

# An Overview of ELSA

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# What is ELSA?

ELSA is a multidisciplinary cohort study of a representative sample of people aged 50+ living in private households in England.

The survey began collecting data in 2002 (following a pilot study in 2001), with follow-up interviews every two years.

The sample has been refreshed periodically to maintain representativeness of the population aged 50+.

# What ELSA does

ELSA provides a rich and unique resource of information related to ageing.

The main objective of ELSA is to understand the *complex dynamics of the ageing process*, which relates to economic circumstances, family and social connections, biological factors, work, lifestyle practices, and multiple aspects of health and wellbeing.

A key aim of ELSA is to advance research and inform policy to improve the lives of older adults and all who reach later life.

# Components of ELSA

ELSA includes various modules and components that contribute to its richness. Each wave of data collection involves a computer-assisted personal interview (**CAPI**) as well as a self-completion questionnaire.

This **SCQ** provides respondents with an added layer of privacy as well as extra time, collecting information related to e.g. social connections, loneliness, consumption practices, and life satisfaction. SCQs in Waves 6 & 8 also collected information on *sexual activity*.

In certain years, a **Nurse Visit** is conducted to take various measurements related to health and physical function, including taking blood samples.

# Waves and Data Collection

Year	Modality	Sample	Refreshment
Wave 1 (2002/3)	CAPI	12,099	
Wave 2 (2004/5)	CAPI + Nurse visit	9,432 (7,666)	
Wave 3 (2006/7)	CAPI + Life History	9,771 (7,855)	HSE 2001/02/03/04
Wave 4 (2008/9)	CAPI + Nurse visit	11,050 (8,643)	HSE 2006
Wave 5 (2010/11)	CAPI	10,274	
Wave 6 (2012/13)	CAPI + Nurse visit	10,601 (8,054)	HSE 2009/10/11
Wave 7 (2014/15)	CAPI	9,666	HSE 2011/12
Wave 8 (2016/17)	CAPI + Nurse visit (50%)	8,445 (3,525)	
Wave 9 (2018/19)	CAPI + Nurse visit (50%)	8,736 (3,069)	HSE 2013/14/15
Covid-19 (2020)*2	Online + CATI	~7000	
Wave 10 (2022/23)			

# The Main ELSA Modules

## Demographic data

e.g. ethnicity, marital status, education

## Physical health

e.g. mobility, disability, chronic conditions

## Lifestyle practices

e.g. smoking, physical activity, sleep

## Mental health & psychosocial wellbeing

e.g. depression, loneliness (SCQ), quality of life (SCQ)

## Social care

e.g. limitations in I/ADLs, formal care receipt

## Social participation

e.g. transport, activities out of the home (SCQ)

## Work & pensions

e.g. employment status, pension arrangements

## Income & assets

e.g. sources of income, wealth

## Housing & consumption

e.g. housing tenure, energy use, goods owned

## Cognitive function

e.g. memory, word recall, literacy

## Volunteering & caregiving

e.g. recipient of help, sense of reward

## Expectations

e.g. of mortality, retirement timing, future finances

# Special Sub-studies of ELSA

## Life History Interview: Conducted as part of Wave 3 (2006/07)

- Collected retrospective data on key events across respondents' entire life course

## HCAP (Healthy Cognitive Ageing Protocol): 2018 & 2023

- Used to investigate dementia risk using a series of various cognitive tests and batteries among a subsample (~1,300) of ELSA participants aged 65+
- Informed a predictive algorithm to classify ELSA respondents
- Designed to produce comparable data among the HRS/Gateway network of studies

## COVID-19 sub-study: June/July & Nov/Dec 2020

- Collected key ELSA measures along with items specific to the pandemic

# Special Features and Connections

In addition to the wide range of information collected in ELSA, there are additional resources for various types of specialist research:

- Hospital Episode Statistics – linkage to data from health services
- Environmental data linkage, e.g. area-based air pollution
- Genetic data – genotyped data, polygenic scores
- Biomarkers – connecting the biology to other outcomes
- Proteomics – assays of proteomes to allow analysis of protein biomarkers



# Thank you!

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