

First findings released

Welcome to the first ELSA Update telling you about the results we found from the study of the health and lifestyles of people aged 50 and over which you took part in. The first wave of ELSA was a huge success. We interviewed 12,100 of you from all walks of life. The information you provided us with has already produced important results and the study will go from strength to strength as it continues.

We had a major public launch in December 2003 where we were able to present the first results of the study to the press, academics and government officials. The study was well received and people were excited by the findings.

'Most are not in employment after 55'

'ELSA data will be a crucial input to our understanding of pensions provision and retirement behaviour in Britain' Adair Turner CBE
Chairman, Pensions Commission

'I am delighted to see the launch of ELSA, which fills an important gap in our knowledge of how older people live their lives' Baroness Sally Greengross
Former Director General of Age Concern England,
Chair of ELSA Advisory Panel

Manual workers affected earlier by old age

BILLY BRIGGS

MANUAL workers suffer the effects of old age up to 20 years earlier than their white-collar counterparts, new research has revealed.

The largest study conducted

Fifty and feisty – the group they can't ignore anymore

'Surveys that follow the same people over time are an invaluable national statistical resource and ELSA adds a new dimension to the UK evidence base' Len Cook
The National Statistician, Office for National Statistics

Why the middle classes look better

'These data will be crucial to help us meet the health care needs of the older population' Lord Warner
Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Department of Health

Growing older in England today

Ask anyone about growing older in our society and they would have a view. By asking so many of you from all backgrounds about all kinds of topics we have been able to build up a picture of what life is really like for those aged 50 years and over in England today.

As the findings show, many of you reported having good to excellent health and did not have a long-term illness that limited your ability to do things. However, an important number of you experienced a variety of health problems.

The majority of you reported that your health was either excellent, very good or good, even amongst the oldest age group.

Percentages who reported their health as excellent, very good, good, fair or poor

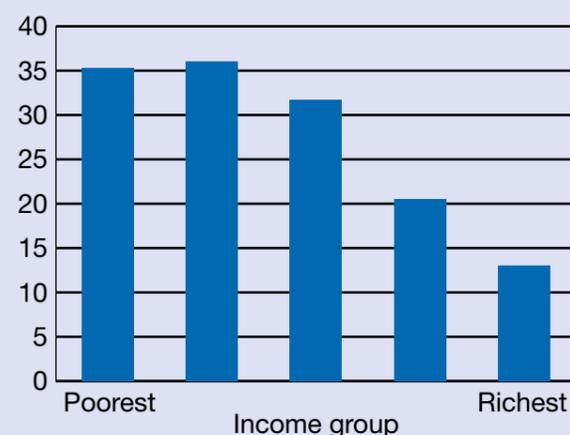


Physical health declines with age. Twenty-four percent of people aged between 50 and 55 years said that they had an illness that limited what they could do, compared with 53% of you aged over 80 years.

Mental health does not decline with age. People with the poorest mental health are likely to be in either the youngest or the oldest age groups.

But age is not the only factor. Those with low incomes, the poorest jobs or with the least education had the worst health.

Percentage in each income group who say they have poor health



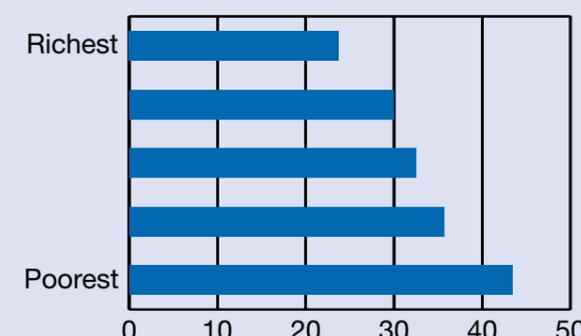
More and more often people are leaving work before state retirement age. For those of you who are below state pension age, only six out of every ten are in paid work.

Only 3 in 10 men who are working in their fifties are 100 per cent certain that they will still be working after age 60.

Those aged 65 and over have a monthly income which is two thirds of those aged under 65.

On average you thought that there was a three in ten chance that your future resources would not be enough to meet your needs. But these chances are lower for those with more wealth.

Chances that future resources will not be sufficient for future needs for each income group



- Half of you go to the cinema, opera or museums at least once a year. Almost all of you eat out of the house at least sometimes.
- Just over one in ten of you did some voluntary work last month and around nine per cent of you spent some of your time caring for someone last month.
- Nearly half of you have a computer in your household, and one third have access to the Internet.

What's next?

Exciting developments for the next round of the study, between April 2004 and early 2005, include:

- New questions about the quality of health care people receive.
- More on experiences of growing older and expectations and motivations.
- A visit by a qualified nurse and more physical tests like the walking speed test in the first interview.

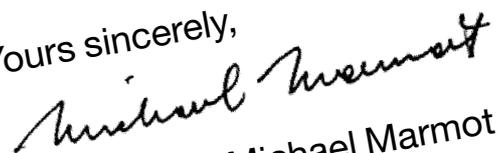
More findings can be seen on the ELSA web site: <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/elsa>

Dear ELSA respondent,

I would like to extend my sincere thanks for your help in making the first wave of the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing such a wonderful success. Getting older involves many challenges and opportunities. Government and policy makers aim to address the needs of our ageing population. The information that you have given us so far will be crucial in shaping policies to help people get the most out of later life.

But this is just the first step. We are keen to find out how your life changes as you grow older. In the next interview we will find out what has happened to you since we last saw you, both the positive and the negative things. We are also introducing some new questions and a visit by a nurse to get better information about your health. We hope that you are able to continue in this study with us and continue to increase our understanding of growing older in today's world.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Sir Michael Marmot

PLEASE KEEP IN TOUCH!

We really value your contribution to the study.

The best is yet to come – as we see you all for more interviews we will be able to understand how people's circumstances change over time and with age.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call us on
freephone 0800 652 4569