

## Institute for Social and Economic Research



Taking the long view: **the ISER Report 2002/3**

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# About ISER

The Institute for Social and Economic Research is an independent department of the University of Essex. It is jointly core-funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the University of Essex, but nearly half of its annual income is derived from grants and contracts awarded by research councils, charitable trusts, government departments, commercial companies and European institutions.

Originally established in 1989, the Institute was reorganised in 1999 to incorporate three centres:

The ESRC Research Centre on Micro-social Change (MiSoC) is the base for ISER's substantive research programme. The 30-strong research staff (see inside back cover) includes specialists in demography, economics, sociology, social policy and statistics. The core-funded programme is founded on a central theme – the analysis of life chances, taking a longitudinal perspective on people's careers, incomes, family lives, health experiences and so on. Related topics include time use and consumption, and the effects of locality and ethnicity.

The ESRC UK Longitudinal Studies Centre (ULSC) provides longitudinal data and data-related services to the wider academic and policy community. It manages the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) – an integrated operation from design through to fieldwork control, data cleaning and management, documentation and dissemination. The ULSC has overall responsibility for ESRC's investment in panel and cohort data, for promoting longitudinal research, and for devising a national strategy for longitudinal studies. Other aspects of the Centre's work are discussed on pages 14-15.

The European Centre for Analysis in the Social Sciences (ECASS) is a 'research hotel', welcoming academic visitors from the European Union (EU). Designated a 'major research infrastructure' of the EU, ECASS provides fellowships and bursaries for study visits to the University of Essex for periods of between two weeks and three months.

# Director's introduction

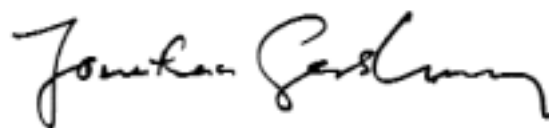
Regular readers of ISER's yearly Reports and our new twice-yearly Newsletter will be familiar with our core activities: the production and analysis of longitudinal data. At the centre is the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), successfully following the same sample of 5,000 households every year since 1991. The research programme, specialising in analysis of panel and other longitudinal survey data, has focused on the dynamics of social change in the linked areas of family formation, the labour market and household income. Our activities have been expanding in scope as well as in scale over the years.

One of the aims of this year's Report is to remind readers that there is more than one shot in our locker. Several of the articles illustrate the diversity of the ISER programme. One shows how longitudinal research can be based on retrospective questioning as well as prospective surveys (see pages 10-11). Another shows how diary surveys, following people through the event sequences that make up their days, offer a complementary perspective to the BHPS records of life-course events, one that makes clear the importance of time in people's lives (see pages 12-13). A third emphasises the potential importance of place (see pages 8-9). The survey programme is expanding too, with new samples in the devolved UK national administrations, and the mini-BHPS in the London Borough of Newham – not forgetting Bosnia and Albania (see pages 14-15).

ISER's combination of research and data collection activities is changing the way that academics and policy-makers think about life chances and social mobility. The BHPS allows us to investigate mobility – and hence the dynamics of life chances – in a subtle and detailed way. We examine how family, employment and income dynamics interact with individuals' and households' accumulation of various sorts of *resources* – not just financial, but also education, work-related skills and experience, cultural knowledge and social connections – which enhance (or hinder) access to various sorts of material and psychological advantages. What is emerging at ISER is an innovative interdisciplinary approach to the study of social mobility, which brings insights from economics and sociology into a new synthesis for the discussion of social policy.

While the research programme has been diversifying, the Institute's financial base has broadened too. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) plans to continue its support for the longitudinal surveys (ULSC – see opposite) for some years to come (subject to review), but the core grant for the substantive research programme (MiSoC) is expected to end in 2004. We already obtain about half of our funding in the 'open market' from such sources as government departments, the European Commission, research foundations and commercial companies, and these sources will make an increasingly important contribution to our work in the next few years.

That is just one of the motives for our increasing emphasis on communicating research results to a diverse audience. The steady stream of books, reports, journal articles and working papers remains targeted mainly at our academic colleagues in Britain and Europe. But we are equally determined to get the message across to policy-makers. Two examples among the year's events illustrate that process. David Willetts, Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, visited ISER in July for a discussion of the impact of family dynamics on household poverty – a lively and constructive exchange. A team of five ISER researchers visited the Department for Education and Skills in October to brief research managers and officials on our range of studies of young people (see pages 4-5). These are among the contacts with more than 30 'official' bodies that have shown a direct interest in ISER research this year – in Whitehall, the devolved administrations, the European Commission and beyond. We are always eager to discuss our findings: readers are invited to make direct contact with any of the researchers listed inside the back page of this report.



Jonathan Gershuny  
Director

# Diverse Europe

There are wide and systematic variations across Europe in the way people live – their patterns of family life, employment and incomes



There are wide and systematic variations across the European Union (EU) in the way people live. In a report commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council and presented at its national conference in November 2002, Richard Berthoud and Maria Iacovou drew on their own research and that of colleagues in the European Panel Analysis Group to map the diversity of experience in three key areas – family structure, employment and incomes.

