

1970 BRITISH COHORT STUDY UPDATE 2015



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BELIEF IN GOD AND LIFE AFTER DEATH

At age 42, women held stronger religious beliefs than men.

WHAT WE ASKED YOU

We've asked you about your religious affiliations over the years, but age 42 was the first time we asked you to go into more detail about your beliefs, including whether you believed in God and life after death.

This information was used to classify you as:

- Atheists – those who do not believe in God
- Agnostics – those who don't know whether there is a God
- Fuzzy believers – those who believe in a higher power but not a personal God, who sometimes believe in God, or believe in God but with doubts
- Firm believers – those who have no doubts about the existence of God

WHO'S MORE LIKELY TO BE A BELIEVER?

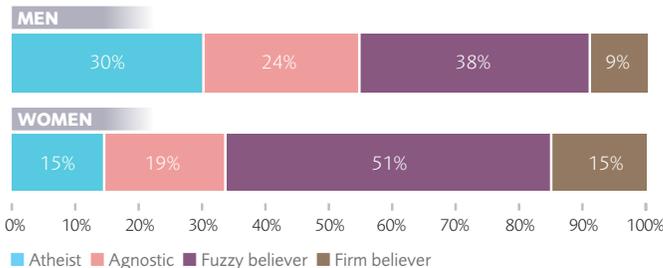
Almost nine in ten Muslims (88%) were firm believers. Of those of you who described

yourselves as 'evangelical', such as Baptists, almost three quarters (71%) were firm believers. Only a third (33%) of Roman Catholics and one in six (16%) members of the Church of England or the other main protestant denominations said they had no doubts that God exists.

Muslims and Evangelical Christians were also most likely to believe in an afterlife (85%). Only six in ten Protestants (59%) said that they believed in an afterlife.

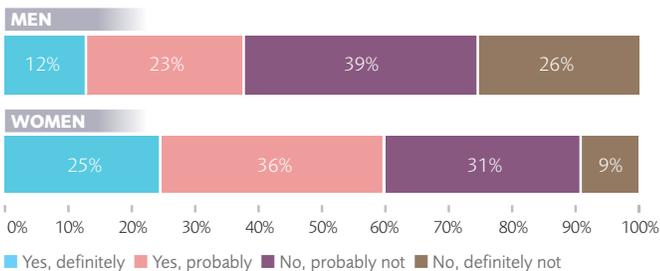
Belief in the afterlife was much more common among women than men. Sixty per cent of women, but only 35 per cent of men, said they believed in life after death. Women were also much more likely to believe in God. More than half of men (54%) said they are atheists or agnostics, compared to only a third of women (34%). The reason for this difference is not entirely clear. Professor David Voas, of the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex, who analysed the data said:

Belief in God





Belief in the afterlife



"Quite generally we find, across different times and places that women are more religious, but exactly why that is the case remains the subject of debate. The two main schools of thought are on the one hand to do with the different social roles and functions of the sexes and on the other more like genetic dispositions – it is a nature vs nurture debate."

BELIEF IN GOD AND LIFE AFTER DEATH DON'T ALWAYS GO TOGETHER

Interestingly, it was also found that belief in God and belief in the afterlife did not necessarily go together. A quarter of you (26%) who said you were agnostic also said you believed in life after death. And of those of you who do believe in God, nearly a third (31%) do not believe in an afterlife.

Just less than half (45%) of you who said you don't have a religion do believe in either God or life after death, with around one in five (20%) believing in both.

BCS70 IN THE NEWS

This research was reported extensively by media in the UK and internationally, including BBC News, the Daily Telegraph, the Independent, the Daily Mail and the Guardian. It was discussed on BBC Radio 4's Today, BBC Breakfast, ITV's Loose Women.

The mysteries of religion and the lifecourse (2015), by David Voas, is a working paper published by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at UCL Institute of Education.

ARE PARENTS HELPING THEIR CHILDREN UP THE LADDER?

