

Autumn 2008

# ELSA UPDATE



Welcome to a new update bringing you news about the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) which follows the health and lifestyles of people aged 50-plus and their partners.

It is an exciting time when we are getting ready to produce a report about ELSA's third wave of interviews which ended in August 2007. The third wave was an enormous success thanks to your valuable help. Almost three quarters of the 13,500 people who are now in this study took part in our interviews. For those of you who were unable to take part last time, we hope you will be able to participate again in the future.

You may have seen some findings from ELSA discussed in the media since the last update. We have even been reported in a recent Hollywood film – see inside for details.

*In this newsletter we describe some of the highlights from the findings from ELSA’s third wave. These findings are from research carried out by researchers at the National Centre for Social Research, University College London, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the Peninsula Medical School in Exeter and the University of Cambridge.*

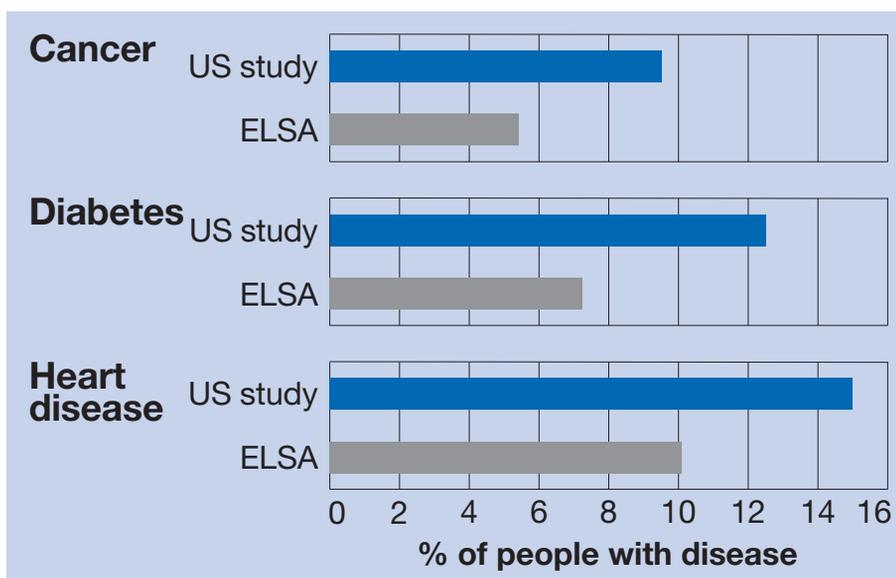


## Middle age lasts until at least 63!

You are living longer, travelling in record numbers and have a better overall quality of life than your parents did at the same age. The majority of you do not think of yourselves as old and those of you who feel younger than your actual age also feel healthier. Also, although middle age is sometimes seen as going on until your 59th birthday, in general ELSA participants see it as going on until at least 63! These findings go a long way to dismiss popular views of ageing as negative, especially as the majority of you find ageing to be a positive experience regardless of how wealthy you are.

## ELSA stars in US film!

ELSA findings have been mentioned in the recent film ‘Sicko’ by the Oscar winning director Michael Moore. The film, which is about the US health care system, mentioned research comparing findings from ELSA with those from a similar study in the US. The film reported that *“in a study of older Americans and Brits, the Brits had less of almost every major disease. Even the poorest Brit can expect to live longer than the richest American.”* (See graph below.) This is despite the fact that the US spends considerably more money on health care than England. These findings have attracted interest in further research from both government departments in the UK and internationally.



## Wealth and retirement

ELSA participants in their fifties are likely to hold most of their wealth in their homes, instead of in complicated investments. In addition, those of you who are in a couple are likely to make 'joint' retirement decisions. We have also found that men are more likely to wait to retire until their wives reach 60, to make sure they have enough money in retirement. These findings have been presented to the Department for Work and Pensions and attracted a lot of interest from within the government.

## Non-smokers have a better overall quality of life

Data from the ELSA nurse visits in 2002 has shown that smoking affects the functioning of people's lungs and their happiness



levels. Non-smokers reported higher levels of pleasure and enjoyment of life, and a better overall quality of life than smokers. We are looking forward to finding out if the smoking ban, introduced in England in July 2007, has had any impact on participants' rates of smoking.

