

ncds

National Child
Development Study



Making a difference

UPDATE 2026

Now and then

NCDS began with 17,415 babies in the first survey. The study grew with a further 1,143 people added during childhood, including those born overseas in your birthday week who had then moved to Great Britain.

In total, 18,558 study members have been part of at least one survey.

It's amazing that we are still in touch with around 11,500 of you after all this time. At the last survey, 8,405 study members participated – 8,215 living in Great Britain as well as 190 living abroad.

Did you know?

A new study called Generation New Era will track over 30,000 babies born in the UK this year. This will be the first nationwide study of its kind in 25 years, and it will be based at the UCL Centre for Longitudinal Studies, like NCDS.

We know that around 1,300 study members live overseas. We can now invite them to take part in our surveys online. This gives us an opportunity to learn about the experiences of emigrants compared with those who have stayed in Britain. If this applies to you, please make sure we have your current contact details so we can invite you to our next survey.

Sadly, we know that almost 2,500 study members have passed away over the years.

We would like to thank every single one of you who have contributed to NCDS across seven decades. The study wouldn't be possible without you.

Thank you!

Relationships and family

In the Life in Your Early 60s Survey, you told us about your living arrangements and family life.

Most of you were living with a spouse (six in 10) or a partner (just under one in 10). Just over three in 10 didn't live with a partner: around 4% had a partner but didn't live with them, 10% were divorced, 4% were widowed, and 12% were single (not divorced or widowed).

One in five study members had at least one child living at home. Just 2% of your generation lived with one or more parent.

Roughly three in five of you had become grandparents. About a third of grandparents looked after their grandchildren at least once a week (without their parents), 15% did so monthly and 19% did so less often.

Playing and cooking meals were the most common activities done by grandparents who provided care, with 62% saying they did each of these. Just over half said their grandchildren stayed overnight and around half did the school or nursery run.

What childcare did grandparents provide?

62% Played or took part in leisure activities with grandchildren



62% Prepared meals for them



53% Looked after them overnight



50% Just been around in case they needed anything



49% Took them to, or collected them from, nursery, playgroup or school



39% Looked after them when ill



36% Helped them with their homework



Planning for retirement

New findings from NCDS show there is stark variation in how well people of your generation have been able to prepare financially for later life.

As many as one in six study members don't have a private pension of their own or sizeable savings (more than £25k) to bolster their State Pension. While women are only a little less likely than men to have a private pension, their pension pots are a lot smaller on average.

Who retired early?

By your early 60s, a quarter of your generation had fully retired. Just over half of you (53%) were in paid work. Others were out of work but not yet retired (23%), with illness being the main reason.

You had different expectations about when you would retire. Those who had mainly been self-employed were much more likely to say they would keep working until 68 or older than those who had mostly been in paid employment (40% versus 14%).

Most of you knew the State Pension age for your generation was 66 but more than a third of you did not know how much you would receive.

Your employment status in your early 60s

Employed full time	25%
Fully retired	24%
Employed part time	14%
Sick	12%
Self-employed full time	9%
Being a carer	7%
Self-employed part time	5%
Unemployed	2%
Other	2%

Compared to those still working, people who had already retired were around twice as likely to:

- have household savings of over £100,000
- own their own home outright
- have a defined benefit or 'final salary' style pension, paying out a secure income.

Who had a private pension?

Most of you (four in five) had a workplace or other private pension. But nearly one in 10 didn't have a pension or any household savings to fall back on either.

Women had accumulated much smaller private pensions on the whole. The average value of defined contribution pensions held by female study members was £28,500. For men, it was three times this amount at £90,000.

Almost half of study members (45%) had their own pension and lived with a partner or spouse who had one too. But in comparison, 15% of study members reported that neither they nor their partner had a pension.

Half of adults with no pension had a limiting illness and a third had experienced poor mental health at some point through life.

What about savings?

A third of you said they had less than £25,000 in savings, and a further one in six (16%) had no savings at all. A quarter had saved up £25,000 or more but less than £100,000, and the remaining quarter reported savings of £100,000 or more.

Study members with no household savings were more likely to be single, divorced or widowed than married or in a civil partnership.

Why this research matters

These NCDS findings highlight some big disparities in people's finances in the run up to State Pension age. In particular, women had much smaller pension pots, potentially leaving some financially vulnerable in retirement.

Since 2012, employers have had a legal duty to enrol their staff in a workplace pension, to help more people to save enough for retirement. This important NCDS research will enable the government to see whether the gender pension gap reduces for younger generations.

The story behind the study

**Friday,
April 1st, 1955...**

It was a fresh spring evening in London. The capital was quieter than usual, undisturbed by the newspaper sellers who had recently joined their Fleet Street colleagues on a national strike.

Just a stone's throw from Buckingham Palace, a Georgian terraced house was to be the setting for a meeting of the nation's most talented and influential medical minds.

Senior representatives from Britain's most important medical bodies had been called together to discuss an extremely pressing matter. Namely, why were so many babies still dying during their first week of life?



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A decade earlier, Dr James Douglas masterminded the first national survey of mothers and babies, the 1946 birth cohort study. The evidence it generated had informed the design of NHS maternity services.

However, by the mid-1950s almost 30,000 babies were still dying each year during their first seven days of life. Douglas and the British medical community realised a new survey was needed to reassess the state of maternity services, the costs of childbirth and the risks of home and hospital delivery.

Douglas and up-and-coming paediatrician, Dr Neville Butler led the meeting, outlining their suggestions for this new national birth survey.

Douglas suggested following the 1946 cohort by studying all births in England, Wales and Scotland during a single week. While Douglas expected this new survey to give fresh insights into maternity care, he also hoped it would shine a light on how socioeconomic circumstances influenced women's reproductive rights and health, and their child's fortunes.

Butler's proposal overflowed with ideas. While the 1946 survey followed 5,500 births, Butler suggested this new study would need 90,000 babies to accurately compare the differences in home and hospital delivery.

"Butler was keener than ever to get a new study underway."

Having already made connections with the Ministry of Health about this mammoth project and launching pilot studies, the full study was postponed. Despite this disappointment, Butler was keener than ever to get a new study underway.

Reassured by Butler's positive experience with the British medical establishment, the committee had yet to discuss costs and funding. All eyes turned to Douglas, who noted the 1946 survey cost just over £5,000 (£180,000 today) and warned a new study would likely be more expensive.



Even with this stumbling block, the committee agreed that a new maternity survey was "desirable". Within a month, the key players in British science would reconvene to work out a detailed plan for the study and how to raise the necessary funds.

**Visit our website
for the full story -
coming soon!**

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