## Family structure

In the sphere of the family, a southern group of EU countries – Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece – plus their fellow Catholic country, Ireland, is characterised by large households where sons and daughters live with their parents well into their twenties, and tend to leave home to marry rather than to live as singles or for informal cohabitation. In the Nordic countries – Finland, Sweden and Denmark – plus their fellow social democratic country, the Netherlands, young people leave home much earlier, and formal marriage is much less the norm.

These variations in the behaviour of young people are mirrored in the living arrangements of older people: half of elders in the southern/Catholic countries live with one or more of their children, but hardly any do so in the Nordic region. This has implications for the exchange of family care: in southern Europe, ‘young’ grandparents are available to help care for children, but can expect to receive care from their sons or daughters when they reach frail old age. This domestic reciprocity cannot take place in the Nordic region, because three-generation households are so rare.

The north/south divide provides a clear axis of variation in the extended family. But it reveals little about variations in childbearing behaviour. The most delayed fertility is in the Netherlands and Italy, while the earliest fertility is in the UK and Austria – the rate of teenage motherhood is far higher in the UK than anywhere else in Europe. The research confirms that teen mothers and their children have a high risk of experiencing family poverty later on, in the UK as well as in many other countries.

## Employment

In the sphere of employment, perhaps the most striking findings concern the economic activities of women. In

Scandinavia, two-thirds of women have full-time jobs. In most of the southern countries, full-time employment rates are as low as 40% for women without children and 30% for mothers. The startling exceptions to this pattern are Portugal and the Netherlands, where female employment rates are the opposite of what might be expected from their geographical positions.

## Cross-national comparative research provides policy-makers with valuable insights into the different lifestyles and processes within Europe

The report also examines non-working households, whose numbers have increased substantially since the 1970s. One hypothesis about this phenomenon is that the increase in employment among married women has crowded other potential workers out of jobs – i.e. that more ‘work-rich’ two-earner families means more ‘work-poor’ no-earner households. But according to Berthoud and Iacovou’s research, cross-national comparisons offer no support for the idea that a high employment rate among married women is associated with a high proportion of non-working households.

### Incomes

In the sphere of incomes, Greece, Portugal, a substantial swathe of southern and western Spain and the southern section of Italy are significantly worse off than the rest of Europe. Eastern Germany is another economically weak area. But income inequality between households *within* countries is much wider than income variation *between* countries. Even if poverty is defined relative to national average income, it is more common, consistent and persistent in countries with low GDPs than in the more prosperous countries of northern Europe.

Using the conventional measure of poverty as the proportion of households with income below 60% of the national median, the EU league table runs from Denmark, where only 9% of households are poor, to Greece, where the proportion is 23%. There is a general trend running from low poverty rates in the north to high rates in the south, with Ireland and the UK the exceptions: their poverty rates are much closer to those observed in the southern countries than to their northern

neighbours. This may be related to their ‘liberal’ welfare regimes: Ireland and the UK’s social security systems may be ‘efficient’ (in limiting benefits only to the lowest income bands) but they may not be ‘effective’ (in delivering enough benefits to allow claimants to escape from poverty).

Variations in financial hardship across the EU suggest that there is a case for re-defining ‘Euro-poverty’ in relation to absolute measures of purchasing power. More than half of Greek and Portuguese households would be counted as ‘poor’ on that measure. National poverty rates remain the key indicator for national policies, but the Europe-wide perspective has important implications for EU policy. The issue will become more pressing as the EU is enlarged. Most of the candidate countries have lower levels of GDP than any current EU members, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the range of inequality between households in Europe, and the extent of Euro-poverty, will grow.

### The value of comparative research

The report makes a convincing case for the value of cross-national comparative research. Berthoud and Iacovou argue that an understanding of the different lifestyles and processes within Europe is essential:

- for policy-makers at the EU level, who have to take account of the range of behaviour and economic inequality across current member countries;
- for policy-makers concerned with the proposed enlargement, which will introduce a much wider range of social variation and economic inequality within the EU;
- for national policy-makers, whose common assumption that their own country is in some sense ‘normal’ needs to be challenged;
- and for academic analysts of social and economic processes, whose theories and interpretations cannot be generalised until they have explained how and why differences between countries have occurred.

# Young people

## Smaller infant class sizes lead to significant improvements in children's reading



Analysis of the lives of young people is an important and growing part of ISER research activity. Recent work includes studies of the effects of childhood poverty on psychological well-being and school performance (see page 11), the impact of class size on educational attainment, the link between higher education and 'social capital', and the labour market risks faced by graduates in an era of expanding higher education. These projects use a range of datasets, including the British Youth Panel, an adjunct to the BHPS based on interviews with young people aged between 11 and 15.

### Class size

Although it seems intuitively obvious that smaller classes should produce better results in schools, most research in the UK has failed to find any relationship between class size and pupils' attainment. Why should this be? Research by Maria Iacovou reveals that the effects of class size on performance are counterbalanced by the effects of selection of children of different abilities into different class sizes. In other words, children who are doing well in school tend to be put into large classes, while those who are doing less well are put into smaller classes.