## Looking back at your childhood

Thank you to all of you that took part in the separate interview about your life history. We found that many participants enjoyed telling us about their childhood and the story of their life so far. One interesting finding we have from this data is that almost one in ten participants were evacuated during World War II. We are also

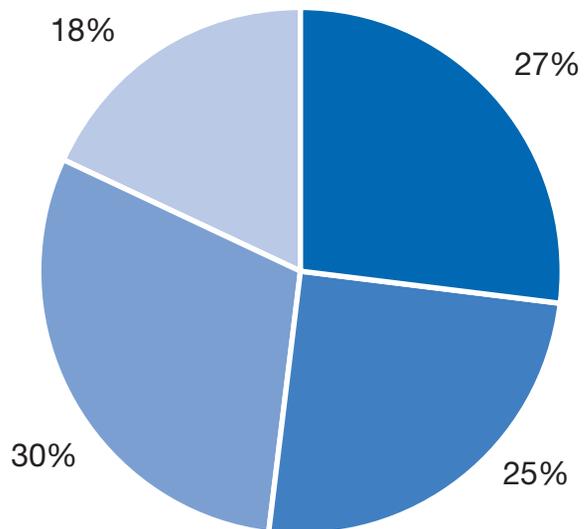


now able to present a snapshot of ELSA participants' lives when they were 10 years old thanks to the responses you gave:

- Six out of ten ELSA participants lived in a 3-bedroom home when they were ten.
- Almost seven out of ten participants had both hot and cold running water in their home but more than a third did not have an inside toilet.
- Only 4% of you grew up with central heating.
- Most of you had at least a shelf full of books in your childhood home (See pie chart).

### Number of books respondents had in their house when they were 10

- None or very few books
- Enough to fill one shelf
- Enough to fill one bookcase
- Enough to fill two or more bookcases



We are looking forward to examining the information participants told us about their early lives in more detail. We are planning to look at whether people's past jobs, personal events, or the places they have lived, affect their retirement choices or health in later life. We are also going to compare the early life experiences of ELSA participants with those of people in the US and Europe.

## Taking part

Thank you to all of you who took part in ELSA in 2006-07. Over 200 interviewers travelled all over England and to some other parts of Britain to visit the 13,500 of you that participated. We would also like to wish a warm welcome to those of you who are new to ELSA.

### Nurse visit during ELSA's fourth wave

Our interviewers will be visiting you all again sometime between May 2008 and summer 2009. We would like to include as many participants as want to and can take part. This fourth wave will also include a visit from a nurse, similar to the visits participants had in 2002-03, in which the nurse will make a record of some simple measures like your height and grip strength. An interviewer will be in touch with you soon to make an appointment. If you have any queries about what it means to be a participant, what is done with your data, or any other matter, please call our freephone number below.

### ELSA and the world

The information you provide us with in your interview is important in helping us understand the health and lifestyles of people aged 50+ in this country. Data from ELSA is compared to similar studies in the United States, Mexico, mainland Europe, Korea, China and India. In fact within the last 6 months almost three quarters of the population of the world have become represented by these and other surveys of ageing!

## Meet the team



**James Nazroo** is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Manchester. He examines the data from ELSA to identify and explore reasons behind health and social inequalities. He also looks at how people's activities and well-being are affected by their retirement.



**Elizabeth Breeze** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, University College London. She is in charge of the development and coordination of ELSA. She uses the ELSA data to look at how people's social and employment circumstances affect their health and well-being.



**Gemma Tetlow** is a Senior Research Economist at the Institute for Fiscal Studies. She is part of the ELSA team that designs and analyses the questions which ask about your work and pensions. Her main research interests are people's savings and work in older age.



**Chris Shaw** has taken over from Audrey Hale as the head of the team that looks after ELSA in the National Centre for Social Research offices at Brentwood. She answers the ELSA helpline, responds to queries from ELSA participants and looks after our interviewers and nurses.

### Please keep in touch!

We are very grateful for your continued participation in ELSA and we hope that you continue to welcome our interviewers and nurses when they visit.

If you would like to update your contact details or have any questions about the study and the data we collect from you please contact us: Freephone 0800 652 4574

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