



PROGRESS REPORT ON THE PATH THROUGH LIFE STUDY November 2000

The Twenty-Plus Study

We finished interviewing people in their 20s in March this year, by which time we had interviewed 2404 people. Analysis of the 20-plus data is well under way. Our research team is currently preparing articles for scientific journals. In August this year we added an updated report to our web site. This updated report presented information on a number of areas not mentioned in the first report. If you do not have access to the internet and would like a copy of the updated report, call Trish on 62798408.

The Forty-Plus Study - progress so far

We have now interviewed over 1800 people in this age group. We hope that by March 2001, 2400 people will have been interviewed. The following preliminary results are based on the first 1545 people (819 women and 724 men) interviewed.

Sociodemographic data and Health

Of these 1545, 79% were married or living in a de facto relationship while 12% were separated or divorced. Sixty nine percent were employed full-time, 20% were employed part-time, 8% were not part of the labour force, while only 3 % were unemployed and looking for work. Those employed part-time or not in the labour force were mainly women. Fifteen percent were studying; either full or part time, 15% of whom were also working full-time.

Physical activity and Health

Compared to the younger age group, those in their 40s have slightly higher systolic and diastolic blood pressure, but there was no difference in resting pulse and average strength of handgrip.

People in their 40's reported doing less exercise than those in their 20s. Despite this, we found that for both age groups, those reporting higher levels of vigorous exercise tended to have better lung function and lower resting pulses than those undertaking less vigorous exercise.

Some Average Results

Blood Pressure: The average systolic pressure was 126 and the average diastolic pressure 81.

Pulse rate: The average pulse rate was 71 beats per minute.

Hand grip: The average handgrip for men was 47 kgs and the average for women was 29kgs.

Lung function:

Height	Men		Women	
	FEV*	FVC**	FEV	FVC
less than 160 cms			2.4	2.8
160-169 cms	3.0	3.6	2.7	3.2
170-179 cms	3.5	4.1	3.0	3.5
180-189 cms	3.8	4.6	3.2	3.8
190 cms or taller	4.1	5.1		

* Expired volume in 1 second (litres) ** Full lung volume (litres)

Anxiety and Depressed Mood

In this study we are interested in examining how personality, lifestyle and social factors may influence people's mental health. We have used measures of anxiety and depressed mood as indicators of mental health.

As has been found in previous studies, women reported higher levels of anxiety and depressed mood than men. However, the difference between men and women is not as great in the 40s as in the 20s. While men in their 20s and 40s reported similar levels, women in their 40s reported lower levels than those in the 20s.

Participants who were married reported significantly less anxiety and depression than those who were in a de facto relationship or who were separated or divorced. Those who had never married also reported levels only slightly higher than those who were married.

Participants were asked some questions about their family life when they were children. For those participants whose parents had separated permanently during this time, females in their 20s had higher levels of both anxiety and depressed mood than those whose parents had not separated. However, this was not the case for men in their 20s or both men and women in their 40s. As with the 20-plus group, mothers of the 40-plus group were seen as showing more affection than fathers. While those in the younger age group who reported higher levels of affection from either parent reported lower levels of anxiety and depression, this relationship was not apparent in the older group. The only exception was women in their 40s who reported lower levels of affection from their mothers had higher levels of anxiety and depression.

The study asked participants about responsibility for household tasks (childcare, house care, financial management and financial provision). Women reported slightly more overall responsibility than men. While neither men nor women had increased levels of anxiety with increased responsibility, both reported higher depressed mood.

Those who exercised a few times a week reported lower levels of anxiety and depressed mood, even if it was only mild exercise.

Ten percent of women and 6% of men reported using some medication for anxiety in the last month, while 8% of women and 6% of men had taken medication for depression.

Marijuana and Alcohol

Fifty two percent of people in their 40s reported having tried marijuana in their lifetime. Of these, only 17% had used marijuana in the past year. Weekly use was reported by 39% of those who had used marijuana in the past year. However this corresponded to only 3% of all people surveyed. In the 40-plus study higher levels of marijuana consumption were associated with more symptoms of depression and anxiety. In the 20-24 age group levels of marijuana use were much higher. Seventy percent had tried marijuana, and of these, 48% had used in the past year.

The vast majority (48%) of people reported being light drinkers. However, 5% of participants reported drinking alcohol at hazardous/harmful levels. A small proportion (9%) reported having no alcohol in the previous year. Of these, 46 people (33%) said that they had never consumed alcohol. Both non-drinkers and hazardous/harmful drinkers had higher levels of depression, but not anxiety. The amount of alcohol consumed by 40-44 year olds was similar to those aged 20-24.

The Next Stage

Next year we will be interviewing people in the Canberra and Queanbeyan Region aged between 60 and 64. When this has been completed we will be able to undertake analysis comparing the mental health and risk factors for mental health problems in the different ages groups.