
MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Update 2023



BCS70

1970 British
Cohort Study

50

YEARS OF LIFE
& SCIENCE

THANK YOU!

Thank you to everyone who has taken part in the Life in Your Early 50s Survey so far.

We're delighted to have spoken to over 6,000 of you. We really appreciate the contributions you've made. The information you share with us is so important and helps us make discoveries that benefit society and future generations.

If you haven't completed the survey yet, there's still time. Interviewers will continue to contact study members over the next few months. If you haven't heard from us or couldn't take part before and would like to now, please get in touch.

To learn more about the survey, head to: bcs70.info/early50s



YOU ASKED US...

Why do you ask for information about my family?

Our families can impact our lives in many ways. They help us make choices, shape our beliefs, and provide us with support and opportunities. The information we collect about your families helps us look for connections between your home life and other important aspects such as your health, finances and emotional wellbeing. Our strict confidentiality protocols ensure we take just as good care with the details you give us about your family as we do with all other information you share with us.

INTO THE WOODS!

In the autumn, we opened the BCS70 woodland in Bleasdale, in the Forest of Bowland, situated right in the centre of Britain.

Local study members and their families joined us in the woodland to help us plant trees. It was also a chance for them to meet the new Study Director, George Ploubidis (pictured below). Here are some of their takeaways from the day:



...it's good to meet the study members, good to hear from George about the importance of the study, and what the information goes towards, and how it shapes understanding of policies for governments.



It does make you feel that you're contributing massively to something and hopefully making a big difference. So I do everything that has ever come my way.



To see more photos from the official opening and for information about visiting, head to: bcs70.info/woodland

GENDER GAP IN TOP JOBS

Research from BCS70 has found that men are more likely than women to be in top jobs at age 42, with 'overconfidence' playing a key role. However, other factors pose a bigger barrier between women and senior positions.

WHAT WE ASKED YOU

When you were growing up, we asked you to complete different tasks to measure your abilities. We also asked you questions to find out how well you thought you were doing at school and in certain subjects. Throughout your working lives, you've given us information about the jobs you've had.

'OVERCONFIDENCE' GIVES MEN A LEG UP

At age 42, there was a clear gender gap among top jobs (such as chief executives, doctors and lawyers), with 24% of men and only 16% of women of your generation working full-time in these roles.



There was a clear gender gap among the top jobs, with 24% of men and only 16% of women of your generation working full-time in these roles mid-career.



The difference was even starker among those of you who had gone to university; almost half of male graduates but less than one third of female graduates occupied top jobs at age 42.

This gender gap had been much smaller during your mid-20s. But by your 30s, with many of you starting families, the gap widened and then persisted into your 40s. More than one in four (26%) working fathers were in top jobs in their 40s compared to one in seven (15%) working mothers.

The research team sought to examine whether male 'overconfidence' could explain this gap. They compared the results of the tasks you completed in childhood with your own subjective assessment of your performance at school. By age 42, those who showed overconfidence during childhood and adolescence were more likely to be employed full-time in top jobs than those who had not overrated themselves. Boys were much more likely to be overconfident than girls.

However, men's overconfidence only explained 11% of the gender gap. The researchers concluded that women changing their working patterns once they had children was the most important driver of the gap.



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WHY THIS RESEARCH MATTERS

These findings highlight how men's overconfidence may make them more likely to apply for promotions than their female counterparts. However, it is also evident that women face numerous barriers in applying for promotions, with working mothers facing the most challenges. The researchers emphasise that employers have a responsibility to examine who is putting themselves forward for promotion and to ensure career progression opportunities are accessible for everyone.



LIFE SATISFACTION

Research has found that your generation felt more satisfied in your mid-20s than those born in the 90s.

When you were 26, we asked you how satisfied you were with your lives and about key milestones in education, employment, living arrangements, personal relationships and parenthood. To understand the relationship between milestones and life satisfaction across generations, researchers at UCL compared your answers with those given by members of a similar study who were born in 1989-90.

Among your generation, 79% of men and 81% of women felt satisfied in their mid-20s. Full-time workers were more likely to be satisfied than those who worked part-time or were unemployed. Those with a partner or spouse felt more satisfied than those who were single. While parenthood did not impact men, women with two or more children felt less satisfied than women who had one or no children.

When the younger generation reached their mid-20s, 68% of men and 75% of women said they felt satisfied with their lives. Full-time employment, living with a partner, and home ownership remained important, but was less common – home ownership, for example, decreased by 60%. For women, having two or more children now led to higher life satisfaction. Women who rented their own homes were also more satisfied than those who lived with parents.

The researchers note that younger generations are facing more challenges in achieving key milestones and that policies should focus on providing better housing and employment opportunities to improve wellbeing.

EARLY ROOTS OF MIDLIFE FITNESS

Staying fit is important for adult health. But BCS70 research reveals that our midlife exercise habits may be partly shaped at birth.

When you were babies, we collected information on your health and social backgrounds, as well as your mothers' health and habits during pregnancy. At age 46, we asked you to wear a device to measure your physical activity levels. Researchers in Australia, South America and the UK used this information to understand if your early life was connected to how physically active you were in your 40s.

Those of you from more affluent social backgrounds spent six minutes more a day exercising in your mid-40s than those born into less well-off families. Your mother's pregnancy also affected your midlife physical activity. Those whose mothers had smoked while pregnant spent 2.5 minutes less a day exercising than those whose mothers had not. If your mother was a young mum (under the age of 25), you also exercised less than those whose mothers were

older. The length of your mother's pregnancy also mattered; those born after 41 weeks were less physically active than those born between 37-41 weeks in their 40s.

This research shows the role early life plays in shaping adult health and the importance of putting in place measures to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds to live healthy lives.



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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