Even where children are not officially streamed, those who have demonstrated higher attainment in the past tend to be put in larger classes throughout their educational careers. This means that any straightforward inspection of the data that simply relates class size to performance would appear to show that larger classes are associated with *higher* attainment. Controlling for this effect, the research finds a significant relationship between smaller classes and higher scores in reading tests for seven-year-olds.

Reducing infant class sizes by eight pupils would have significant benefits: average attainment in reading would be improved by almost 10 percentage points; boys would be reading as well as girls are currently reading, while girls would do even better than they do now; and children from lower social classes could do as well as children in higher social classes are doing now, while the latter would do even better. What's more, children in small infant school classes would continue to reap the benefits at least until the age of 11 and for some children, possibly much longer than that.

## Civic and political engagement

It is well known that more highly educated people carry out more voluntary work and it is generally believed that it is higher education that encourages such civic engagement. But research by Muriel Egerton, which charts changes in young people's civic engagement as they leave school and enter the labour market or higher education, suggests that the degree of activity in social or civic organisations is already ingrained. Teenagers' civic engagement tends to be higher for those who will enter higher education in the future than for their peers going straight into the labour market. When these people are observed later, in their early twenties, there is little change.

But there are also longer-term effects of education. The teenagers who will enter higher education are disproportionately drawn from professional backgrounds. Since a large percentage of parents working in the professions are graduates, higher civic engagement might arise via parental transmission of appropriate attitudes and behaviours. Egerton's analysis confirms that highly qualified parents (particularly highly qualified mothers and particularly parents working in the public sector) are more socially engaged, as are their children in turn.

## Children of highly qualified parents are more active in social and civic organisations

This research also explores changes in political engagement. Partisanship and voting have been falling among the general population for some time and the falls have been greatest among the young. In the early 1990s, there was little difference in boys' political partisanship across social classes. But by the late 1990s, preferences were stronger among those who had entered higher education. Lower proportions of less educated young men endorsed any political party, while more highly educated young men and women had changed their preferences. Only among the least educated girls was there any increase in political partisanship as they matured into adulthood.

## The expansion of higher education

Few would doubt the social and economic value of the expansion of educational provision of the last few decades. It has enabled more people to pass school exams, to move into further and higher education, and has taken place in conjunction with a gradual equalisation of access to and success in education for women. Demand for places in colleges and universities has rocketed as government has relaxed the previous constraints on entry through the creation of more places, and despite the additional costs to individuals of undertaking courses. And government itself clearly believes that there are economic and social benefits to be gained from this expansion.

Nevertheless, research by Malcolm Brynin suggests that we should be more aware of potential negative effects. It is possible that the expansion of higher education produces diminishing returns to a degree relative to the returns to a degree prior to the rapid expansion. His work shows that 'overqualification' is an increasing problem in the labour market. It also indicates that the rewards accruing to young people entering the labour market for the first time are affected by 'graduate density', the size of graduate employment. But these effects are different for men and women: men have on average suffered a loss from the growth in education while women seem to have gained.

None of this means that we should put the brakes on the expansion of education. Rather, the research shows that the idea of uniformly increasing benefits from such expansion is simplistic, and we should be aware of this in thinking about the value of education. Expansion is ultimately efficient and socially fair as it gives people more choice to make an educational decision that is suitable for their needs. This, writ large, must be good for society.

# Social mobility

The structures of advantage and disadvantage that can be transmitted across generations have been growing dramatically in Britain, especially for women



Family background has had a bigger impact on the lives of the generation of Britons born in the late 1950s and 1960s than it did on previous generations, according to research by ISER's Director Jonathan Gershuny. For women in particular, the structures of advantage and disadvantage that can be transmitted across generations have been growing dramatically. Key drivers of this rising inequality of life chances have been the growth in women's participation in paid work and the growing instability of marriages.

These findings emerge from the application of a new alternative to traditional schemes of social class, one that is based on estimation of the market value of people's work skills. Gershuny has developed an index summarising the degree of inequality in chances of acquiring 'labour market capability' among children of parents with varying levels of work skills: the higher the index, the more unequal the life chances.

Index of intergenerational continuity based on labour market capability

	Women	Men	Both
Born 1935-44	0.12	0.08	0.07
Born 1945-54	0.15	0.08	0.09
Born 1955-64	0.24	0.09	0.15

## A new way of measuring social position

There are two connected reasons for these new results. The first is the use of an innovative method of measuring social position. Traditionally, British research considers mobility in terms of class *categories* based on employment situations. At the top of the class system are the well paid professionals, senior managers and so on who constitute the 'service class'. At the bottom is an unskilled 'labour class'.

There are two drawbacks to this approach. First, it ignores changes in advantages accruing to holders of particular jobs at different points in history. For example, are bank managers now as well paid as they once were? Second, the fact that classification depends on employment position excludes those without jobs – which means in effect that women have to be excluded from analysis of recent social change since most women in the earlier birth cohorts were not employed.

