

## Institute for Social and Economic Research



Taking the long view: **the ISER Report 2001/2**

# Contents

Inside front cover:

**About ISER**

**1-2: Director's introduction**

**3-4: Taking the long view**

**5: Families**

**6-7: Employment**

**8-9: International comparisons**

**10-11: BHPS 2001**

**12-13: Information technology in the home**

**14-15: The UK Longitudinal Studies Centre**

**16: Further information**

Inside back cover:

**ISER staff**

# 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** is the base for ISER's substantive research programme. The thirty-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

The overwhelming majority of empirical data available to social scientists is based on 'cross-sectional' surveys, in which a sample of people are all interviewed once at about the same time. This produces a 'snapshot' of the situation at that time – the level of unemployment, the proportion of mothers in work, the extent of poverty, and so on. Valuable though these data sources have been, they lack the picture of changes in individuals' experiences that contributes to an understanding of the processes at work. Longitudinal surveys offer a 'movie' rather than a 'snapshot'.

The Institute for Social and Economic Research specialises in the production, dissemination and analysis of longitudinal data. ISER is the home of the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), which has followed the same sample of 10,000 individuals every year since 1991. It undertakes research on issues relevant to social policy based on the analysis of the BHPS and a range of other longitudinal sources. As an interdisciplinary institute, we bring together experts in the methodological development of surveys, the collection and management of data, complex techniques of statistical analysis and the application of empirical research to policy.

Until August 2001, Jonathan Gershuny was the Director of ISER as a whole and of both of its principal research centres (see inside front cover). The management structure has now been rationalised. John Ermisch has taken over as Director of the *ESRC Research Centre on Micro-social Change*, while Nick Buck has become Director of the *ESRC UK Longitudinal Studies Centre*. We are also delighted to welcome Norman Glass and Ceridwen Roberts as the chairs of the two Centres' academic advisory groups. Jonathan Gershuny remains the overall Director of ISER, but Nick Buck is Acting Director for the academic year 2001/2 while J takes a well-earned sabbatical to concentrate on his own research.

## Cross-sectional surveys offer merely a 'snapshot' of people's lives; the longitudinal surveys, in which ISER specialises, offer a 'movie'

Among the diverse activities summarised in this report on 2001, three features of ISER's work are worth highlighting: the links between substantive and methodological research; the international dimension of our programme; and the importance of communicating our findings to policy-makers.

One of the Institute's founding principles was that the *collection* and *analysis* of longitudinal data had to be closely inter-linked. The design teams of the BHPS and other panel surveys require contact with a group of analysts to ensure that the right issues are addressed; the analysts require contact with the design team to make sure that they understand exactly what the data represent. These links have always worked well at ISER. The recruitment of Alison Booth, John Ermisch and Stephen Jenkins in 1994 signalled a new emphasis on the development and application of advanced econometric techniques for the analysis of panel data. We now welcome Peter Lynn to the senior team, to develop a programme of work on the methodology of panel surveys, including sampling issues and data collection procedures. His analysis, briefly outlined on pages 14-15, will contribute substantially to the quality of both elements of the ISER research programme.

A feature of social life at ISER is the surprisingly cosmopolitan atmosphere in this Essex backwater. Getting on for half of the research staff comes from continental Europe, North America or Australasia. We have a constant stream of young EU visitors through ECASS (see inside front cover) – it sometimes seems that more Italian is spoken in the common room than English. More seriously, the Institute is developing a strong international profile. The BHPS 2001 conference (see pages 10-11) showed the extent of foreign interest in our major data set, and Heather Laurie is on the editorial board of the equivalent German conference to be convened in Berlin in July 2002. Apart from ECASS, we are involved in a whole series of international collaborative exercises, many of them funded by the EU: training schemes and study visits; analysis of comparative data (see pages 8-9); the creation of new cross-national data sets either by combining available national studies or by starting from scratch; and methodological analysis. And we are constantly looking for opportunities to expand our contacts abroad – we have, for example, applied for funding for a users' network for the European panel survey.

