
TESTING TIMES

Update 2021



BCS70

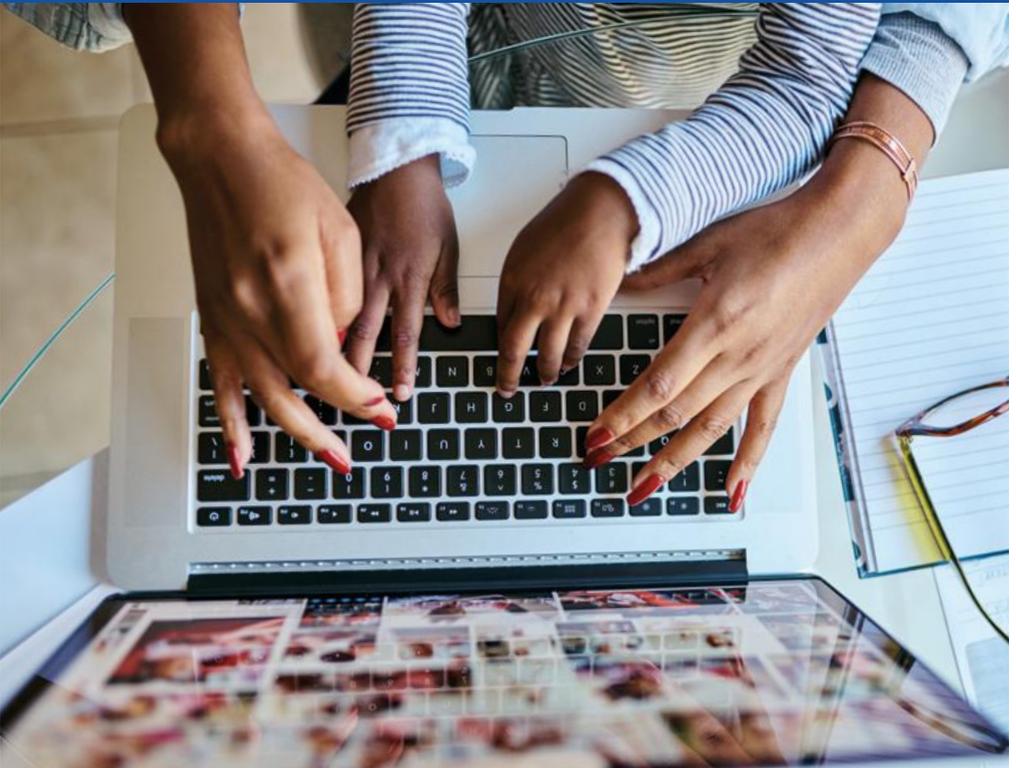
1970 British
Cohort Study

50

YEARS OF LIFE
& SCIENCE

LIVING THROUGH A PANDEMIC

Since the start of the coronavirus crisis, we have been asking you, and participants in four other studies (born in 1946, 1958, 1989-90 and 2000-02), to tell us about your experiences.



Around 30,000 people, including BCS70 study members, have taken part in at least one of our three surveys. Thank you. Your contribution is invaluable.

Here are some of our researchers' initial findings, based on responses to our first survey in May. For more insights, go to www.bcs70.info.

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 women, those of your generation and those aged 30 were most likely to report being worse off. Some 39% of BCS70 women said they were in a worse financial position than before the pandemic, while 17% reported being better off. Among men, 62-year-olds suffered the biggest financial impact; 37% said they were worse off compared to 33% of men of your generation. Just over 1 in 5 (22%) of BCS70 men reported that their finances had improved during lockdown. Among those in work before the coronavirus outbreak, 30% of you stopped working completely in the first lockdown. This was even more common among the other three generations, with 33% of 30-year-olds, 44% of 62-year-olds and 62% of 19-year-olds stopping work.

MENTAL HEALTH

Of the four generations looked at in our initial analysis, poor mental health in the first lockdown was most common among the youngest generations: 34% of 19-year-old women and 23% of 19-year-old men experienced symptoms of depression, compared to 14% of women and 12% of men of your generation.

