

**ncds**

**National Child  
Development Study**



# Testing times

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UPDATE 2021

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# Living through a pandemic

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**Information you have shared with us through our COVID-19 surveys is helping researchers understand the impact of the pandemic on different aspects of people's lives.**

Since the start of the coronavirus crisis, we have been asking you, and participants in four other studies (born in 1946, 1970, 1989-90 and 2000-02), to tell us about your experiences. Here are some of our researchers' insights, based on your responses to our first survey in May. Information from the surveys is being analysed by hundreds of researchers in the UK and around the world. We will share more of their findings on [www.ncds.info](http://www.ncds.info) in the months ahead.

## Employment and finances

During the first national lockdown, nearly 30% of survey participants aged 19, 30, 50 and 62 reported being worse off financially than before the coronavirus outbreak. Among men, those from your generation were most likely to report being worse off. But among women, 30- and 50-year-olds were most likely to say this. More people of your generation (44%) stopped work completely in the first lockdown compared with 50-year-olds (30%) and 30-year-olds (33%). However, the youngest generation was most affected, with 62% of 19-year-olds in our survey having stopped work.

## Mental health

Your generation was the least likely of the four generations looked at in our initial analysis (ages 19, 30, 50 and 62) to report symptoms of depression. Poor mental health in the first lockdown was most common among the youngest generation surveyed, with 34% of 19-year-old women and 23% of 19-year-old men experiencing symptoms of depression, compared to 10% of women and 7% of men of your generation.

Shortly before the pandemic, some of you had already taken part in the Life in Your Early 60s Survey (which is now on hold). Using the information from this survey, combined with information from our COVID-19 survey, researchers compared levels of mental ill-health immediately prior to and during the first national lockdown. They found that levels of mental ill-health had reduced slightly for your generation.

## In your own words

We asked you to tell us about your experiences of the pandemic in your own words. Across all five generations, people described a mix of positive and negative impacts.

NCDS participants mentioned missing friends and family, worrying about health and loved ones, and facing financial difficulties. However, you also reported positive experiences, including having more free time to reflect, spend time with family, and for yourselves. We asked you this question again in our latest COVID-19 survey, which will allow us to explore how your feelings about the effects of the pandemic may have changed.

**For more findings from our COVID-19 surveys, please check [www.ncds.info](http://www.ncds.info).**

## THANK YOU

Thank you to all those who took part in these surveys. Around 30,000 people across the five studies, including NCDS, completed at least one of the three surveys. Your contribution will really make a difference to how society responds to the consequences of the pandemic now and in the future.



# Timing matters

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**Research has shown that those of you who waited until your mid-20s, or even your 30s, to have children had better health later on, compared to those who started a family earlier.**

## What we asked you

Over the years, you've told us if and when you had children. In 2002, when you were 44, a nurse visited you and carried out a range of health checks and took blood samples.

## Later parenthood and better health

Researchers from University College London and the

University of Essex examined information from your age 44 blood tests and health checks and explored how results of these varied depending on when you started a family. They also took into account other factors that may have influenced your health, including a wide range of childhood circumstances, such as how well off your family was when you were growing up.

The majority of women in your generation started having children in their 20s. Around one in five waited until their 30s, and about one in six were teenage mothers. Men of your

generation became fathers slightly later, with the majority having their first child between the ages of 23 and 32. Around one in five became fathers after the age of 33, and just over one in five were under the age of 23. Most people in your generation had finished having children by their early 30s.

The researchers found that young parents were more likely to be obese later on than those who had children when they were older. Men who became fathers before 23 had a 31% greater chance of being obese by their 40s than dads who started their families between the ages of 23 and 27. Women who waited until at least age 25 to start having children were on average 34% less likely to be obese in their 40s compared to younger mums.

Teenage mothers and men who had become fathers by their early 20s were also at greater risk of developing conditions such as heart disease and diabetes in their 40s, compared to those who had delayed parenthood.

## **An invaluable source of evidence**

Previous studies investigating how the timing of parenthood

relates to future health have struggled to unpick the role of age from other potential influences. This most recent study was able to account for a wide range of childhood factors that may have shaped men and women's journeys into parenthood and their health in midlife, such as family background. The researchers also took into account certain factors in adulthood, including periods of unemployment and number of partnerships by age 42.

These findings support the theory that the stresses of early parenthood on both men and women accumulate over time, and may be contributing to poorer health in middle age.