## **Demand for longitudinal data and analysis is growing – from academics, policy-makers and the commercial sector – and ISER is expanding supply to meet that demand**

ISER's research has long been highly regarded within the academic community. Indeed, we have more successes to report within that arena, with the number of papers published in refereed journals doubling between 2000 and 2001, and both of the Essex academic departments to which we contribute (Economics and Sociology) gaining coveted 5\* accolades in the recent national research assessment exercise. But we also recognise the importance of communicating our findings to the ultimate end-users of social and economic research – policy-makers and commentators. Romesh Vaitilingam was appointed ISER's Communications Adviser in the autumn of 2000, and he has helped us to gain a marked increase in media coverage over the year. All our publications are now available on the ISER website. In addition to this report on the year's activities, we are developing plans to distribute regular updates on research findings both by post and by e-mail.

This is a period of stability and growing self-confidence for ISER. Dynamic analysis has transformed the way we look at such key social issues as lone parenthood, poverty and unemployment (see pages 3-4). The BHPS is highly regarded ('the jewels in the research crown'! – see page 3), and is expanding (see pages 14-15). There is increasing demand for longitudinal data of all kinds from academics, policy-makers and the commercial sector, and we are well placed to take part in an expansion in both the supply of that data and its analysis.



Nick Buck

# Taking the long view

**Longitudinal analysis has transformed the way we look at such key social issues as lone parenthood, poverty and unemployment**



Radio and TV presenter Sheena McDonald described ISER's work as the 'jewels in the research crown' at the Economic and Social Research Council's national conference in November 2001. She was chairing a seminar on the value for policy-makers and private sector decision-makers of longitudinal data and analysis, at which John Ermisch presented key findings in the areas of family life, unemployment and poverty and their implications for policy.

## Births outside marriage

The basic facts of extra-marital births are that four out of ten births are now outside marriage. But only one baby in six is born to a woman without a live-in partner, and a quarter of births are to couples who live together without having married. So given that more than half of the births outside marriage are in cohabiting unions, is there a problem? Answering this question requires information about the dynamics of families.

BHPS data suggest that the rise in births outside marriage should be a major cause for concern. The time spent living together in cohabiting unions before either marrying or splitting is usually very short. Unmarried couples with children are much more likely to break up than childless ones. And among women who have dissolved a cohabiting union, the rate of subsequent re-partnering is much slower for those who are mothers. As a consequence, children born outside marriage spend significant periods of their childhood with only one parent, even though both parents may have been living together at the time they were born. This experience, particularly in the pre-school years, leads to lower educational attainment and poorer labour market and health outcomes as young adults.

## Unemployment persistence

Studies of the duration of unemployment usually find that a large majority of the unemployed leaves the unemployment register within a few weeks. But it is important to know whether particular people become unemployed again relatively quickly and whether there is a hard core of people who stay unemployed for a long time. BHPS data can establish whether there is such 'persistence' in unemployment. They show, for

example, that of men who were employed last year, only 3% of them are unemployed this year. But of men who were unemployed last year, 54% are unemployed this year as well.

This evidence of a causal link between past unemployment and unemployment today suggests that policies to reduce short-term unemployment, such as training or education, will have favourable long-term effects on the unemployed. Fewer people will be ‘scarred’ in terms of their future labour market chances.

## Poverty dynamics

Cross-sectional data can show how many people are poor at a given point in time, but not how long they are poor nor how long they stay out of poverty once they have left it. BHPS data can show how many years people are likely to be poor over a given period. For example, more than a quarter of the British population was touched by poverty during the 1990s. And while most of them could expect to be poor for only a short period of time, a significant minority – one tenth – experienced spells of poverty of at least five years, and 30% of those who escaped poverty fell back into poverty within a year. Such data are invaluable given the government’s emphasis on routes out of poverty.

## Taking a long view informs the pursuit of goals as diverse as eradicating child poverty, improving education and turning new technologies into business successes

Three groups of people can be distinguished – the persistently poor, the recurrently poor and the temporarily poor – calling for different policies in each case. Many of the persistently poor remain outside the labour market: for them, it is changes in social security benefits that are most likely to affect their incomes. But if the experience of poverty is temporary, then it is more important to ensure that there are

mechanisms to tide people over. Recurrent poverty raises different issues again: policies such as the New Deals focus on getting the unemployed into work, but that is not enough if the jobs do not last for very long.

