

## Philip Silva: August 22, 1940–June 12, 2025

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We note, with sadness, the passing of Dr. Philip Silva, the founder and emeritus director of the influential Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study. As a New Zealand-based publishing team, we want to acknowledge the remarkable work of this New Zealand psychologist and researcher, which continues to have worldwide impact. Our founding editor, Dr. Bob Stewart, comments on Dr. Silva's contributions to the fields of health, child development, psychology, and more.

### Keywords

Philip Silva, obituary, the Dunedin Study, Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study

Dr. Philip (Phil) Silva, the founding director of New Zealand's world-renowned Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study, passed away, aged 84, on June 12, 2025.

Dr. Silva initiated one of the world's most successful longitudinal studies, the Dunedin Study, which is ongoing. The original cohort of 1,037 infants was born between April 1, 1972, and March 31, 1973, at Queen Mary Maternity Hospital, Dunedin, New Zealand. This group has been studied regularly throughout their lives, traveling from their homes around the globe back to Dunedin for their next study assessment. The participants in this longitudinal study may be some of the most studied people anywhere in the world.

In the mid-1970s, when I was a teacher and researcher in Human Development at Massey University, I attended the Annual Meeting of the New Zealand Psychological Society. Dr. Silva was presenting information about his then newly established longitudinal study. The Dunedin Study made the front page of *Time* magazine in 1993, and the following year Dr. Silva was given a public award in New Zealand for services to health education.

The longitudinal nature of the Dunedin Study enables researchers to observe how early life factors affect long-term health and development. A significant contribution has been the DunedinPoAm algorithm, a tool developed to assess the rate at which a person ages. This metric can predict the likelihood of developing age-related diseases and can inform interventions to slow the aging process. The Dunedin Study results have provided deep insight into how genetic predispositions interact with lifestyle factors and the environment to influence health outcomes.

Researchers involved in the Dunedin Study have published thousands of papers, and this longitudinal study is one of the most cited in the world in the field of health and development. Its present director, Professor Moana Theodore, stated that the study's current 90% participation rate, more than 53 years later, is "unparalleled in the world" (1News, 2025).

I was privileged to view the funeral service for Dr. Silva. From the recollections shared at this event, I am sure that the effectiveness of his project was enhanced by his personal style and positivity toward participants in the study. People have been willing to remain committed to the project for over 50 years because Dr. Silva made them feel part of something making a real difference in the world. One commentator, under the heading "*Good data needs trust*," suggested that Dr. Silva's legacy is "the proof that good data starts with good relationships" (O'Donnell, 2025).

The headline to the article in the *Time* magazine article perhaps summed it up: "All you need is love." It reflects how Dr. Silva, as a former teacher, psychologist, and parent, felt about his career and his life's work with the Dunedin Study. His contribution to New Zealand health education, and to the world, will remain.

## References

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