



P A T H   T H R O U G H   L I F E

# The PATH Through Life Project Newsletter

November, 2001

We have now (6/11/2001) interviewed 1623 people aged 60-64. By March next year about 7,500 people in Canberra and Queanbeyan will have been interviewed for this project. This is the biggest study of mental health in which participants will be followed up over time ever undertaken in Australia. We have been very pleased with the willingness and enthusiasm to participate of so many people in our region. We are very grateful for the time you have given us. In particular, special thanks goes to those in the 60+ study who have participated in sub-studies by either having an MRI or any extra interview with Suse or Chantal.

We also value any feedback you give us about the study - both good and bad. This will help us to plan a better follow-up interview.

The results presented below are very brief. We are planning to update our web page ([www.anu.edu.au\cmhr](http://www.anu.edu.au\cmhr)) over the next few months and more detailed information will be presented there.

## The 60+ participants so far

We have interviewed 832 men and 791 women in this age group. 32% of the men are employed full-time and 19% part-time, while 12% of the women are working full-time and 21% part-time. Less than 2% are looking for work while the remaining are no longer in the labour force - mostly voluntarily retired. We have found that in this age group there are many people who do not have English as their first language. Of those interviewed, 12% have come from non-English speaking countries. We appreciate their effort in taking part in our study because we realise the importance of having a sample that is representative of our community.

## Some Average Results for the 60+ Group

*Blood pressure:* The average systolic pressure is 141 and the average diastolic pressure, 84.

*Pulse rate:* The average pulse rate is 71 beats per minute.

*Handgrip:* The average handgrip strength for men is 41 kgs and the average for women was 24 kgs.

*Lung function:*

Height	Men		Women	
	FEV*	FVC**	FEV	FVC
Less than 160 cms	-	-	1.80	2.28
160-169 cms	2.44	3.06	2.05	2.58
170-179 cms	2.77	3.48	2.23	2.82
180-189 cms	3.05	3.86	2.75	3.19
190cms or taller	3.37	4.27	-	-

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

## What 20 Year Olds Eat

The CSIRO Division of Nutrition in Adelaide has started to examine the information from the diet booklets that half of the 20+ group completed. The news is not good! Only 1/3 had the recommended level of fibre in their diet, while 92% consumed more than the recommended level of saturated fats. However, don't despair - people's diets tend to improve with age. Women were more likely than men to have a low enough fat intake and smokers had a lower fat intake than non-smokers. For women, only 1/2 had the recommended iron intake. Diet data for the 40's and 60's is still being prepared for analysis.

## **Use of Doctors and Hospitals**

Many of the 20 year olds consented to us having access from Medicare to the number of doctors visits they had made and also use of emergency hospital services. The hospital data is currently being examined and we have some results on the number of visits to doctors. Women attended the GP an average of 4.7 times in one year with 9% not attending at all in that period. Twenty percent of men did not attend a GP over 1 year with the average number of visits being 2.7. Those people with higher scores on anxiety and depression measures, who were more inclined to worry and also to have more hostile feelings were more inclined to go to the GP. Another factor associated with attending a GP was having poor support from family and friends. Women (but not men) who had children were more likely to attend a GP about their own health.

## **Alcohol Consumption**

The majority of 60 year olds interviewed so far are light drinkers, similar to the 40+ group. Approximately 6% of all age groups are drinking at hazardous/harmful levels. However, a greater proportion of the 60+ group (16%) are non-drinkers compared to 9% of the 40+ group.

## **Levels of Anxiety and Depression**

In all 3 age groups women report higher levels of anxiety and depression than men. This difference is particularly noticeable in the 20's. Both men and women in their 20's report the highest levels of anxiety and depression of the 3 groups while those in their 60's report the lowest levels. Despite the lower levels of anxiety and depression in the 60+ group, the association with other measures are similar. As with other age groups, higher levels of anxiety/depression are related to having a personality inclined to worrying, the occurrence of bad life events, lack of support from family and friends and to bad childhood experiences including lack of affection from parents. This latter finding may be considered surprising given that 50 years have passed since this group were children.

## **Publications and Presentations**

Next year, with all the data collected from the first phase of the PATH study, the emphasis will be on analysing the data and writing articles for publication. This has, however, started already. Helen Christensen gave a talk at a conference in Canada this year. This talk was about differences in ways the 20+ group performed on the memory and concentration exercises.

Bryan Rodgers and Tanya Calwell have just returned from a conference on drugs and alcohol. Bryan presented a talk on his finding in the 40+ age group that non-drinkers tend to have a higher level of distress than light drinkers. He tested the theory that some of the current non-drinkers may be ex-heavy drinkers which may lead to higher levels of anxiety and depression in this non-drinking group as a whole - the "sick-quitter" hypothesis. He found that past heavy drinking did not account for the higher levels of distress in this non-drinking group. Tanya is about to have an article published which looks at the relationship between alcohol consumption and depression symptoms in 20 year olds. Tony Jorm has been examining the relationship between sexual orientation and health in the 20+ and 40+ group and hopes to have an article published soon. He found that the bisexual group has worse levels of anxiety and depression than homosexuals or heterosexuals, while both homosexuals and bisexuals reported more bad experiences in childhood and poorer support from their families than heterosexuals.

## **Planning for our follow-up to start in 2003**

Next year will be a very busy year for those of us involved in the PATH Through Life Project. Apart from data analysis and the writing of reports, we have to decide on changes and additions to the PATH questionnaire. We will be buying new computers for you to do the interviews on. These will be bigger and better than those used in the first interviews. We realise that many of you will have moved by the time we want to see you again. We do plan to travel out of this region for the next round of interviews and hope to cover the east coast of Australia, if not further. Therefore, we would really appreciate you taking the time to tell us when you move, either by returning the enclosed card, emailing [path@anu.edu.au](mailto:path@anu.edu.au) or telephoning Karen (02 6125 8417). Also, if you have any questions about the study please contact Karen or Trish on 02 6125 8408.