



P A T H T H R O U G H L I F E

PATH Through Life Project Newsletter November 2003

In April this year we started re-interviewing all those participants in the 20-24 year age group who had participated four years ago. As we expected, this group has dispersed all around Australia with many overseas. We expect to visit most of those who are in other parts of Australia and will be asking those overseas to complete a written version of the questionnaire and mail it back to us. ***If anyone in our 20's age group is reading this Newsletter and has still not been contacted could you please call Karen on 02-61258417 or email her on path@anu.edu.au.***

This year we have started using a laptop computer with a touch-sensitive screen. As these laptops were only introduced into Australia last November, it was quite a rush getting the questionnaire set up to start early this year.

The PATH Interviewers

One of our interviewers, Claire Powell, has left our team to take up another position. We have 2 new interviewers who have started in the last couple of months – David Fryer and Marianne Crane.

Awards

In September this year, the PATH team was awarded the A.N.U. Council Medal for General Staff Excellence. The award “recognises the outstanding contribution the PATH team has made to achieving the university’s goals...enabling the university to be at the forefront of tertiary education and research in Australia.” We could not have achieved this without the cooperation of all those who have taken part in the project.

CMHR has been growing over the last few years and this year we have had an extension built. As part of this the University has commissioned a sculpture to be displayed outside the building. To compete with this our director, Tony Jorm instigated the “Bald Tony” art award with all those working at CMHR being eligible to enter. The ‘People’s Choice’ award was won by Ruth Parslow. Ruth is a Research Fellow at CMHR but was an interviewer for the PATH project in 1999 and 2000. The artwork is now displayed in the corridor leading to the PATH office.

Analysis of data in 2003

Four papers based on data collected from the PATH project have been published, 13 more are ‘In press’ and 15 have been submitted to academic journals. These are listed on our web site www.anu.edu.au/cmhr. While we try to update this regularly, but as more papers are reaching publication stage all the time, not all may be listed. If you would like to have copies of any of these papers and have any further questions please contact Trish Jacomb on 02-61258408 or patricia.jacomb@anu.edu.au. Some of the results so far are summarised below.

Some previous studies have found that owning or caring for a pet may be good for your health. Ruth Parslow has examined whether those participants aged 40-44 years who owned or cared for a pet differed in mental or physical health and use of GP services from those who did not have a pet. Being a devoted dog owner herself, Ruth was surprised to find no difference between those with pets and those without. In further analysis using data from both the 40+ and 60+ age groups she found that while those with pets undertook more mild physical activity they had higher diastolic blood pressure, were more likely to smoke and to be overweight. These findings are surprising and probably only indirectly relate to pet ownership. She will be continuing her analysis of these data using the second collection of data.

In the 40+ age group we asked questions about work conditions. Rennie D'Souza has examined the effect of work stress on those in management or professional positions. She found that 23% reported high job stress while another 30% reported moderate or high job insecurity. Both high job strain and high job insecurity was associated with much higher levels of depression and anxiety and poorer physical health. Rennie comments that such adverse job conditions, particularly job insecurity are on the increase and concludes that "the potential impact of job strain and job insecurity on employee health warrants attention by governments, management and unions formulating industrial relations policies and agreements.

Tony Jorm has examined the relationship between weight and mental health. He found that women, but not men, who were obese had higher levels of anxiety and depression. However, the results suggested that this was more likely due to the poorer physical health found in these women. When physical health, level of exercise and a number of other factors were taken into account, underweight women tended to have more depression and obese or overweight women better mental health than the acceptable weight group.

Our results, along with other studies, have found that reporting greater affection from fathers and mothers was associated with fewer anxiety and depression symptoms. However, our results showed that mental health was worse in those who reported higher affection from their father than from their mother. Such families tended to have a range of problems such as emotional problems in parents, conflict in the home and parental separation or divorce. It is possible that family problems lead fathers to show increased affection to their children or mothers to show reduced affection.

Re-interviewing the 40+ age group

In April 2004 we will start to re-interview those aged 40 to 44 years who were interviewed in 2000-2001. This time, interviewers will be contacting you directly by phone to arrange an interview time.

We hope you find these Newsletters interesting. If you would like to know anything more about the study please contact either Karen Maxwell on 6125 8417 or Trish Jacomb on 6125 8408.