

Longitudinal research is essential to understanding the complexities of the factors that influence an individual's life chances. It allows an exploration of how different groups vary, and how and why people's lives change, enabling a greater understanding of the difference between causal relationships and correlation. Findings from the UK's longitudinal population studies have continuously demonstrated the vital role that early life plays across a wide range of biomedical and social areas of life.

Key messages

- The nutritional status of both women and men before conception has profound implications for the growth, development, and long-term outcomes of their offspring. Recent evidence suggests that intervening to improve men's and women's nutritional status before pregnancy improves long-term outcomes for mothers and babies.
- Educational attainment is strongly associated with quality of diet and fruit and vegetable intake before pregnancy, with the more highly educated being more likely to conform to dietary recommendations. This underlines the need for increased awareness for those women who are planning a pregnancy, with a focus on disadvantaged women.
- Research using data from longitudinal population studies demonstrates the importance of communications skills and language development on later life outcomes. Research looking at the gender gap in literacy and language development found that boys are more likely to fall behind than girls by the time they start school.
- Findings from longitudinal population studies have shown a link between reading for pleasure and better vocabularies, suggesting that if young people are encouraged to discover a love for books at an early age it could alter the course of their lives, regardless of their background.
- Research shows that early language is a crucial stepping-stone to literacy and that children with good language ability at age five are more likely to have both higher qualifications and to be in employment compared to their peers. The research found that employing early years' teachers with graduate level qualifications has a measurable impact on children's language development.



Evidence

CLOSER written evidence submissions:

- [Life chances \[PDF\]](#)
- [First 1000 days of life \[PDF\]](#)
- [Evidence based early years intervention \[PDF\]](#)

Suggested citation

CLOSER Evidence Hub: Life chances. (2022). CLOSER. London, UK