

Aspirations for later life

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Background

This research report presents new survey findings on people's aspirations for later life in Great Britain. Later life was defined as 60 or older; people already in this age band were asked about their aspirations for the future. The survey sought to determine whether people hold aspirations for their later life and, if so, what these might be. It also sought to gain insight into the enablers and barriers to achieving these aspirations. Questions were asked of adults of all ages to see how aspirations are formed and how they change with age.

Key findings

- The majority (65 per cent) held hopes or ambitions for their later life with about a third of these having some ideas but not having thought about it that much. However, the remaining 35 per cent stated they had not thought about it at all.
- Among those respondents aged 50-59 years, 53 per cent held hopes or ambitions for their later life, 22 per cent had some ideas but had not thought about it that much and 25 per cent had not thought about it at all.
- Among those who either had some ideas about their later life but had not given it much thought or had not thought about it at all, 41 per cent said this was because they do not tend to plan their life in advance. For 37 per cent, it was because they felt themselves to be too young or that it was too far off.
- For those with hopes or ambitions for later life, these predominantly related to leisure activities or hobbies (cited by 81 per cent). Others related to volunteering (39 per cent) and paid work (37 per cent).

- In terms of planning, a wide range of preparation activity was reported (for example, 35 per cent were estimating their likely future pension income and 32 per cent were starting to save). Planning for long-term care was least commonly reported (six per cent).
- Expectations for caring in later life showed that almost three-quarters (73 per cent) of respondents expected to care for someone when they themselves were in later life.
- Surprisingly, younger respondents were most likely to state that they expected to have caring responsibilities in later life.
- Interest in volunteering in later life varied by type: with 53 per cent of respondents interested in formal volunteering and 33 per cent in informal types. However, 31 per cent were not interested in either type of volunteering.
- Older respondents were less interested in any type of volunteering with 61 per cent of those aged 65 years or more stating that they were unlikely to do any type of volunteering in the future.

Methodology

These questions were asked as part of the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) Omnibus. Face-to-face interviews were carried out with a random probability sample of 1,867 adults aged 16 years and over. The sample of respondents aged 45 to 65 years was boosted to allow more detailed analysis of their answers.

Research findings

Perceptions of later life

Perceived life stage was closely aligned with respondents' actual age. For example, 82 per cent of those aged 65 or more said they were in 'later adulthood or old age'. Fifty-five per cent of those aged 60 to 64 years considered themselves to be in 'later adulthood or old age', and a significant minority (43 per cent) considered themselves to be in 'middle adulthood'.

On average, people perceived later life to commence at the age of 58, however, this increased with respondent age. For example, those aged 60 to 64 years perceived 'later adulthood or old age' to start at 63 on average; this reduced to starting at 52 years for those in the youngest age group (16 to 34 years). Men tended to give a slightly younger age for the start of 'later adulthood or old age' than did women (56 and 60 years, respectively).

Expectations and planning for later life

Forty-three per cent of respondents had hopes or ambitions for things they would like to do when aged 60 onwards, whereas a further 22 per cent had some ideas but had not thought about it that much, and 35 per cent had not really thought about it at all. These proportions varied by age group, with those aged 50 to 64 years most likely to have thought about what they might do, as were respondents with higher incomes, those in managerial and professional occupations and those with higher educational qualifications.

Among those who had thought about what they might want to do when aged 60 onwards, the most mentioned aspiration was for leisure activities and hobbies (81 per cent). Smaller proportions were interested in volunteering (39 per cent), employment (37 per cent), attending social clubs/community activities (32 per cent) and undertaking further learning or acquiring new skills (30 per cent).

In terms of planning, 35 per cent had estimated their pension income and 32 per cent had started to save money.

Among those who either had some ideas about their later life but had not given it much thought or had not thought about it at all, 41 per cent said this was because they do not tend to plan their life in advance. For 37 per cent, it was because they felt themselves to be too young or that it was too far off.

Activities in later life

Leisure and culture

Of those who stated they had hopes or ambitions for later life, leisure activities and hobbies were the most frequently mentioned items that respondents wanted to be doing when aged 60 onwards (81 per cent). Of leisure activities and hobbies, travel and holidays were the most common aspiration (82 per cent). Those respondents in higher income quintiles were more likely to mention this, whilst older respondents (those aged over 65 in particular) were least likely to do so.

Volunteering

Fifty-three per cent of all respondents (except those who stated they were too young to be thinking about or planning for later life) were interested in formal volunteering, defined as 'unpaid work through a group, club or organisation' when aged 60 onwards. Thirty-three per cent were interested in informal volunteering, defined as 'unpaid help for someone who is not a relative' and 31 per cent were not interested in either type of volunteering. Interest in formal volunteering varied by age, with respondents under 60 more likely to express an interest. Older respondents were less interested in any type of volunteering with 61 per cent of those aged 65 years or more stating that they were unlikely to do any type of volunteering in the future.