FAMILY LIFE

BCS70 mothers with primary school aged children were spending, on average, five hours per day home schooling when schools were closed in May, while fathers spent, on average, two hours each day. Parents with secondary school children spent considerably less time on home schooling, though again mothers appeared to be taking on more of the burden – on average just under two hours per day compared to just under one hour for fathers. Mothers of primary school aged children also spent nearly twice as much time as fathers on interactive activities, such as reading to them, playing games and doing puzzles with them.

THE SECRET TO HAPPINESS

Researchers have found that a stable home environment and getting on with your parents when you are young are important factors for happiness later in life.



WHAT WE ASKED YOU

When you were 42, you answered some questions to help us measure your wellbeing. Participants of two other studies, the National Child Development Study (born in 1958) and the National Survey of Health and Development (born in 1946) answered similar questions at ages 50 and 60-64 respectively. As you were growing up, we collected information about your family life and your parents.

SOWING THE SEEDS OF HAPPINESS

A group of researchers in London, Oxford and Edinburgh found that the happiest adults in your generation were those whose parents had taken an interest in their education in childhood, and who had a good relationship with them as they were growing up. This was also true for participants born in 1958, but for those born in 1946 parental interest in education mattered less. Across all three generations, poor parental health – especially mental health – was associated with lower levels of happiness in adulthood.

Family stability was also an important factor, but only for your generation. BCS70 members whose parents had divorced tended to report lower levels of wellbeing at age 42. Those of you whose parents had lower levels of education, and those who grew up in rented

accommodation, also reported being less happy as adults, whereas the same was not true for study participants born in 1946 and 1958. The research team noted that this was perhaps due to the expansion of education following the 1944 Education Act and an increase in home ownership in the 1970s and 1980s, both of which would have affected your parents. Consequently, children who grew up in rented accommodation and whose parents had low levels of education might have felt left behind.

“Both economic interventions in childhood to reduce childhood poverty and interventions to support positive parenting and parental mental health may help promote lifelong mental wellbeing,” the researchers said.



FINDING OUT ABOUT YOUR HEALTH

Our last survey in 2016-2018 had a major focus on health. The information you shared is now being used for vital research into how lifestyles and experiences affect health in midlife.



TIME SPENT SITTING

Almost 6,500 of you agreed to wear an activity monitor on your thigh for a week, so we could record the time you spent sitting, standing, moving and sleeping. Researchers discovered that almost three quarters of you had sat for more than eight hours each day. A quarter of this time was made up of prolonged periods of sitting for an hour or more at a time. Those of you who spent the most time sitting – more than 10 hours a day – were more likely to be obese, to smoke and to report higher rates of poor health and disability. People with a university degree sat down for longer than those without, and men tended to spend more time sitting than women.

THE LONG ROOTS OF CHILDHOOD

In a separate study, researchers analysed the blood samples you gave alongside the information you and your parents provided throughout the years. They found that those of you who grew up in the poorest families were 43% more likely to have two or more health conditions (such as hypertension, diabetes, heart problems and mental health problems) at a time in middle age.

DRINKING HABITS

In the 2016-2018 Survey we asked you about your drinking habits. We asked you about this again during the first COVID-19 survey last May.

Researchers found that rates of 'high-risk drinking' – drinking too heavily or too frequently – had increased by 27% during the first lockdown compared to 2016-2018. The number reporting drinking four or more times a week had more than doubled, from 12.5% in 2016-18 to 26% in May 2020. We asked you about your drinking habits in the later COVID-19 surveys as well, so researchers will be able to look at how drinking behaviour has changed during the pandemic.

'PEOPLE WITH A UNIVERSITY DEGREE SAT DOWN FOR LONGER THAN THOSE WITHOUT, AND MEN TENDED TO SPEND MORE TIME SITTING THAN WOMEN.'



KEEP IN TOUCH

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

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