

Results from Study of 8,000 Older People Launched

The first results from The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA), a national study of 8,000 older people aged 50 and over, were launched today (May 9th) by the Minister for Health and Children, Dr James Reilly.

TILDA is the most comprehensive study ever conducted on ageing in Ireland. Between 2009- 2011, over 8,000 people aged 50 and over were randomly selected across the country and interviewed about many aspects of their lives including issues such as health, financial circumstances and quality of life. Almost 85 per cent of the participants also underwent a rigorous health assessment. The same group will be interviewed every two years until 2018. Further health assessments will be undertaken on the participants in 2014 and 2018. This report, *Fifty Plus in Ireland 2011: First Results from the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing*, contains initial findings from the study. TILDA is funded by the Department of Health and Children, Irish Life and The Atlantic Philanthropies.

Commenting on the significance of the study, Principal Investigator of TILDA and Professor of Medical Gerontology, Professor Rose Anne Kenny said: “The importance of this study cannot be understated. By collecting and analysing this data, we will be able to develop a much deeper understanding of the lives and circumstances of older people and of the factors which lead to good health and good quality of life in older ages. This will mean that Ireland will be better placed to plan for the ageing of our population and to help policy makers ensure that limited resources are correctly targeted to those in need. TILDA provides exciting opportunities for Research and Development and new models of service delivery to create employment in this rapidly developing demographic. We are deeply grateful to our participants. Because of their generosity in taking the time to provide us with this crucial information, Ireland now and in the future will greatly benefit.”

When launching the report, the Minister said that the Study’s high quality objective and subjective measurements of health coupled with its longitudinal design “will provide a truly unique knowledge base that will inform policies for older people in the years ahead.”

The findings in the report cover many topics and show that there is considerable diversity across older adults in terms of the various dimensions of their lives. A selection of findings is highlighted below.

When the participants were asked about their quality of life, the following emerged.

- The 50+s report that they derive considerable enjoyment from life. Eighty-five per cent report that they often enjoy the things they do, while 81 per cent often look forward to each day. Over 80 per cent feel that life is full of opportunities.

The report also shows how this group contributes significantly to their families and communities, in terms of both money and time. Specific examples of this are as follows:

- Over one third of people aged 50 and over provide practical household help including shopping and household chores to their children who are not living with them and nearly half provide care to grandchildren.
- Over one quarter of 50+ households report giving a financial or material gift worth €5,000 or more to their children within the last ten years.
- Over a quarter of 50+s do voluntary work at least once or twice a month.

The report shows the extent to which health declines across age groups and two examples of this are as follows:

- Seventy nine per cent of those aged between 50 and 64 say that their health is excellent, very good or good but this falls to 66 per cent for people aged 75 and older.
- The proportion of people with high blood pressure increases from 29.7 per cent for those aged 50- 64 years to 53.7 per cent for those aged 75 and over.

A constant finding across the report is that those with higher levels of education and wealth are likely to enjoy better outcomes later in life. Examples include the following:

- For men aged 50-64, 53 per cent with primary education are employed. This rises to 70 per cent for those with third level education. For women aged 50-64, 28 per cent with primary education are employed. Among the third level group, 62 per cent are employed.
- We find that individuals with a primary education report substantially higher levels of chronic lung disease (5.5 per cent) compared to individuals with second or third level education (3.6 per

cent and 2.7 per cent respectively). Similarly, older adults in the lowest wealth quartile report almost three times the rate of chronic lung disease compared to older adults in the highest wealth quartile (6.5 per cent versus 2.5 per cent).

Among other findings are the following:

- On the issue of mental health, we find that 10 per cent of respondents reported clinically significant depressive symptoms while a further 18 per cent reported 'sub-threshold' depression.
- On incomes, we find that state transfers are the only source of income for a high proportion of less educated older people. For those in the lowest education group, around 40 per cent of people aged 50-64 have no other source of income and this rises to 53 per cent for those aged 75 and over.
- With regard to the use of health care services, we find that among older people in poor health, attendance at either GP clinics or emergency rooms is lower for those without medical cards or private cover thereby raising concerns about diagnosis and treatment deficits for this group.
- People with disabilities receive an average of 118 hours of help per month. As the most common primary helper for this group is the care recipient's spouse, this translates into extensive inputs by older adults into the care of other older adults.
- Amongst women at work, 41 per cent are not covered by an occupational, PRSA or private pension scheme compared to 20 per cent of men. Pension coverage also varies significantly by socioeconomic group.

Executive summary, full report and chapter-by-chapter versions can be found at <http://www.tcd.ie/tilda/publications/>

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About TILDA:

The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) was launched by Minister for Health and Children Mary Harney in November 2006 to study a representative cohort of at least 8,000 people, aged 50 and over and resident in Ireland, charting their health, social and economic circumstances over a 10-year period. The study is being carried out by Trinity College Dublin in collaboration with an inter-disciplinary panel of scientific researchers, with expertise in various fields of ageing, from Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT), Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG), The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), University College Cork (UCC) and Waterford Institute of

Technology (WIT). A group of international scientists advises the TILDA investigators. Funding has been provided by the Department of Health and Children, Irish Life and the Atlantic Philanthropies.