All parents want their children to find a good, well-paid job. The common perception is that children of well-off, well-connected parents are more able to secure the unpaid internships that can lead to lucrative, high-status jobs.

We know that there's a link between your family's socioeconomic status at age 10 and your income and occupation more than 30 years later. At age 42, more than two thirds (68%) who had professional parents were in the top professions themselves. Only a quarter (25%) of you with parents who had unskilled jobs were in the top professions.

Children from more privileged backgrounds tend to do better at school, which is part of the reason why advantage and disadvantage are passed from one generation to the next.

But we also wanted to know the difference that help from parents, relatives and friends makes when it comes to getting a job or moving up the career ladder.

WHAT WE ASKED YOU

At age 42, we asked you about the help you received from parents, relatives and friends since leaving school or university, or when starting your careers. We were then able to compare this to what you told us about your earnings and your occupations, and to information we collected about your families when you were children.



THE KIND OF HELP YOU RECEIVED

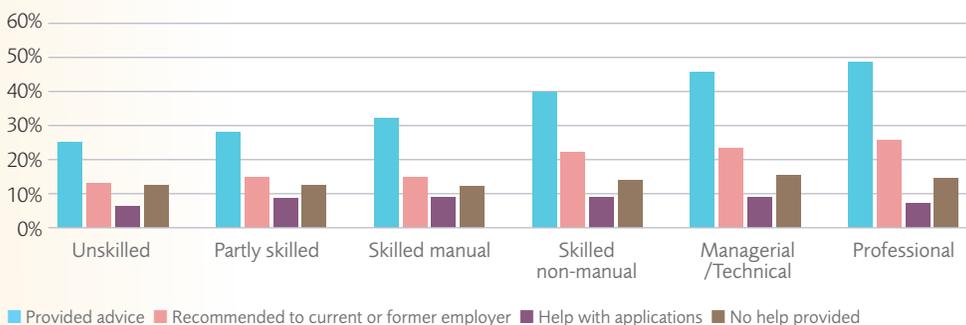
Half of you reported receiving help – usually in the form of advice – from parents, other relatives or friends since leaving school or university. Of those of you who received help, almost a third of you said that this included help finding a job through contacts or networks.

Parents who were professionals or managers were more likely to give advice and assistance with application forms than those in unskilled jobs. However, help from other relatives and friends had little association with family socioeconomic status.

Surprisingly, help from parents like a recommendation to an employer, or in finding a job through their contacts, also had little to do with your family background.



Type of career help received from parents and parental profession at age 10



HELP FROM PARENTS DOESN'T IMPROVE YOUR JOB PROSPECTS

We found that those of you who received help from parents did not have higher earnings or higher-status occupations than those who do not receive such help.

Researchers believe that there are other factors that explain the strong link between parents' wages and occupations with those of their children, particularly for men. The next step for researchers will be to improve our understanding of the complex means by which parents support their children in school and into the workplace.

Social mobility and the importance of networks: evidence for Britain (2014), by Oscar Marcenaro-Gutierrez, John Micklewright and Anna Vignoles, is a working paper published by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at UCL Institute of Education.



LONG-TERM BENEFITS OF READING FOR PLEASURE

Your performance in a vocabulary assessment at age 42 was strongly linked with whether you read for pleasure both in childhood and in adulthood.

WHAT WE ASKED YOU

When you were age 10, 16 and 42 we assessed your vocabulary and asked how often you read for pleasure. At 42 we also asked what kind of things you like to read.

READING FOR PLEASURE

At age 10 reading was a very popular pastime with nearly two thirds (61%) 'often' reading for pleasure, just over one third (34%) 'sometimes' reading for pleasure and just one in twenty (5%) 'never or hardly ever' reading for pleasure. By 16, a quarter reported reading for pleasure 'more than once a week', but a further quarter reported 'never or hardly ever' reading.

