

R038: Health and social selection bias on consent to participation in the Northern Ireland Cohort for the Longitudinal Study of Ageing – QUB

The NICOLA Study, short for the Northern Ireland Cohort for the Longitudinal Study of Ageing (NICOLA) is being conducted by the Centre for Public Health in Queen's University Belfast. NICOLA recruited a random, stratified sample of 8,500 people, over the age of 50 and residing in Northern Ireland and follows them into old age, making a comprehensive assessment of their physical and mental health, their lifestyles and their social and economic decision making.

The aim of this project is to identify if the health, both mental and physical, of individuals asked to participate in the NICOLA study may have affected their decision to take part. Previous studies have indicated that people in ill health are less likely to take part in research than those who are healthier. These decisions can result in a bias in the resulting group of research participants – or cohort – making the research less representative of the general population. This ultimately affects the validity of using the research findings as evidence on which to create policy. This is of particular importance to the NICOLA study which, as Northern Ireland's largest public health research study, was funded by UK and local government as infrastructure to directly inform policy for the over 50's population.

This application aims to look at the data held in the BSO relating to individual deaths, dates of admission to a care home, dates of admission to hospital and area deprivation indicators and, using these as an indicator of ill health, compare these to the response recorded for each individual asked to participate in the NICOLA study. The hypothesis being that those at a closer proximity to these events could be considered in ill health and therefore were more likely to decline to participate.