

Researchers explore benefits of 'social medicines'

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'Social medicines' are beneficial to the health and wellbeing of individuals and the population. By combining social and biological information from UK Longitudinal studies (life-course studies) researchers have identified that the more 'social medicines' you have, the better your physical and mental health. These include a stable family life, stress free childhood, alcohol free culture for young people, secure and rewarding employment, positive relationships with friends and neighbours, and a socially active old age.

Researchers from the International Centre for Lifecourse Studies in Society and Health (ICLS) funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) are releasing a plain English guide to their research demonstrating how 'Life gets under your skin' as part of the Economic and Social Research Council Festival of Social Science in November.

A stable [family life](#) where children have secure routines, including being read to and taken on outings by their parents, is more likely to result in them being ready to take in what will be offered at school (school-readiness). Getting a flying start at school is one of the most important pathways towards wellbeing later in life.

An environment free of constant bombardment with cigarette and [alcohol advertisements](#) helps adolescents avoid the first steps towards addiction. People with more friends have higher levels of health and wellbeing - and researchers have found this to be almost as important as avoiding smoking over the longer term. A supportive social network can make all the difference as people confront the problems of ageing, helping them to maintain a high quality of life for many years.

The booklet demonstrates how social policy related to family life, education, employment and welfare can have [beneficial effects](#) for the health of individuals. It also shows how multi disciplinary,

[longitudinal research](#) can deliver findings valuable to the individual, society and the economy.

Professor Bartley editor of the booklet says: "Unlike most other medicines these 'social medicines' revealed by life course research have no unwanted side effects. They can only benefit both individuals and society."

"Britain is unique and fortunate in having a range of studies on people and society. Wellbeing is increasingly influenced by society and by experiences that stretch right across the lifecourse of a person - from baby to old age. This booklet is intended to help make the results of lifecourse research as widely available as possible, informing decisions and improving understanding across a broad range of audiences," continues Professor Bartley.

More information:

www.ucl.ac.uk/icls/publications/booklets

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

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