Gershuny's work uses a different indicator for social class: levels of marketable capabilities for work – the personal



resources that give people material advantages or disadvantages, now and in their futures – those skills and experiences that determine their earning capacity. Social scientists refer to these collectively as ‘human capital’ – a characteristic reflecting education level, the record of employment and unemployment over recent years, and ‘occupational attainment’, the level of jobs that can be managed effectively.

BHPS data are used to work out a ‘human capital score’ that indicates future life chances. This new measure – equivalent to the hourly wage that respondents receive *or would receive if they had jobs* – covers all individuals, men and women, irrespective of their employment status.

## The impact of women’s employment and marital instability

The second reason for the new finding is to do with the growth in women’s participation in paid work and the growing instability of marriages. In the middle of the last century, most women did not have jobs after marriage, and most households depended for their income on the husband’s wage alone. Most women married men with similar sorts of jobs to those of their fathers.

This meant that, comparing their own *individual* labour market situation with that of their fathers, nearly all women suffered downward mobility, since most fathers had some demonstrated labour market skills and experience, while most women had none. Of course, this had no real implications for change in their socio-economic circumstances, since they still found similar sorts of husbands to those their mothers found!

Now, however, we find a new, class-type, polarisation in labour market situations. When they enter the labour force, young men and women now have similar levels of educational attainment – these levels are also strongly influenced by their parents’ socio-economic positions. Partnerships form and both partners continue to work. But from the first childbirth, a new dynamic emerges.

Most jobs in Britain have (by European standards) relatively long and inflexible work hours; Britain also has low levels of availability and high costs of child-care. So parents face the choice: either they must pay for child-care; or one at least

must, partially or wholly, withdraw from the labour force. In almost all cases where child-care is unaffordable, the woman withdraws. And that withdrawal means a progressive reduction in accumulated work experience, perhaps the loss of an upcoming promotion, so the wife’s human capital falls in relation to the husband’s, and (even if the original withdrawal was driven just by social norms) the gender division becomes increasingly rational in economic terms.

Women with fathers who had relatively high levels of human capital are nowadays likely to have high human capital themselves, and to be married to men who also have high levels of human capital. So they are disproportionately likely to be able to buy child-care services and other sorts of home support. They stay in the labour force, continuing their careers in parallel with their husbands’ careers.

## Key drivers of the rising inequality of life chances have been the growth in women’s participation in paid work and the growing instability of marriages

Polarisation in household incomes related to parental backgrounds has increased as a result of these processes. Where previously most couples had single incomes, now couples whose parents had high levels of human capital are disproportionately likely to have two careers, while those from less privileged backgrounds have at most one.

Rising divorce rates intensify this polarisation. The husband leaves, the wife keeps the children: if her father had low human capital, she is disproportionately likely to have dropped out of the labour market, to have herself very low levels of human capital, and to find it very difficult to find a job. So from a mid-twentieth century position in which most people lived in single-earner households, we move to a present with at one extreme, more high-skilled two-earner households from privileged backgrounds and at the other, more no-earner female-headed households from disadvantaged backgrounds.

# The importance of place

Does living in a deprived area have an extra detrimental effect on people's life chances?



It is often assumed that place matters. For example, much government policy is targeted at particular parts of the country on the basis that concentrating resources will have the greatest payoff. But when it comes to the influence of place on the life chances of individuals, it is much less clear precisely why it should matter, for what outcomes it is particularly important and how significant spatial variations are, compared, say, with differences in people's personal characteristics.

Two ISER projects have addressed this issue from different directions: on the one hand, the use of nationally representative longitudinal data to examine the impact of spatial characteristics on individual outcomes; and on the other hand, the intensive study of a particular place.

## Neighbourhood effects on social exclusion

There is no question that there is substantial spatial variation in social and economic disadvantage at the individual and household level, and in social exclusion. But that is to be expected from the operation of the housing market, which will segregate people at least by their capacity to afford different types of accommodation. The question is whether this sorting generates additional effects: does living in a deprived area have an extra detrimental effect on people's life chances?

Research by Nick Buck finds that poorer people living in more deprived areas are less likely to leave poverty than similar people living in less deprived areas. What's more, the effect is strongest in the most deprived areas: in places where unemployment is particularly high, the chances of leaving poverty are exceptionally low. There is also evidence that in deprived areas, both people's expectations of starting a job and their actual probability of starting a job are lower, controlling for individual characteristics.

But while these results are striking, looking at a wider range of indicators of exclusion leads to more mixed conclusions about the disadvantage that arises from living in deprived areas. Place is undoubtedly important, but there are more important influences. For example, having no qualifications has around one and half times the effect on the likelihood of leaving poverty as area deprivation, and twice the effect on the likelihood of entering poverty.

One aim of this research is to test the assumptions on which much spatially targeted policy has been based. The findings certainly do not suggest that such policies are entirely without foundation: longitudinal indicators of flows into and out of disadvantaged states are clearly associated with neighbourhood disadvantage. But the scale of these effects is not large in comparison with the effects of individual characteristics that lead to disadvantage.

