The UK population is ageing

The number of people aged over 65 is rapidly increasing; it is predicted that by 2050 the older population in Great Britain will have nearly tripled since the 1950s and this growth is even more pronounced in the population aged over 80 where there will be an eightfold increase. This is due to people living longer and remaining more active than at any other time in history.

As the population grows older it is important to work out what resources are required to provide care and support for those who need it. The impact on society means that healthcare, retirement and pensions will need to be extended for longer. These issues are the basis on which National and local policymakers plan and provide for the health and social care needs of the older population.

By the end of this study, we will be able to provide profiles of the mental and physical health of people aged 65 or over and investigate what might cause or prevent the changes that occur with age.

The study is being carried out in five centres: Cambridgeshire, Newcastle, Nottingham, Gwynedd and Neath, and will approach 12,500 individuals in two phases: phase I in England, which has been running since 2008 will finish in 2011. The Welsh centres will continue until 2013.

Phase II: will take place two years after the baseline, those who took part will be invited to conduct a second interview so that we can compare any changes in health over time.

Interviews have been conducted mainly in respondents’ homes; we included questions on family and friends, memory and concentration, and general health. Some interviews were longer than others. For some people we also asked permission to seek further valuable help from a relative or someone who knows the respondent well.

All the information you have provided is treated with the strictest confidence and held anonymously. No personal details will be passed on to anyone.

Although we have not finished all the first wave we want to share a few findings with you. The next section looks at some of the initial findings from those who have taken part so far. Because we have yet to complete the first phase of the project, these results are not the final ones.
Who has taken part so far?

A total of 3,906 people had been interviewed by 12th October 2010. 2,163 of these were women, and 1,743 were men.

Our age range has spanned up to just over 100 years for women and 97 for men.

The chart below shows the ages of those who have taken part.

As expected more women are in the older age groups than men and so far more than 90% of our participants live in their own homes.

More women are widowed than men and more men are living with a partner.
This next section covers physical activities, social engagement and work. A sizeable proportion of people are physically active, taking part in sports or activities that are at least mildly energetic.

More than 1 in 5 of you are still working and almost half report some social activity such as attending community meetings, and groups such as the over 60’s clubs, evening classes, church and other religious meetings.

Around 1 in 10 people reported they were currently smoking, and around half have stopped smoking.

Although many people report mild changes in memory, less than 10% regarded this as problematic.

These initial results suggest that many people are healthy and active.

We asked about particular health conditions. High blood pressure and arthritis were quite common.

Diabetes and strokes affected about 1 in 10 people taking part, and Parkinson’s disease was much rarer accounting for less than 1 in 100.
Summary

The causes of decline in physical and mental health related to ageing are the subject of intensive research both nationally and internationally.

As this study continues, your involvement will be of critical importance to reveal these changes in health and wellbeing of the older population over time. This is the only study of health and ageing which can look at changes over generations.

We are immensely grateful to everybody who has participated in the study and would like to thank you for your continued support.

Should you have any queries regarding the study please contact your local investigator, named below or look at our website www.cfas.ac.uk

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