



# Simmons Longitudinal Study

## 2007 Newsletter

### Happy 30th Anniversary to SLS

SLS, begun in 1977 when most of you were 5 years old, has reached its 30th Anniversary. Throughout the years we and many others in the educational and helping professions have been constantly reminded of the numerous contributions you have made as members of this study. Your honesty and willingness to participate have made it possible for us to understand how children in an "average" community grow and develop. You have taught us all about the difficulties faced by many children and families in the earlier years of life, and also about the extraordinary strengths and supports that help so many overcome childhood and adolescent hardships and flourish in adult life.

In this newsletter we will highlight a few of many important things we (all the past and present hard-working SLS staff and especially YOU) have accomplished together. (You can read about some of our findings in the "Record of Successful Collaboration with You" story.) Over the past 30 years we have published more than 60 articles in professional journals and presented the important insights we have gained from you at over 200 conferences worldwide. Many of these articles and presentations have been awarded praise and are often requested by others examining the obstacles that young people face. The most important of these are the studies we have undertaken and hope to continue on the protective factors that enable a large proportion of those exposed to ill health and other hardships to overcome these negative influences and lead healthy and satisfying lives as adults.

At this time the SLS staff is not requesting further interviews from you (although we may in the future) and instead are devoting our time and energy to distilling and understanding the many lessons you have taught us over the years. You have raised so many intriguing questions, particularly about how you have dealt with tough issues, that need to be studied further and passed on to others.

Please let us know on the enclosed postcard where we can contact you with future news from the study. We welcome your feedback about the project's past, present, and future. Without your continued dedication to the SLS this landmark anniversary would never have been reached.

Happy Anniversary and Best Wishes to You and Your Families,

Helen Reinherz, Project Director

Please visit  
our updated website,  
<http://www.simmons.edu/ssw/sls>,  
to learn more about recent  
SLS activities.



**Win \$500 for your next vacation!**  
**Return the enclosed postcard or email us ([sls@simmons.edu](mailto:sls@simmons.edu))  
by March 30th and you will be  
entered in a drawing for a chance to win \$500.**

## A RECORD OF SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION WITH YOU

To celebrate our long history together, we have highlighted a few of the many insights we and other educators and clinicians have gained along the way thanks to your continued participation.



### AGES 5 AND 6 (1977-78)

As you were preparing to enter kindergarten, we collected information from your mothers and school nurses to aid in identifying children who needed help to succeed in school. We were pleasantly surprised to learn that mothers were better at identifying children needing additional help than were the psychologists and other professionals. This highlights the importance of parents as collaborators in planning educational services and charting the future of their children.

### AGE 9 (1981)

It wasn't until the 3rd grade that we heard directly from you. But even at this early age you were able to speak for yourselves. For instance, we found that high self-esteem and feeling like a valued family member were both protective against the development of depression during adolescence and young adulthood. This illustrates the importance of a positive family environment and belief in one's self.

### AGE 15 (1987)

We talked directly to you in interviews for the first time when you were 15 years old. While the transition to high school was difficult for many of you, you demonstrated the overall resilience of adolescents. You also taught us about the complicated relationship between teens and their parents. While you may have argued most frequently with your parents at this age, they remained important figures in your lives. In fact, when asked whom you admired most, many of you reported your parents were role models.

### AGE 18 (1990)

At this age you shared many aspects of your lives, including your academic achievements and issues that adolescents sometimes face such as depression and alcohol and drug use. You helped us demonstrate to researchers and educators that depression does indeed affect adolescents and is an important issue that should be treated seriously. We also learned about how you successfully coped with life's challenges.

### AGE 21 (1993)

As you entered into the early stages of adulthood we found that you were engaged in a range of activities. For instance, while some of you were attending college, others were working full-time or establishing small businesses. You had many dreams of starting families and owning homes of your own. Many were feeling excited about the future.

### AGE 26 (1998)

As one of the few studies to have followed a group of people from early childhood into adulthood, we had the unique opportunity to look at the long-term impact of early experiences on mental health functioning years later. We also learned of the power of positive outlook and strong self-image in overcoming difficult early experiences.

### AGE 30 (2002)

At age 30 we were happy to hear that most of you were very satisfied with your lives, including a number of you who had previously encountered problems. You were leading productive, interesting, and full lives. We still have much to learn from all the information you have shared with us across time! (See "What's Down the Road for SLS" to learn more about our future plans.)



## What's Down the Road for SLS

Although Xmas is long past, SLS Staff are checking their wish lists, comparing them, and finding ways to complete papers on topics that will be of most use to educators, parents, and caregivers.

Right now, as many of you are creating and building your families, we are revisiting questions you raised for us on the central role of the family in your lives. We are concentrating on seeking out patterns in families that encourage children and youth to grow and flourish.

We also are studying the positive factors in the lives of some remarkable adolescents who experienced thoughts about suicide at age 15 (a tough age for many of you) but who have developed into well functioning adults in all respects. Through understanding the path they followed to healthier development in spite of their suffering as teens, we will be able to provide educators and mental health professionals with recommendations for helping the many youth who face serious difficulties during this time of life.

Finally, we are examining similarities and difference among those of you who were exposed to illness, violence and other difficult experiences early in life. Again, we are seeking to understand what circumstances and strengths allowed many of you to survive, overcome, and build satisfying lives in spite of early hardships.

So rest assured that even if we don't call on you for interviews right now, we hope to get in touch with you at a later time to learn how you're doing, how your life has changed, and how you and your families have grown. We hope you will return the enclosed postcard and give us your feedback on other topics we should study.