The research also has to take account of the problems in identifying neighbourhood effects. For example, if people tend to leave disadvantaged areas as soon as they have enough resources, then we get an exaggerated view of the size of the neighbourhood effect since we cannot observe the people who succeed. Paradoxically, this means that we may underestimate the success of a neighbourhood policy since we may not see the people who gain from it.

## Down but not out in London

An alternative approach is to investigate how the processes that generate poverty and social exclusion operate in particular places. ISER researchers have focused on this issue in a major project on London that combined analysis of local samples from national surveys, including the BHPS, with qualitative data.

The research – conducted with colleagues at the London School of Economics, University College London and the Universities of Reading and Salford – reveals London as a particularly unequal city, and one where inequality has markedly increased since 1980, more sharply than in the UK as a whole. The city has much more than its fair share of the really affluent, and rather more than its share of the poor. Poverty is particularly associated with the high cost of living, especially for housing and transport. But it also reflects an above-average concentration of many vulnerable groups, together with rates of unemployment and inactivity above the national average.

There has also been a great increase in London's ethnic and cultural diversity since the late 1980s. While this has not been accompanied by further spatial concentration, other trends have brought some increase in segregation of the employed from the non-employed and of couple-based households from non-couple-based ones. There has also been a tendency for the

differences between the Greater London area and the surrounding suburbs – in terms of poverty, household structure and ethnic mix – to become more marked.

## For people with qualifications and experience, London offers exceptional opportunities; for those without, it imposes high barriers to getting ahead

But in spite of the severe problems of poverty, the research clearly does not describe a city facing a breakdown of social cohesion. Londoners do not report living in an anonymous, alienated, menacing city. And they are just as connected in terms of friends, family, organisations or trust as similar sorts of people in any other part of the country, although the physical distances separating people from family and friends are much greater in London.

But because the composition of London's population is different, average levels of 'connectedness' are lower on some indicators. Some groups – such as long-term sick and disabled people and those who have retired – do experience social isolation, while those lacking qualifications, income or networks perceive themselves to be (and are) isolated and remote in the midst of a successful, global city. Few people are truly excluded, though, in the sense that they experience all forms of exclusion at once: from jobs, from communal support and from citizenship entitlements, as found in studies of American ghettos.

For those whose qualifications and experience give them access to the high skilled, high paid part of the labour market, London offers exceptional opportunities. At the other extreme, London imposes particularly high barriers to getting ahead on those without such qualifications and experience. But the research suggests that, more than most places, London provides the resources for the most disadvantaged people to get by.

# Life histories

Retrospective data on BHPS respondents' life histories extends the sequence of employment and family events subject to longitudinal analysis and provides historical background



Panel surveys like the BHPS typically follow people's lives by interviewing them every year. This is sometimes referred to as a 'prospective' approach: we first contacted members of the panel in 1991 with the intention of studying future changes in their lives. But 'retrospective' data can also be of value. The 1992 and 1993 BHPS interviews included 'life histories', recording all the jobs and periods of unemployment respondents had experienced since they left school, a complete sequence of marriages, cohabitations and separations, and the dates of birth of every child.

These life histories can be used in two ways: to extend the sequence of employment and family events subject to longitudinal analysis; and to provide historical background for the current data. Three studies that have made use of them are summarised here, showing the impact of people's life histories on their wages, their retirement income and the educational and other outcomes for their children.

## Wage penalties for interrupted careers

Wages increase with labour market experience – relatively quickly at first, and more slowly later. This 'experience-earnings profile' relationship is the foundation for much empirical research on the labour market. Work history data make it possible to look beyond this simple relationship, drawing on the diversity of experience that is the reality of people's working lives.

Men earn less if their careers are interrupted by periods of unemployment; equivalent wage penalties for women arise from time spent caring for family

Research by ISER visiting fellow Dave Maré uses work histories to examine how current wages depend on *what* people have done *when* rather than just on *how long* they have been in the labour market. For example, he is able to look at whether unemployed workers receive lower wages when they return to work, and how long this penalty lasts. Having the work history information collected as part of a panel survey

adds considerably to its value, by allowing researchers to take account of differences in people's earning capacities that would exist even without different work histories.

The results reveal somewhat different patterns for men and women. A man returning to full-time work after a year of unemployment earns 10-15% less than he would have if he had remained employed. This penalty is reduced if he remains in work, although even 10 years later, he earns 5-10% less. For women, the largest penalties arise as a result of time spent caring for family. The penalties are similar in size to the penalties that men face, and are similarly persistent. For both men and women, part-time work leads to slightly lower full-time wages initially, but faster wage growth over the following decade. Spells out of the labour force for full-time education yield higher full-time wages for both men and women, but only after a few years.

## Income in later life

Research by Elena Bardasi and Stephen Jenkins examines the relationship between people's work histories and the risk of having a low income in later life. They find that early retirement or redundancy can sharply increase the likelihood that men in their fifties will spend their old age in poverty. But the long-term effects on income of leaving the labour market before reaching the age of 60 vary widely between different occupational groups.