ISER research demonstrates that it is not only increases in exits from poverty that are required to cut poverty but also reductions in entries to poverty, perhaps through measures to promote job retention. What is more, the evidence of a ‘scarring’ effect of poverty, which makes it increasingly difficult to get out, points to the value of identifying people who are likely to have long poverty spells and short times between poverty spells.

## The value of longitudinal research for policy and practice

Responding to John Ermisch’s presentation, *Malcolm Wicks MP*, a minister at the Department for Work and Pensions, underlined the wide range of ways in which longitudinal research helps policy-makers and practitioners. For example, the dynamic approach to poverty and family formation and dissolution is of particular importance to a government with the ambitious target of eradicating child poverty.

*Ben Anderson*, strategic social scientist at BTextact Technologies, explained the benefits of longitudinal data and analysis for a technology company. It is no use having the best technology in the world if you do not understand what difference it is going to make to people’s lives. The way to generate this kind of understanding – to make the technology a business success – is by taking a long view.

*Paul Johnson*, chief economist at the Department for Education and Skills, said that education is an area where longitudinal studies are essential. The whole point about education is not what it does for you today but what it does for you in the long term. So it is vital to see the impact of education on people over time to know what works and what it is worth. Longitudinal analysis is also valuable in providing information to the public, for example, on the added value of different schools.

# Families

## ISER studies illustrate some of the complex interactions of family life



Changes in family life are at the heart of ISER research. The programme of studies of family formation and dissolution, highlighted in last year's ISER report, continues and contributed to John Ermisch's ESRC conference presentation (see pages 3-4). This report features three studies that illustrate some of the complex interactions of family life: how do couples choose how many children to have? What are the consequences of different family sizes for the children themselves? And how does poverty in childhood affect young people's life-chances as they approach adulthood?

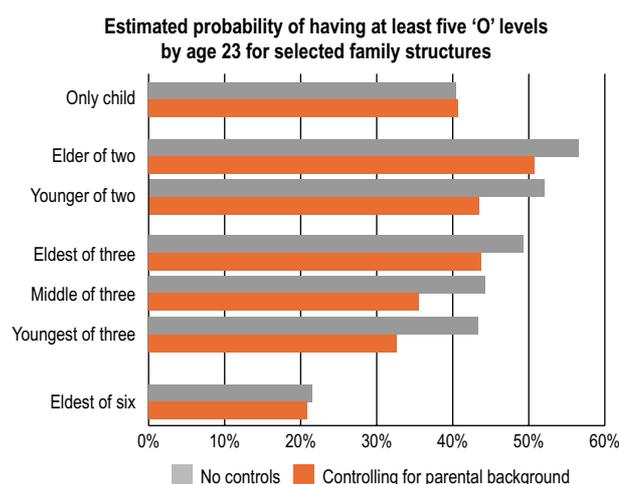
### Family balance

ISER research by Maria Iacovou reveals that British women whose first two children are of the same sex are more likely to go on to have a third child, while women who have two children of different sexes are more likely to stop at two. And not only are the former more likely to have a third child, they are also more likely to have it quickly: of all women who have a third child, 'two-the-same' mothers have their third child on average four months earlier than 'two-different' mothers. The likelihood of having a third child is also influenced by the

number of siblings a mother had herself: the more brothers and sisters she had, the more likely she is to have a third child.

### The effects of family size and birth order

Maria Iacovou has also studied the effect of the number of children in a family and a child's position in the birth order on how well children do later on in school. She finds that children in two-child families have the best educational outcomes. Only-children have significantly poorer educational outcomes than children who have one sibling, particularly in mathematical subjects. In families larger than two, there is a decrease in performance with every additional sibling. And the effect of growing up in a large family is much greater for children in poorer families.



These differences can only partly be explained by the way that family size varies with the characteristics of the parents. Taking account of basic parental characteristics – age, education, social class and whether the family is intact – reduces the disadvantage associated with a large family. But as the chart shows, it does not eliminate it entirely.

### The impact of growing up poor

ISER research by John Ermisch, Marco Francesconi and David Pevalin shows that children who grow up in poor families are more likely to leave home early, to do poorly in school and to be economically inactive after they reach adulthood. What is 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 a matter of luck, play truant and expect to leave school at the age of 16.