The strongest factor in facilitating volunteering in later life would be having someone ask you to become involved (50 per cent of respondents mentioned this). Of respondents not interested

in volunteering, 25 per cent said 'I would do other things with my spare time' and 20 per cent said 'I just don't want to/I am not interested in volunteering'. However, some did perceive particular constraints related to age with 16 per cent anticipating a caring responsibility, 18 per cent anticipating a future health problem and 19 per cent saying that they would be too old.

Learning and training

Among those who had indicated they might be interested in undertaking further training, learning or acquiring new skills, there was a clear preference for more informal types of training. The majority (76 per cent) of those interested in learning when aged 60 onwards wanted to do so 'just for the pleasure of learning', with only 19 per cent interested in formal training that led to a qualification.

Respondents aged 45 to 64 were asked about their interest in training for a career change. Forty-four per cent of those who were currently working said they would be very or fairly interested.

Caring

Seventy-three per cent of respondents with aspirations said they expected to care for a family member when they themselves are aged 60 onwards. Younger respondents were most likely to say this. The expectation of having to provide care limited ambitions for leisure and cultural activities, but not for volunteering.

Health and independence

In general, the majority (81 per cent) of respondents considered themselves to be in 'good' or 'very good' health, even though 26 per cent said that they had a long-standing health condition or disability.

Respondents were asked which (if any) activities they were doing in order to maintain their long-term health. Almost all (98 per cent) were doing at least one activity and the most commonly mentioned of these were avoiding smoking, getting out of the house as often as possible, eating fruit and vegetables and taking regular exercise.

Respondents were also asked which of a list of things they had done or were currently doing to get ready for changes as they get older. Eighty-four per cent of respondents were doing at least one activity to help them maintain their independence, and the most common of these behaviours were trying to maintain their health, paying into a pension and keeping an active mind. There was a strong relationship between the number of activities and the age of respondents (e.g. older respondents were doing more activities).

Those who were doing nothing to maintain their long-term independence were more likely to be in the youngest age group and with lower educational attainment. The most common reason for not doing any independence-maintaining activities (36 per cent) was because later life was 'too far off'.

Community and social inclusion

Eighteen per cent of respondents said that they sometimes or often felt isolated or did not have enough contact with other people. These feelings tended to peak in middle age before decreasing in the oldest respondents. Those respondents with lower incomes and lower educational attainment were slightly more likely to say that they felt isolated.

Sixteen per cent of all respondents felt that their local community would not be a good place to grow old in. Older people were more likely to state that their community was a good place to grow old in, however, in every age group nearly ten per cent of respondents thought their community was not a good place to grow old in.

Conclusions

The majority (65 per cent) held hopes or ambitions for their later life with about a third of these having some ideas but not having thought about it that much. The remaining 35 per cent stated they had not thought about it at all. These proportions varied by age group, with those aged 50 to 64 years most likely to have thought about what they might do, as were respondents with higher incomes, those in managerial and professional occupations and those with higher educational qualifications.

This is an important consideration for future policies aimed at encouraging particular activities (including volunteering and learning new skills) in later life.

Respondents aged 60 to 64 were most likely to have thought about their hopes or ambitions, with over half (54 per cent) saying they had aspirations for the future. Among those respondents approaching 60 (those aged 50 to 59 years), 53 per cent held hopes or ambitions for their later life, 22 per cent had some ideas but had not thought about it that much and 25 per cent had not really thought about it at all. Across all respondents many stated that they did not tend to plan out their lives in advance or alternatively saw life after 60 as an opportunity to relax and do less.

Respondents' aspirations for later life varied across the age groups. This has important implications when communicating with different age groups about various opportunities and the importance of planning for later life.

This research demonstrates that later life is primarily seen as an opportunity to pursue leisure activities and hobbies, with travel and reading amongst the most popular sorts of activities people are aspiring to do.

This research explored respondents' aspirations for leisure and cultural activities, learning and training, and volunteering. Despite the interest in these activities when thinking about later life, there were respondents who were not interested in pursuing these types of activities, particularly volunteering and training. However, there were also smaller groups who were interested but perceived certain constraints that might prevent them from undertaking these sorts of activities in later life. Of these respondents, some felt that they would be too old or unhealthy, while others anticipated they would need to care for someone else (either an adult or children). For others, the issue was more financial as they felt they may not be able to afford the activities they might want to do in later life.

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The full report of these research findings is published by the Department for Work and Pensions (ISBN 978 1 84712 971 0. Research Report 737. May 2011).

You can download the full report free from: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp>

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