The study suggests that men who have spent most of their working lives in occupations such as clerical or sales, skilled crafts, and personal or protective services – ranging from private security guards to police constables, ambulance drivers to waiters – may be especially vulnerable if they stop work early. By contrast, low rates of participation in the labour market between the ages of 50 and 60 appear to make little difference to the chances of being poor in old age for either women or men who worked in managerial, professional or manual occupations.

The lack of association between women's poverty in old age and early labour market exit probably arises from the fact that intermittent labour attachment is a characteristic feature of their whole working lives – for example, breaks from paid

work for child care. What is more relevant for the chances that a woman over 60 will be relatively poor is her household type and marital status. Women without a partner, especially those who were divorced, have a substantially higher risk of low incomes than those who were married or cohabiting. This suggests that, for many women, having a partner with a good work history still makes more difference to their income after retirement than their own work histories.

## Growing up poor

Research by John Ermisch, Marco Francesconi and David Pevalin examines a range of outcomes for children growing up in the 1990s and their relationship to whether the child grew up in poverty. By using the BHPS family and work histories, they are able to explore the impact of family structure and parental joblessness across the entire childhood of the young adults in their sample.

## Children who grow up in poor families are more likely to leave home early, to underperform in school and to be economically inactive in their future lives

The study shows that children who grow up in poor families – defined as having an income less than 60% of average income – are more likely to leave home early, to underperform in school and to be economically inactive after they reach adulthood. What's more, compared to those who never experienced life in a low-income family, adolescents who grew up poor have lower self-esteem, are more likely to plan not to marry, believe that health is matter of luck, play truant and expect to leave school at the age of 16.

# Time use

Time diaries provide insights into the changing ways in which people divide their lives between paid work, unpaid domestic work and leisure



Most people aspire to achieve a balance between their commitments at work, commitments at home and free time for themselves. Data collected from time diaries, in which people record what they do during the day (and usually also note where they are, how they travel from place to place and who is with them), can help determine the extent to which groups in society succeed in achieving this balance. They also offer insights into long-term historical trends and cross-national differences in the way people divide their time between paid work, unpaid domestic work and leisure. And from a policy perspective, diaries can track the degree to which long-term policy initiatives can influence changes in behaviour.

## Changing times

Research by Jonathan Gershuny, which analyses cross-national longitudinal time use data from 20 developed countries detects three distinct historical trends in the way people have spent their time from the 1960s to the present. The first is a *national convergence*: there appears to be an approximately constant balance between the totals of paid and unpaid work in a society, generally around 55% paid and 45% unpaid. There has also been a general increase in leisure though some of the richer countries had a small decline in leisure time towards the end of the twentieth century.

There has also been a *gender convergence*. Women in all countries do on average much more domestic work and much less paid work than men, and the majority of men's work is paid work. But over time, the balances change: women come to do more paid work and less unpaid work; and men do less paid work and more unpaid work. Nevertheless, women continue to perform the majority of unpaid domestic work, and men have increased the time they spend doing housework and caring for children only by a small amount. British men have increased their average time performing household cleaning and child-care by 47 minutes a day since 1961.

Finally, there has been a *convergence* in time use across different *status groups*. In the 1960s, women with higher social status had substantially more paid work than lower status women; they also had a lot less unpaid work, so overall they had more leisure time. Since then, for both groups, unpaid work has declined substantially but the decline is larger for lower status women, leaving them with more leisure time. Paid work time has declined for all men over the period, but more so for lower status ones. Unpaid work has increased for both groups, but more for higher

status ones. The overall result is that while higher status men used to have less work in total and more leisure, now they have less leisure time than those of lower social status.

## Sociability and physical activity

Research by Kimberly Fisher and Richard Layte has used the same data to explore the time people spend with others: friends, family, neighbours and colleagues. Comparing patterns across European countries, they find that the Irish and British, as well as people in the southern European countries, tend to spend the most time seeing other people in person, while the Danes are most likely to be members of clubs and organisations. The two activities that British people most often perform alone are care of pets and commuting.

Fisher has also examined time spent in a range of physical activities: sports and exercise, walking dogs, physically active housework and travel on foot or bicycle. She finds that Britain's pensioners now lead more physically active lives than teenagers: on the average day, people aged 8-19 spend one hour and 15 minutes doing physical activity, while those aged over 65 tend to be active for one hour and 40 minutes. The gap is large enough to reflect a real difference in lifestyle between younger and older people. And it raises serious issues about future health risks since people's lifestyle choices in youth can significantly influence their health in older age.

## Work-life balance

Time use diaries can play a valuable role in informing the debate about 'work-life balance'. Not only do they demonstrate the total volume of work more reliably than other measures; they also reveal the timing of work in relation to the timing of other activities, the proportion of the day influenced by work and the degree to which work

intrudes into other dimensions of life. For example, people are asked about times when they are working and doing something else at the same time (such as working while listening to the radio) or doing something else while also completing a task for work (like watching television while doing paperwork for your job).