# Employment

**More than a third of full-time employees would prefer to work fewer hours and accept the associated reduction in earnings; 10% want to work longer hours**



Movement in and out of jobs, between full- and part-time work, between being an employee and self-employment, between permanent and non-permanent employment, and between work and non-work have become increasingly significant features of the labour market in Britain. These developments – often perceived as an indicator of increasing labour market flexibility or employment deregulation – partly reflect firms’ needs to adapt to rapidly changing market conditions and technology. But they have also emerged through efforts on behalf of workers to achieve a better balance between domestic and work responsibilities. ISER research continues to examine and explain the labour market experiences of men and women in Britain, focusing particularly on how these changes are affecting everyday working life.

## Are we overworked?

ISER research by Mark Taylor and René Böheim shows that more than a third of men and women in full-time employment would prefer to work fewer hours and accept the associated reduction in earnings, while under 10% would prefer to increase their working hours.

But the research also shows that some employees are able to adjust their working hours over time. Men and women who wish to reduce their working hours are seven percentage points more likely to experience a subsequent fall in their weekly hours than similar men and women who are satisfied with their hours. This probability is increased to ten percentage points if they also change jobs. The evidence suggests that employees can increase their working hours more easily than they can reduce them.

## Whatever happened to ‘regular jobs’?

The popular image of a regular job is one that offers permanent employment and is done at the employer’s premises, during the day, and for between thirty and forty-eight hours a week. But ESRC-funded ISER research by Alison Booth and Marco Francesconi shows that the majority of British workers do not fit this stereotype. More than half of men and women in employment in Britain today are in ‘non-standard’ jobs – ones that are either temporary;

or involve working away from the employer's premises; or fill less than thirty or more than forty-eight hours a week; or are done outside the regular working day.

There are large wage differentials between regular and non-standard workers as well as between workers in different types of 'flexible jobs'. Typically, jobs that require long hours of work or flexibility of location are associated with higher wages at the top of the earnings distribution. In contrast, the other types of flexible employment pay lower wages than those obtained from regular jobs.

## Fewer than half of British workers have 'regular jobs' – permanent employment, for 30-48 hours a week, done during the day and at the employer's premises

But perhaps most importantly, regular employment guarantees higher pay at the bottom of the wage distribution than almost all types of non-standard employment. Thus, if certain groups of workers are disproportionately employed in flexible jobs – for example, young and uneducated men in seasonal and/or casual jobs and older women in jobs with non-standard times – there may be greater inequality in the labour market. This may be a question not only of fairness but also of efficiency if those individuals' skills and talents could be allocated to more productive jobs.

### Temporary jobs: stepping stones or dead ends?

Temporary employment comes in two forms: being in a seasonal or casual job; and being on a fixed-term contract. According to ESRC-funded ISER research by Alison Booth and Marco Francesconi, the experience of either of these forms of employment is more common for workers who are less experienced, who work in the public sector and who are in part-time jobs. Women in professional occupations and with higher qualifications are significantly more likely to be on fixed-term contracts than men are.

The research also finds that temporary workers report lower levels of job satisfaction and receive less work-related training. In addition, both types of temporary employment pay significantly less compared to permanent employment. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that fixed-term contracts are stepping stones to permanent work. The earnings of women (and to a lesser extent men) who start in fixed-term employment and move to permanent full-time jobs fully catch up (within five to ten years) with those who start in permanent jobs.

### Unions and training

What impact do collective bargaining institutions have on the incidence and intensity of formal training provided by employers to employees? ISER research by René Böheim and Alison Booth shows that men and full-time women who work in the private sector and are covered by unions typically receive significantly more work-related training than their non-union counterparts, and that this impact is large.

But part-time women in workplaces with union recognition are significantly less likely to be trained. And taking account of a variety of establishment-level characteristics – such as the closed shop, the level at which pay bargaining takes place, and 'multi-unionism' – tends to reduce the positive impact of union coverage on the likelihood of men receiving training.

### The future of work

In September 2001, ISER hosted a conference on *The Future of Work: Flexible Employment, Part-time Work and Career Development in Britain*. This featured ISER research by Alison Booth and Marco Francesconi, funded by ESRC as part of its programme on 'The Future of Work'. Other speakers included Juan Dolado (Universidad Carlos III, Madrid) on *Drawing Lessons from the Boom of Temporary Jobs in Spain*; and Bertil Holmlund (Uppsala University) on *Temporary Work in Turbulent Times: The Swedish Experience*.

