

# Thematic guide: later life studies (using qualitative data)

Social changes ... have led to an increase in the elderly population

## Introduction

The elderly are a sector of society with their own unique range of issues and concerns.

Sociological studies frequently focus on issues of care and social policy, retirement and leisure as well as health and disability.

Significant social changes in the last century have led to an increase in the elderly population in Britain and with this increase and the fragmentation of families and communities, matters of care in later life have become a particularly challenging social issue.

The division of responsibility between the state and the family has long been a significant focus for debate. Peter Townsend's classic study 'The Last Refuge' examines the provision of institutional care for the elderly.

## Searching for related materials

The [UK Data Service catalogue](#) can be searched for data on later life studies using subject terms such as:

- quality of life
- residential care
- retirement
- social isolation
- death
- family
- old age
- poverty

Every data collection is accompanied by comprehensive documentation. These are open access and available to the public from the website and it is not necessary to be a registered user to access and download them.

The content of the documentation varies by collection, but usually includes information such as the initial proposal, interview schedule, description of methodology, end of award report, and so on.

In some cases more details are provided, such as the coding schemes of the original researchers or examples of the consent forms used.

## Other resources later life studies

[Alliance for Aging Research.](#)

[British Geriatrics Society.](#)

[British Society of Gerontology.](#)

[King's College London Institute of Gerontology.](#)

[A Better Life, Old Age, new thoughts.](#)

[Social Gerontology and the Aging Revolution.](#)

## Summary of selected qualitative studies on later life studies

### Study name

[SN 6011 Older Men: their Social Worlds and Healthy Lifestyles, 1999-2002](#)

Arber, S. and Davidson, K.

This study aimed to better understand the social worlds of older men. It sought to understand masculinity in later life, the nature of older men's social relationships, and factors influencing healthy lifestyles.

### Coverage

Sample: Men over the age of 65 in the Guildford area, stratified by marital status

Data: 85 interviews and 2 field observation notes

### Topics

- retirement
- health
- elderly
- family life
- gender roles
- masculinity

### Study name

[SN 5231 Grandparents and Teen Grandchildren: Exploring Intergenerational Relationships, 2003-2004](#)

Hill, M., Sweeting, H., Cunningham-Burley, S., and Ross, N.

This research focused on the nature of grandparent-grandchild relationships, exploring the ways family and societal contexts are impacting on this kinship relation. The study emphasised the dynamic nature of grandparent-grandchild relations by examining perceived changes related to life stage and the implications of various family transitions, formations and mobility.

### Coverage

Sample: Younger people (aged 10-19) and older people (aged 50s to 80s) from Scotland interviewed between 2003 and 2005

Data: 63 interviews

### Topics

- elderly
- family life
- marriage
- youth

## Study name

[SN 4943 Mothers and Daughters : Accounts of Health in the Grandmother Generation, 1945-1978](#)

Blaxter, M.

This is an enhanced qualitative study. The research looked at beliefs and attitudes to health and medical care, inter-generational relationships, and social history of members of a grandmother generation. The original study included interviews with daughters as well but this collection contains only the grandmother interviews. The interviews cover health and social history, beliefs and attitudes to medical care, and intergenerational relationships.

## Coverage

Sample: Women in a Scottish city who had a child between 1950-53

Data: 46 interviews

## Topics

- health
- childbearing
- health services
- nutrition
- child rearing
- elderly
- family life
- gender roles
- social welfare

## Study name

[SN 6227 Boomers and Beyond: Intergenerational Consumption and the Mature Imagination, 2006](#)

Leach, R, Phillipson, C and Biggs, S.

This project focused on the consumption practices of the first wave 'baby boom' generation (born 1945-1954). This group, representing 17% of the UK population, began their life at a time of austerity but entered adulthood during a period of relative prosperity, experiencing major changes over their life course. Previous research has viewed 'boomers' as having experiences that set them apart from previous generations. This research project provided an account of the lives of the boomer generation, examining the role of consumption in changing traditional approaches to adult ageing.

## Coverage

Sample: People born between 1945 and 1954, resident in the Greater Manchester area during 2006

Data: Phase One interviews: 115 Phase Two interviews: 30 Quantitative demographic data file: 150 cases

## Topics

- social attitudes
- social behaviour

- elderly
- family life
- social and occupational mobility

## Study name

[SN 4750 Last Refuge, 1958-1959](#)

Townsend, P.

In the late 1950s Peter Townsend undertook a national study which investigated the provision of long-stay institutional care for old people in England and Wales. The study sought to ask "Are long stay institutions for old people necessary in our society, and, if so, what form should they take?" Interviews were conducted with local authority chief welfare officers, matrons, wardens and proprietors, as well as residents.

## Coverage

Sample: Chief welfare officers, matrons or wardens and elderly people in residential accommodation in England and Wales, 1958-1959

Data: 194 interviews 22 field notes, 112 photographs

## Topics

- old age
- residential care
- care
- retirement
- nursing
- poverty
- welfare services
- loneliness

## Study name

[SN 4840 Technology and Natural Death: a Study of Older People, 2001-2002](#)

Seymour, J.

This study has developed new methodologies for social science in a demanding and ethically sensitive field highlighting the role of older people in caring for the dying and their needs for support and training; information needs about issues of ethics, clinical practice and advance care planning; and the willingness of older research participants to discuss these matters.

## Coverage

Sample: Men and women aged over 65 and living in Sheffield

Data: 39 interviews and 6 focus groups

## Topics

- clinical death
- quality of life
- natural death
- older people