**Since 1961, British men have increased their average time cleaning the house and caring for children by 47 minutes a day**

Of course, time use data cannot reveal the full range of processes involved in the changing patterns in time use. Geographical, economic and social policy factors all impose varying constraints on people's daily schedules. So campaigns encouraging men to spend more time with their sons during the work/school week may well have less effect on men who live long distances from their workplace than on those who work near to home. And policies encouraging single mothers to spend more time improving their employment skills while their children are young will not be effective if affordable child-care is not located near the homes or places of study of these mothers.

Public policy must consider which groups will have the greatest and the least opportunity to change their behaviour in response to any given initiative. What time use data provide is an indication of the effects the various key forces have on the way people allocate their time during the day. Time use data thus serve as one measure of the effectiveness of policy change. But they also provide the best measure of long-term change. People do not readily alter their habits, and consistent information and incentives must be applied over the long term to have significant effects on behaviour.

## Twin conferences for longitudinal researchers

ISER will host two concurrent academic conferences on the analysis of household panel surveys in July 2003.

BHPS-2003 builds on the successful 2001 conference, which brought together an international group of social and economic researchers using BHPS data to analyse the changing patterns of families' lives across Britain.

EPUNet-2003 is the inaugural conference of the new EuroPanel Users' Network. The network has been established with funding from the European Commission to provide communications and support for new and experienced analysts of the European Community Household Panel.

Researchers from more than 10 countries will speak at these conferences. See [www.iser.essex.ac.uk](http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk) for details of both programmes.

# Surveys and methods at ISER

ISER's flagship, the British Household Panel Survey, now covers the whole UK, with a sample of roughly 20,000 individuals in 11,000 households



The UK Longitudinal Studies Centre (ULSC) is responsible for the provision of longitudinal data and associated resources to UK social scientists. It has been charged by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) with developing a national strategy for longitudinal studies in the UK. The draft strategy is in the process of being agreed with ESRC's Research Resources Board and should provide a framework for the continuing development of high quality longitudinal data sources in the UK.

## The British Household Panel Survey – and its extensions

The BHPS is ISER's flagship survey. Started in 1991, the BHPS carries out annual interviews in over 10,000 households across the UK. In 2000, new samples in Scotland and Wales were added to the existing BHPS; in 2001, the survey was extended to include a 2,000 household sample in Northern Ireland for the first time. So the panel now covers each of the home countries, as well as the UK as a whole, with a combined sample size of roughly 20,000 individuals in 11,000 households being asked comparable questions.

Early data from the national booster samples are now being analysed. A research conference on 'Living in Scotland' was held at the University of Stirling in October 2002 to raise the profile of the Scottish extension sample.

## Living in Newham

During the summer of 2002, ISER carried out the first wave of a new household survey called 'Living in Newham'. The survey is supported by the London Borough of Newham as part of its commitment to making the borough 'a place where people choose to live, work, and stay'. Over time, it will provide an increasingly detailed picture of what life is like in Newham for people from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds and from all walks of life, including information on health, employment, housing, local services, education and family life. The aim is to allow the borough to develop a better understanding of where resources are needed and how best to improve living standards.

Like the BHPS, the Newham survey will make it possible to track the changes in people's social and economic lives over time. Around 1,000 randomly selected households are taking part, and everyone in these households over the age of 16



will be interviewed each year so as to collect the views and experiences of all ages within the community. A team of 40 local interviewers has been recruited and trained to carry out the interviewing on the survey with the knowledge and skills of local people contributing to the success of the project.

## UK cohort surveys

ISER continues to collaborate with the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at the Institute of Education on the collection and release of data for two national birth cohort surveys – the National Child Development Study (NCDS) and the 1970 British Cohort Study (BSC70). The most recent interviews for both cohorts were in 1999/2000 and the data from these sweeps are available from the Data Archive at the University of Essex.

ESRC also supports the new Millennium Cohort Study (MCS). The first interviews with the parents of 20,000 children born in 2000/1 were carried out when they were about a year old. The second sweep will start in September 2003 when the children will be three. Data from the first interviews are due for release to the Data Archive in May 2003.

The cohort surveys provide the UK research community with a rich source of longitudinal data that is particularly suited to the study of childhood development and outcomes in later life.

## Improving the accuracy of interviews

A new study funded by ESRC's research methods programme will address important issues of measurement in two areas. The first concerns the validity of respondent reports of income from state benefits and of the details of their current employment. This will be explored by comparing respondents' interview answers to benefits data from the Department for Work and Pensions and by collecting earnings data directly from their employers.

The second area is the use of 'dependent interviewing' techniques, where responses from the previous wave are fed forward and incorporated into the wording of questions in the current wave. The overall focus of the study, which involves over 1,000 interviews with ex-members of the European Community Household Panel, is to identify ways of improving the accuracy of survey measures, particularly of change between waves.