# International comparisons

**ISER researchers are taking advantage of new international data sources to compare social and economic change in the UK with other industrialised nations**



The American sociologist Melvin Kohn has written, ‘Cross-national research is valuable, even indispensable, for establishing the generality of findings and the validity of interpretations derived from single-nation studies. It is equally valuable, perhaps even more valuable, for forcing us to revise our interpretations to take account of cross-national differences and inconsistencies that could never be uncovered in single-nation studies’.

ISER researchers are increasingly following this advice, taking advantage of new international data sources – such as the European Community Household Panel – to compare social and economic change in the UK with the experiences of other industrialised countries. Within Europe, cross-country comparisons are of immense potential value:

- To the institutions of the EU, offering a detailed map of variations in social and economic experiences between countries and groups of countries.
- To policy-makers at the national level, showing how far the social and economic problems observed locally are experienced elsewhere in Europe.
- To social scientists seeking to understand the processes and results of change. If the influences identified in one country cannot be generalised to other countries, hypotheses must be developed to explain the differences.
- To analysts of social policy looking for general conclusions about the influence of government actions on individuals’ lives in Europe.

## Young people’s lives

ISER research by Maria Iacovou and Richard Berthoud reveals the extraordinary diversity of young people’s lives across the EU. Their work analyses data on nearly 25,000 individuals from the fifteen member states aged between 17 and 25 years old – their educational achievements, their early experiences in the labour market, their patterns of family formation and their standards of living. Among the findings:

- In the UK, half of all young people are in work by the age of 19 years and 1 month. But in Spain and Italy, entry into the labour market often comes a full five years later: in these countries, half of young people do not have a job until they are aged 24 years and 4 months.

- Young men in the UK are more likely than anywhere else to work long hours: 31% of those with a job work long hours in the UK, compared with only 12% in Ireland and just 8% in Sweden.
- 28% of women aged 21-25 are mothers in the UK and Sweden – but less than 12% are mothers in the Netherlands and Italy.
- Almost 18% of young women aged 17-25 in the UK report their main activity as family care – but in Denmark, only 1% of women in this age group are engaged in family care.
- 73% of Danish men aged 21-25 have left the family home – but only 7% of Italian men in the same age group have left home.

## Teenage mothers

Teenage motherhood is increasingly rare in many countries. Even in countries where teenage fertility rates have not been falling, it is seen as increasingly exceptional as the average age at which other women have their first child has risen.

ISER research by Richard Berthoud and Karen Robson confirms that women who have their first child as teenagers are much more likely to experience poverty and other disadvantages than women whose first child is born later. This is true throughout Western Europe. The problem is especially important in the UK, where rates of teenage motherhood are among the highest in the EU. But there are big differences in the outcomes, depending on which country the young mothers live in.

## Former teenage mothers suffer many disadvantages in comparison with older mothers – but the extent of the handicap varies considerably across European countries

The research, which was supported by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Florence and by the European Commission, shows that former teenage mothers suffer a variety of disadvantages in comparison with older mothers: they have

lower educational qualifications; they are more likely to be a one-parent family; they (and their partners) are less likely to have a job; and their families are more likely to be poor.

The surprising findings concern the variations between countries in the extent of the handicap associated with early parenting. Over a range of outcomes, Ireland is the worst place to have a baby while still a teenager; while young Greek, German and Austrian mothers experience the lowest level of disadvantage compared with women who have babies later.

## Child poverty

Many more children experience poverty than are reflected in standard poverty statistics, according to ISER research sponsored by UNICEF and published in *The Dynamics of Child Poverty in Industrialised Countries*, a Cambridge University Press book co-edited by Stephen Jenkins.

Child poverty rates of 8-25% were recorded in the United States, the UK, Germany, Spain, Ireland and Hungary in the 1990s. These statistics summarise how many children are poor in a single year, but the proportion of children who are ever poor is significantly higher. In the UK, for example, 39% of children were poor at least once over a five-year period – more than twice the child poverty rate for a single year of 17%. Similarly, the ‘ever poor’ child poverty rate is double the single-year poverty rate in Germany (16% compared to 8%) and in Hungary (20% compared to 10%).