## **HELPING YOUNG PARENTS**

The researchers noted that these findings highlight the need for policies aimed at protecting younger parents against the potential long-term negative impacts of starting a family early.

# Tracking the gender wage gap

**Researchers have discovered that the gender wage gap is smaller for people born in 1970 than for members of your generation.**

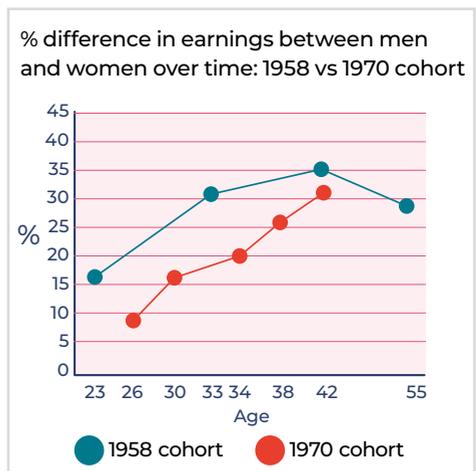
It has long been recognised that women are generally paid less than men. We have asked you about your earnings throughout your adult life. We have also collected information about earnings from participants of the 1970 British Cohort Study, who were born 12 years after you. This has enabled researchers to study how the gender wage gap – the difference in average earnings between men and women – has changed over time and between generations.

Researchers from University College London found that for your generation, the gender wage gap widened substantially during childrearing years, from 16 percentage points at age 23 to 35 percentage points at age 42. The gap then narrowed again at age 55, down to 29 percentage points. Among those born in 1970, the researchers similarly found that the gender wage gap became wider over time.

On the whole, the gender wage gap is smaller for people born

in 1970 than for your generation, due to a range of factors and policies. In particular, the study's authors highlight the effect of the Equal Pay Act, which came into effect in 1976. However, although the gender pay gap has narrowed, it remains large and by age 42 the gap is just a few percentage points narrower for the generation born in 1970 than it was for your generation.

Your information has helped build the case for a number of key policies aimed at improving equal opportunities and pay.



# Imagine yourself fit

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**Using innovative research methods, including artificial intelligence, researchers have been able to investigate whether essays you wrote more than 50 years ago can predict how physically active you would be as adults.**

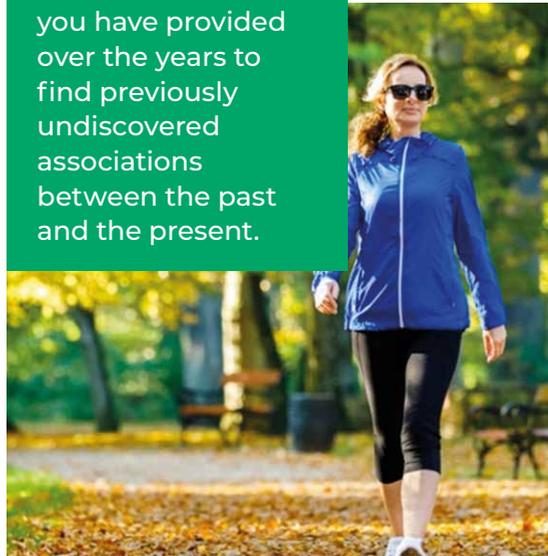
When you were 11 years old, we asked you: “Imagine you are now 25 years old. Write about the life you are leading, your interests, your home life, and your work at the age of 25.” We gave you 30 minutes to write an essay about this. Fast forward to today and over 10,000 of the essays you wrote have been transcribed and made available for researchers to analyse.

One group of researchers based across three continents used advanced artificial intelligence techniques to explore the language used in your essays. They identified answers in which you portrayed yourselves as taking an active part in – rather than watching – sports (for example “My biggest interest will still be swimming” as opposed to “We’re at Loftes Road stadium where the Rangers play and they’re playing Portsmouth”). They compared these answers with how much

exercise you told us you were doing when we surveyed you at different points during your adult lives.

Accounting for a range of childhood factors, they found that those of you who wrote about taking an active part in sports at age 11 were more likely to be physically active as adults. The researchers suggest that policies aimed at helping people view themselves as physically active might help them sustain good habits throughout their lives.

Researchers use the information you have provided over the years to find previously undiscovered associations between the past and the present.



# 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:

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Please get in touch if you would like this booklet in a different format, such as large print or high contrast.

## LATEST DISCOVERIES

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

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