

# BHPS UPDATE

Autumn 2008

## The British Household Panel Survey

The British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) has interviewed members of the same sample of households every year since 1991. The main objective of the study is to further our understanding of the dynamics of social and economic change in Britain – across the whole age range of the population. The data supports analysis of both short-term processes – such as year-to-year changes in people's experience of poverty – and longer-term life course mobility. It also places individual change within the context of the household.

The BHPS had an original sample size in 1991 of 5,500 households, covering England, Scotland and Wales. Additional samples in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have been available in recent years. The total sample size is now around 9,000 households across the UK, providing annual interviews with some 15,000 individuals.

The core questionnaire covers a broad range of social science and policy interests and supports interdisciplinary research in many subject areas. The data are available from the UK Data Archive at the University of Essex. This Update is mainly aimed at researchers who analyse the data, or who are interested in doing so.

The survey is designed, managed and distributed by the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Essex. It is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

# BHPS | British Household Panel Survey

## Headlines

### *Understanding Society Update*

Work on *Understanding Society: The UK Household Longitudinal Study* has been continuing all year. As reported in the Spring **BHPS Update**, the first wave of the Innovation Panel took place in the first quarter of the year. This panel is used to test new questions, and new ways of asking existing questions. Researchers at ISER and elsewhere analysed the data and made recommendations for the survey which fed into the design of the survey. Innovation Panel data will be made available with the main-stage data via the UK Data Archive.

In April and May, 2008, NatCen conducted cognitive testing of the questionnaire. This testing was necessary to ensure that the questions were accurately and consistently capturing what they were designed to measure. The procedure aims to assess how respondents understand and interpret questions, how they come up with their answer, the information they use when thinking about the question and how they decide their final response. A report from the cognitive testing will be made available on the *Understanding Society* and the NatCen websites.

A Translation Pilot took place in June. The pilot was primarily used to test the interviewing software and the experience of interviewing in a language other than English. The experience of this pilot helped to establish procedures for the translation and quality checking process for *Understanding Society*.

A 'Dress Rehearsal' pilot started in August. This aimed to test the content and flow of the questionnaire, the length of the interview, the fieldwork procedures and the reactions of the respondents to the new name and logo of the survey. The findings from this pilot will go towards refining the fieldwork procedures and the questionnaire design of the first main stage of *Understanding Society*. This will start in January 2009. Later that month, the second wave of the Innovation Panel will start.

*Understanding Society* was officially launched on 13 October, at the Church House Conference Centre in London. The speakers were Professor Ian Diamond (Chief Executive of the ESRC), Professor Patricia Broadfoot CBE, (Chair of the Understanding Society Governing Board), and Lesley Longstone (Director General, Young People Directorate, Department for Children, Schools and Families). More information about the survey, including news updates, is available here:

<http://www.understandingsociety.org.uk/>

## BHPS UPDATE online

BHPS UPDATE provides a guide to information about the BHPS, most of which is available on the Web. The easiest way to access these links is to connect to the online PDF version of the UPDATE at [www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/bhps/update/](http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/bhps/update/). It is laid out identically to this paper version. Then just click on the links you want to follow. Why not bookmark the BHPS UPDATE for easy reference?

## BHPS at 18!

As Wave 18 of the survey started ISER published a new report; "In Praise of Panel Surveys". The briefing celebrated the achievements of the BHPS, and also revealed plans for *Understanding Society*. The advantages of longitudinal data were discussed by a number of distinguished authors, demonstrating the breadth of information covered by the BHPS. The report covered the areas of income and poverty, health, young people, births outside marriage, subjective well-being, political choice, social exclusion and changes in social position across generations. The last few articles looked at the promise of cross-national research, such as the Cross-National Equivalence File for which the British data is taken from the BHPS, and the relationship between evidence and policy-making, with Dr David Halpern (Director of Research at the Institute for Government) describing the importance of high quality data for effective policy-making, drawing on his experience at the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit. The last two articles look forward to *Understanding Society* with information about the new study, from Professor Nick Buck (Principal Investigator), and why the new study is so important, from Professor Robert Walker (Professor of Social Policy, University of Oxford). The full report is available here:

<http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/press/releases/docs/IPOPS.pdf>

## BHPS data news

In September Wave 16 data was made available by the UK Data Archive. Wave 17 data is in the process of cleaning with value-added information added such as weights and derived variables. Wave 18 went into the field in September 2008. More information about the content of Wave 18 can be found in the Spring 2008 edition of **BHPS Update**, available here: <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/bhps/update/>

Data available for download at the UK Data Archive: <http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/>

Information on how to acquire the data is also available from the ISER web-site at:

<http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/bhps/acquiring/>

The questionnaires are all available at:

<http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/bhps/doc>

There is also a detailed user documentation available on the BHPS web-site: <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/bhps/>

## BHPS training and user support

ISER runs regular short courses on using BHPS data. These have a practical orientation and are designed to introduce users to both data manipulation and statistical analysis techniques. Separate courses are run using both SPSS and STATA statistical software. An SPSS course has been announced for November, 2008.