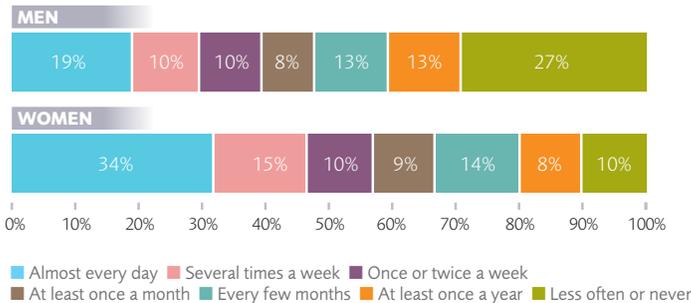
Reading remained a popular pastime at age 42. Just over one in four people (26%) said they read books for pleasure every day, and a further 13 per cent said they did so several times a week.

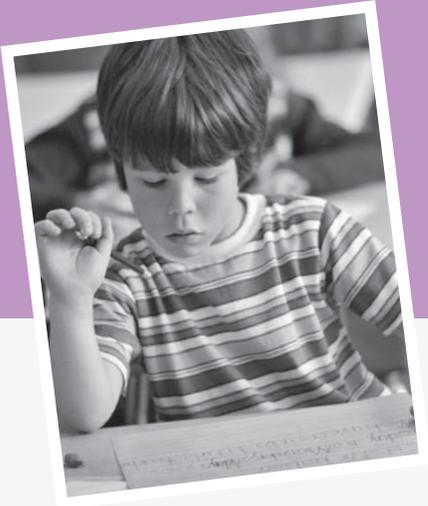
Reading was more common among women – a third (34%) read every day compared with one in five men (19%). The most popular type of fiction by far was crime fiction (43%) followed by humour (26%) and romance (25%). The most popular non-fiction was cookery books and autobiographies (39% of you read each of these).

CHILDHOOD READING IMPROVES ADULT VOCABULARY

We found that those of you who regularly read for pleasure at age 10 scored 67 per cent on the vocabulary test age 42, compared to 51 per cent for those who rarely read while growing up.

How often men and women read at age 42





Those of you who read regularly as children tended to come from more advantaged families and also had higher vocabulary scores at ages 10 and 16.

However, even after taking into account both your families' socioeconomic backgrounds and your vocabulary scores in childhood, there was still a nine percentage point gap in vocabulary scores at age 42 between those who read frequently as children and those who didn't.

Reading for pleasure as an adult also improves vocabulary. The long-term influence of reading for pleasure on vocabulary that was identified may well be because the frequent childhood readers continued to read throughout their twenties and thirties. It seems that developing 'good' reading habits as a child has long-term benefits.

WHAT YOU READ ALSO MATTERS

We also found that what you chose to read as an adult matters as much as how often you read.

Those of you who read 'literary' fiction improved your vocabularies the most between ages 16 and 42, again after taking into account social backgrounds and vocabulary scores in childhood. Interestingly, non-fiction didn't have as much of a positive effect on vocabulary as fiction.

Those of you who read broadsheet newspapers – including online versions – improved more over time than those of you who didn't read papers.

YOU'RE HELPING MAKE A DIFFERENCE

This research provides evidence that reading for pleasure, both in childhood and adulthood, has a positive impact on the vocabulary of people in their early forties.

It builds on previous research that showed reading for pleasure as a child was linked to cognitive development up to age 16, especially in vocabulary but also for mathematics.

The research has been reported extensively by media in the UK and worldwide. It has also been used by advocates of libraries in the UK and abroad. Many schools in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, as well as the UK, have also drawn parents' attention to the findings in order to encourage reading at home.

Social inequalities in cognitive scores at age 16: The role of reading (2013) and *Vocabulary from adolescence to middle-age* (2014), by Alice Sullivan and Matt Brown, are working papers published by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at UCL Institute of Education.



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KEEPING IN TOUCH

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You can tell us by:

- Calling us free (from a UK landline) on 0500 600 616
- Emailing us at bcs70@ioe.ac.uk
- Completing the contact form on the study website: www.bcs70.info
- Or writing to us at FREEPOST RTCX-HBGC-CJSK, 1970 British Cohort Study, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL