, providing more opportunity for social advancement through the job market than other parts of the country.

In this same study, the researchers looked at how people who had travelled from north to south to ride this escalator felt about their journey, drawing on the in-depth interviews conducted with some of you at age 50. They found that among those who had moved down to the South East and moved up socially, their stories of success were sometimes mixed with feelings of being out of place and needing to adjust.

These findings add to the many rich insights NCDS has already given us into your generation's experiences of social mobility.

# An uneven playing field

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**Researchers have discovered that going to a secondary school without adequate sports facilities can make a difference to how active you are later on.**

When you were 16, your headteachers told us about the sports facilities, libraries, science laboratories and other resources available at your schools. According to your headteachers, just over a third of you went to schools with inadequate sports facilities.

A team of researchers from universities in Monash, Australia and London analysed this information alongside other details you've shared with the study over the years, including about your exercise habits. They found that going to a school with sufficient sports facilities slightly increased the likelihood of you doing at least some exercise in your 30s, 40s and 50s.

The World Health Organisation recommends that adults aged 18 to 64 do at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise, or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise, every week. When we surveyed you at ages 33, 42 and 50, an

average of 75 per cent of you said you exercised once a month or more. Of those of you who did some exercise, just under 4 in 10 were very active, exercising four or more times a week.

Although the researchers found the quality of school sports facilities made a small difference to whether or not people exercised at all as adults, there was no evidence of any impact on how frequently people exercised. They argued that, while investing in school sports provision is important, on its own it won't combat the problem of people not exercising enough in adult life.



# Unlocking the secrets of our health

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**The information you share with the study enables researchers to investigate an enormous range of social issues which matter to all our lives. But your contribution, including the blood samples many of you have provided, is also a vital resource for medical research.**

The Age 44 Survey was the first adult survey to have a significant focus on health. Trained nurses visited you at home to carry out various checks and, if you agreed, they took a blood sample. We also asked for your consent for us to extract DNA from your blood, so this could be used for genetic research.

Your health measurements, blood samples and DNA, combined with other information you've shared with us over the years, have improved our understanding of various common diseases and conditions. For example, thanks to NCDS, researchers have been

able to pinpoint the factors which may put people at greater risk of vitamin D deficiency, and to piece together the links between certain genes and diseases, including diabetes and Crohn's disease.

Your DNA is also being used in a growing area of research, known as 'epigenetics'. Researchers working in this field are using NCDS to understand how our genes are able to be switched on or off by different influences, and what this might mean for our health.

For the next survey, which is now underway, we'll ask if we can take some up to date health measurements from you and another blood sample. By agreeing to this, you'll be helping to unlock even more of the secrets of our health.

# Keep in touch

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If you change your address, phone number or email address, please let us know so that we can contact you in the future.

## You can contact us by:

 0800 035 5761  
(free from a UK landline)

 [ncds@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:ncds@ucl.ac.uk)

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Check out the study website to keep up with the latest scientific discoveries you've made possible.

[www.ncds.info](http://www.ncds.info)