## International consultancy

In addition to UK-based activities, the ISER survey methods team has been providing consultancy, hands-on assistance and training for a new national panel survey in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This work follows a Living Standards Measurement Survey (LSMS) carried out in 2001 by the World Bank in conjunction with the local national statistical offices. Half the LSMS sample has been carried forward into a three-year panel survey funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). In September 2002, members of 3,000 households across Bosnia and Herzegovina were re-interviewed for the second wave of the survey. Despite the difficulties of interviewing in a country still recovering from years of conflict, high response rates were achieved: 95% of respondents interviewed at wave 1 were re-interviewed at wave 2.

As a result of the success of the Bosnia project, DFID have commissioned ISER to provide similar support for a panel survey in Albania, also following a World Bank LSMS. The second wave goes into the field in May 2003 and will provide the first longitudinal data for one of the poorest and most economically disadvantaged countries in Europe.

## Keeping track

A further innovation this year is a new, free, website publication called *Keeping Track*, an electronic reference guide to major longitudinal data sources, developed in partnership with the Office for National Statistics. The central purpose of the site is to encourage greater use of longitudinal data. Indeed, its development stems in part from growing recognition of the analytical and explanatory power of longitudinal or cohort studies among policy-makers and government and academic researchers. Keeping track of cohorts of people as they travel through life enables detailed analysis of different experiences in their lives, and of the impact of government policies such as those designed to improve their education, build their work skills and maintain their health.

The site covers data sets collected by government agencies, academia, private social research organisations, and medical and private industrial sources. They include household panel surveys, studies following the health of individuals, birth cohort studies, studies tracking the quality of a product design, and administrative records.

# Further information

Details of the research discussed in this report may be found in the following publications, many of which are available free of charge on the ISER website ([www.iser.essex.ac.uk](http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk)) or from ISER's Communications Adviser Romesh Vaitilingam ([iserpress@essex.ac.uk](mailto:iserpress@essex.ac.uk)):

## Research on Europe

*Diverse Europe: mapping patterns of social change across the EU* by Richard Berthoud and Maria Iacovou, ESRC, November 2002, [www.iser.essex.ac.uk/epag/pubs/reports/index.php](http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/epag/pubs/reports/index.php)

## Research on young people

*Class Size in the Early Years: is smaller really better?* by Maria Iacovou, *Education Economics*, Vol. 10 (3), 2002

*Higher Education and Civic Engagement* by Muriel Egerton, *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 52 (4), 2002

*Political Partisanship, Voting Abstention and Higher Education: changing preferences in a British youth cohort in the 1990s* by Muriel Egerton, *Higher Education Quarterly*, Vol. 56 (2), 2002

*Family Transmission of Social Capital: differences by social class and education* by Muriel Egerton, *Sociological Research Online*, Vol. 7 (3), 2002

*Graduate Density, Gender and Employment* by Malcolm Brynin, *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 53 (3), 2002

*Overqualification in Employment* by Malcolm Brynin, *Work, Employment and Society*, Vol. 16 (4), 2002

## Research on social mobility

*Beating the Odds (1): intergenerational social mobility from a human capital perspective* and *Beating the Odds (2): a new index of intergenerational social mobility* by Jonathan Gershuny, ISER Working Papers 2002-17 and 2002-18, September 2002

## Research on place

*Identifying Neighbourhood Effects on Social Exclusion* by Nick Buck, *Urban Studies*, Vol. 38 (12), 2001

*Working Capital: life and labour in contemporary London* by Nick Buck, Ian Gordon, Peter Hall, Michael Harloe, Mark Kleinman with Belinda Brown, Karen O'Reilly, Gareth Potts, Laura Smethurst and Jo Sparkes, Routledge, 2002

## Research using life histories

*Paying for the Past* by David Maré, forthcoming ISER Working Paper

*Income in Later Life: work history matters* by Elena Bardasi and Stephen Jenkins, The Policy Press for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2002

*Childhood Parental Behaviour and Young People's Outcomes* by John Ermisch, Marco Francesconi and David Pevalin, ISER Working Paper 2002-12, August 2002

## Research on time use

*Measuring Work-life Balance and Degrees of Sociability: a focus on the value of time use data in the assessment of quality of life* by Kimberly Fisher and Richard Layte, EPAG Working Paper 32, October 2002

*Chewing the Fat: the story time diaries tell about physical activity in the United Kingdom* by Kimberly Fisher, ISER Working Paper 2002-13, September 2002

*Changing Times: work and leisure in postindustrial society* by Jonathan Gershuny, Oxford University Press, 2000

## Data sources

BHPS data is released through the Data Archive at the University of Essex: [www.data-archive.ac.uk](http://www.data-archive.ac.uk)

BHPS documentation is available on-line: [www.iser.essex.ac.uk/bhps/doc](http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/bhps/doc)

*Keeping Track: a guide to longitudinal resources* edited by Kimberly Fisher et al, [www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/projects/ldr4ss/index.php](http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/projects/ldr4ss/index.php)

For details of the UK birth cohort surveys, see [www.cls.ioe.ac.uk](http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk)

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