



PATH THROUGH LIFE

FIRST REPORT ON THE PATH THROUGH LIFE - 20 PLUS PROJECT

December 1999

This preliminary report provides a summary of the early results from the PATH Through Life Project that you were kind enough to take part in this year. These results are based on the first 1500 people interviewed. However, we hope to interview another 700 people aged 20 to 24 years before March 2000. We greatly appreciate your participation and hope that you will find the following results of interest. If you would like any more information on our findings please contact one of the following people.

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WHO TOOK PART IN THE STUDY

733 men and 771 women have taken part in the study so far. Eighty four percent of you are working full or part-time. Nearly half are currently studying, 81% of whom are also working, either full or part-time.

Twenty three percent of you are married or living in a de facto relationship and 142 (9%) have children. Of the 100 women with children, 42 are also working full or part-time.

PHYSICAL HEALTH and ACTIVITY

Only 19% of you rated your health as excellent, with 41% saying 'very good' and 30%, 'good'. Men, on average, rated their health as slightly better than women. When asked about the effect of your health on your usual activities over the last 4 weeks, 18% felt that you had accomplished less than you would like because of your physical health and 27% felt they had accomplished less because of emotional problems. This was reported more frequently by women.

Vitamins had been taken by 47% of people in the last month, 12% had taken medication for sleep and 56% had used painkillers. All were more commonly used by women.

Men reported significantly higher levels of physical activity than women, both in terms of frequency and total number of hours a week, with men reporting, on average, 9 hours of mild activity a week, 4.5 hours of moderate activity and 3.3 hours of vigorous activity. For women this was 5 hours, 2.5 hours and 1.2 hours, respectively. The high level of activity for men may relate to them having jobs that are physically demanding.

Systolic blood pressure was lower in those who exercised more but there was no difference in diastolic pressure. Those who reported more vigorous exercise tended to have lower resting pulse rates. Lung capacity was found to be somewhat higher in those who reported more vigorous physical activity.

LEVELS OF ANXIETY and DEPRESSION

One of the major aims of this study is to look for both social and genetic factors affecting stress. We have taken levels of anxiety and depressed mood as indicators of stress. Women reported higher levels of anxiety and depression than men. Looking at marital status, those who were married reported the lowest levels while those who were separated had the highest levels. Women with children reported higher levels of depression than women with no children but there was no difference in level of anxiety. There was no difference between

men with children and men without. Higher levels of anxiety and depression were also associated with financial problems, reports of drinking problems (but not with higher levels of alcohol consumption), current smoking, experiencing bad things in the last 6 months, less support from family and friends and having experienced more childhood adversity, such as lack of affection from parents and more conflict in the home. Higher levels of exercise were associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression. This was true even for mild exercise alone.

Five percent had used medication for depression while 7% had used anxiety medications, the majority of whom were women. Close to half of those interviewed reported that they had been markedly depressed for several weeks or more at some stage of their life. When asked about suicidal thoughts in the last year, 14% had thought of taking their own life, 4% had made plans to take their life while 22 people had attempted to take their life.

At this stage we have not looked at any of the genes that may play a role in higher levels of anxiety and depression.

SMOKING, ALCOHOL and MARIJUANA

Thirty three percent of men and 31% of women currently smoke cigarettes, with the average number per day being 14 for men and 12 for women. Of those who do not currently smoke, 20% of women and 12% of men smoked in the past.

Nearly 9% of respondents reported either never drinking or not drinking in the last year. Of those who had drunk alcohol in the last year, 62% reported only drinking 2 to 4 times a month or less, while 30% reported drinking more often. There was little difference between men and women. Thirty six percent only had 1 or 2 drinks on the occasions when they drank, 46% had between 3 and 6 drinks and 17% (mostly men) had 7 or more alcoholic drinks on each occasion.

In the last year 520 people (35%) had smoked marijuana. Of this group, 152 (29%) smoked it once a week or more. Frequent use of marijuana was associated with reports of drinking problems but not with level of consumption of alcohol. People who currently smoked marijuana were also more likely to smoke cigarettes and to report higher levels of anxiety and depression.

CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

While 64% reported that their mothers showed them a lot of affection, 34% felt this way about their fathers. One third of those interviewed felt that one of their parents had suffered from nervous trouble or depression and 17% felt that one of their parents had had trouble with drinking or drug use. A lot of conflict in the home was reported by 17% while 22% had parents divorce or permanently separate.

THE NEXT STAGE

Next year we will interview 40 to 44 year olds and then in 2001 we will interview 60 to 64 year olds. This will enable us examine different, age-related factors associated with health across the lifespan. Then, in 2003, we will be trying to find and re-interview all of you who have taken part in the '20 plus' part of this study. We know that most of you will have had many changes in your lives over this 4 year period and we expect to get some interesting results.