### 3rd – 4th December 2008 Introduction to BHPS using SPSS

Taught by Emanuela Sala, Jon Burton and Vernon Gayle

This course is aimed at new users of the BHPS or those who have so far made use only of simpler aspects of the data. The underlying structure of the BHPS is complex, with various different data about individuals and the households in which they live across time. This course aims to guide the user through these apparent complexities, and ensure that they can effectively make use of as much of the data as they require for their own research projects. Its main focus is on the data reorganisation techniques required for different types of cross-sectional and longitudinal research, rather than the statistical techniques themselves, but it is informed by the ways in which data require to be organised for different statistical techniques. A basic knowledge of SPSS is assumed. [http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/bhps/courses/spss\\_intro.php](http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/bhps/courses/spss_intro.php)

For further information on the range of courses, please see <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/bhps/courses/>

### The Hilary Doughty Research Library

The Hilary Doughty Research Library, formerly known as the Research Resources Unit (RRU) is a library collection that includes grey literature and other publications with a focus on longitudinal research, analysis and methodology. The collection is searchable through the web at <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/reslib/>

A new search facility specifically for all publications using the BHPS (non-ISER as well as ISER) has recently been added. To search for BHPS publications go to [http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/reslib/bhps\\_cat.php](http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/reslib/bhps_cat.php)

### Keeping Track. A Guide to Longitudinal Resources

Keeping Track is a database of all longitudinal datasets in the UK and around the world. This provides an up-to-date guide to major longitudinal sources of data, allowing users to see what kinds of longitudinal data are available and to locate information about studies which may provide data useful to their research interests. Keeping Track can be accessed at <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/keeptrack>

## ULSC methodology programme

The UK Longitudinal Studies Centre (ULSC) is the division of ISER responsible for the design, management and distribution of the BHPS and the UKHLS. It also undertakes a programme of methodological research. More information about the work carried out by ULSC researchers is available at: <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/methods/research/>

In July, Annette Jäckle, Peter Lynn, Emanuela Sala (ISER) and Mick Couper (Michigan) organised a highly-successful

**Panel Survey Methods Workshop**, held at ISER. Participants from all over the world (UK, Germany, US, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Chile) gave short papers, with most of the time given to discussion. Papers and presentations from the workshop are available at: <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/methods/psmw2008/programme/>

### Survey Design and Measurement Initiative

On the 1st October, 2007 the ESRC's Survey Design and Measurement Initiative (SDMI) was launched. In the previous year the ESRC had put out a call for research to urgently identify ways to enhance the quality of survey research and to harness opportunities for methodological improvement. Thirteen applications were received, and six were recommended for funding. Since then, one other ESRC-funded research project has been brought under the SDMI 'umbrella'. These seven projects are cutting-edge research which aim to improve the quality of the data collected by surveys.

The seven projects funded, and the person leading the research, are:

1. **Understanding Non-Response and Reducing Non-Response Bias:** Professor Peter Lynn, ISER
2. **Mixed Modes and Measurement Error:** Ms Gerry Nicolaas, NatCen, Survey Methods Unit
3. **The Commodity Chain of the Household: from Survey Design to Policy Planning:** Dr Ernestina Coast, London School of Economics
4. **The Use of Scanner Technology for Collecting Expenditure Data in Mixed-Mode Social Science Surveys:** Ms Zoe Oldfield, Institute for Fiscal Studies
5. **Predicting and Preventing Non-Response in Cohort Studies:** Professor Ian Plewis, Institute for Education, University of London
6. **Solving the Problem of Attrition in Longitudinal Surveys:** Professor John Bynner, NatCen

### 7. Hierarchical Analysis of Unit Non-response in Sample Surveys:

Dr Gabriele Durrant, University of Southampton

For more information about the Survey Design and Measurement Initiative, including links to the project teams and progress reports on the projects, please see: <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/methods/sdmi/>

## BHPS in the news

**The economics of happiness? We're all broke,** *The Mail on Sunday*, 28 September 2008. Refers to **In Praise of Panel Surveys**

**Married parents twice as likely to stay together as couples in live-in relationships,** *The Telegraph*, 23 Sept 2008. Refers to John Ermisch "Births outside marriage: the real story" from **In Praise of Panel Surveys**.

**Decisions, decisions: but how we make them is cold comfort for Labour,** *The Independent*, 22 Sept 2008. Refers to Alan Zuckerman "Political choice in Britain: bounded partisans" from **In Praise of Panel Surveys**.

**Guy and Madge: solid as a rocknrolla,** *The Guardian*, 10 Sept 2008.

**Married couples who lose their jobs more likely to divorce,** *The Telegraph*, 8 Sept 2008.

Refers to Morten Blekesaune "Unemployment and partnership dissolution", ISER Working Paper, 2008-21.

**Housework hits women's wages,** *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 May 2008,

**Why housework costs a woman dear,** by Doughty, Steve. *Daily Mail*, 14 May 2008

Refers to: Mark L. Bryan, Almudena Sevilla Sanz, "Does housework lower wages and why? Evidence from Britain". ISER Working Paper, 2008-03

## BHPS User Group

The BHPS User Group is a liaison channel between ISER and the users of BHPS data. It provides a forum for the exchange of ideas, problems and solutions for data users and provides feedback to the survey designers and managers. Users also benefit from the opportunity to put their ideas for future data collection and from keeping in touch with developments on the survey. Interested researchers can join the User Group via the web at <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/bhps/group>

On the 2nd May 2008, there was a BHPS User Group meeting. The meeting looked at the way Dependent Interviewing, introduced at Wave 16, was implemented and the impact this

had on data. Chiara Pronzato spoke about a new data set she had put together, the "Consolidated Marital, Cohabitation and Fertility Histories" data. In the afternoon, there was more discussion about the future. Nick Buck discussed the integration of the BHPS into the larger UKHLS, the implications this has on the questionnaire and question consistency across time, as well as the timing of interviews through the year and effect on the delivery of data.

For more information about what was discussed, please see: <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/bhps/group/meetings/prevmeets/ugmeet7.php>

## BHPS publications

You can find publications using the BHPS in three main ways:

- The on-line documentation has a full list of all publications we are aware of in Vol A, Appendix 5. If you have a paper or publication which is not listed please send us the details. See <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/bhps/doc>
- You can search our specialised catalogue [http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/reslib/bhps\\_cat.php](http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/reslib/bhps_cat.php)
- Or you can see ISER Working Papers at <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/pubs>

**Tell us about your working papers and publications using BHPS data please!**

It is important we know how people are using the data and these are important performance indicators. If you use "BHPS" as a keyword and/or in the abstract on your papers, this will help us pick them up with automated searches. There is a new web-form to allow you to let us know about recent publications using the BHPS, and which are not already included in the database. This form is on the ISER website and is an easy and quick way to keep us informed:

[http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/reslib/res\\_serv/bhps\\_user\\_pubs.php](http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/reslib/res_serv/bhps_user_pubs.php)

Alternatively you can email [judi@essex.ac.uk](mailto:judi@essex.ac.uk) with details of publications or other papers. The following are some of the recent publications using the BHPS in 2008.

"Age differences in the big five across the life span: evidence from two national samples" by M. Brent Donnellan, Richard E. Lucas, (2008) *Psychology And Aging*, 23 (3):558-566.

"Birth order matters: the effect of family size and birth order on educational attainment" by Alison L. Booth, Hiau Joo Kee, (2008) *Journal Of Population Economics*

"Contractual conditions, working conditions, health and well-being in the British Household Panel Survey" by Silvana Robone, Andrew M. Jones, Nigel Rice, (2008) HEDG Working Papers, 08/19. York: University of York: Health, Econometrics and Data Group.

"Housing wealth, liquidity constraints and self-employment" by Richard Disney, John Gathergood, May 2008, *Labour Economics* (in press).

"Mental health of parents and life satisfaction of children: a within-family analysis of intergenerational transmission of well-being" by Nattavudh Powdthavee, Anna Vignoles, July 2008, University Of York Discussion Papers In Economics, 2008/20. York: University of York: Department of Economics and Related Studies.

## People

If you want to contact someone with a particular area of expertise within ISER but don't know who is best placed to help you, try looking at

<http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/search/expertise.php>

## What do you think of this BHPS UPDATE?

Any comments on the content or the presentation? Do you like the combination of hard copy sent by post and pdf version online? Would you prefer us to send it by email?

Email your comments and suggestions to Jon Burton at [jburton@essex.ac.uk](mailto:jburton@essex.ac.uk)

## Questions? Comments? Project or paper to share?

Please do let us know if you are working on a project using BHPS data, are using the data for teaching, or have given a conference paper or published using the data. And if you have comments about any aspect of the BHPS please get in touch and give us your feedback.

If you have specific questions about using the BHPS data or data problems to report please feel free to contact us.

You can email John Brice at [bricj@essex.ac.uk](mailto:bricj@essex.ac.uk) and he will be happy to help. Alternatively contact us at:

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