But it is not just the large number of children who are touched by poverty that are a problem. It is also the number of children who are always poor. Data tracking child poverty over time reveal that significant numbers of children are living in poverty year after year. Being poor year in year out has serious implications for a child’s well-being and future life-chances. The longer a family stays poor, the harder it is to manage by drawing on savings or going further into debt and the more socially excluded the children become.

# BHPS 2001

**The British Household Panel Survey, produced by ISER since 1991, provides a detailed picture of the changing patterns of social and economic life in Britain**



The British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), produced by ISER since 1991, is used by academics and policy-makers all over Britain as well as by our own research team. And it is increasingly used by continental European and North American researchers to provide a picture of social and economic life in Britain and to compare it with their own countries' experiences.

In July 2001, ISER hosted the first international BHPS research conference. Organised by Stephen Jenkins, the conference brought together an international group of social and economic researchers to discuss the changing patterns of families' lives across Britain. All the papers used BHPS data either on their own or in conjunction with comparable panel data for continental Europe and North America. Many of the 120 delegates said how useful the sessions had been – in spite of the heatwave!

Findings reported at the conference include:

## Happiness at work

Analysis of BHPS data on job satisfaction by Anna Sanz de Galdeano (European University Institute, Florence) shows that women are happier at work than men. 22% of female workers declare themselves as completely satisfied at work compared with only 13% of male workers.

## Who does the housework?

British women still tend to do three-quarters of the housework, spending on average eighteen and a half hours a week on household chores compared to six hours for the average man, according to research by Man-yee Kan (Oxford University). What is more, the number of hours the female partner in a household spends in paid employment reduces the time she devotes to housework to only a minimal degree. More substantial reductions in women's housework hours come the higher her income, the younger she is, and the higher the educational qualifications of both her and her partner.

## Moving home

Moving house tends to be associated with increased earnings, according to research by René Böheim (University of Munich) and Mark Taylor (ISER). But not all migrants

enjoy these returns: it all depends on the distance they have moved, their family structure and the employment situation of other family members. And the returns to migration may not be enjoyed until some time after the move.

## The impact of children on divorce

Having children makes it less likely that a marriage will break down, according to research by Daniela Vuri (European University Institute, Florence). Her analysis of over 6,000 British, German and American married couples indicates that the probability of divorce is cut from 13% to 9% by the presence of young children.

## Economic outcomes for ethnic minorities

As a whole, the ethnic minority populations of the UK do much better economically than their German counterparts, according to research by Felix Büchel (Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin) and Joachim Frick (GSOEP, the German Socio-Economic Panel Study). But at the same time, there are larger differences in terms of economic performance among different ethnic groups in the UK than in Germany. For example, there is no single ethnic group in Germany that is as badly off overall as Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in the UK.

## Discouraging smoking

Health policy intended to discourage smoking may work better if it targets smokers individually – for example, through an interview with a doctor – rather than using depersonalised general health campaigns warning that smoking leads to worse health. That is the conclusion of research by Andrew Clark (University of Orléans) and Fabrice Etilé (University of Paris), which reveals that people tend to respond to their own worsening health by reducing their smoking or even quitting, but they do not respond in the same way to the declining health of other smokers, even if they live in the same household.

## Economic well-being

What happens to the economic well-being of households when a household member leaves the labour force or dies? Research by Richard Burkhauser, Dean Lillard and Paola Valenti (Cornell University) tracks households in four countries – the UK, Canada, Germany and the United States – considering not only what happens to total household income, but also the sources of that income.

## The BHPS is a benchmark for researchers from across the world seeking to build new longitudinal data sets and to compare Britain with their own countries' experiences

The analysis indicates that a narrow focus on government-provided benefits distorts how well (or poorly) household well-being is protected. Households in the United States suffer bigger drops in income after a household member leaves the labour force than in the other countries but the drop is smaller if total household income is taken into account, instead of only government social insurance benefits.

## Parents, children and money

Research by Sandra Hutton (University of York) and Jenny Seavers (Leeds Metropolitan University) reveals the complexity of financial arrangements between adult children and their parents. Although UK survey data show that relatively few parents (around 10%) make regular money payments to their children aged 16-25, in-depth interviews show that parents do provide them with financial support. But the payments are more likely to be irregular 'hand-outs' and loans (not necessarily paid back) made when needed. Parents also provide a wide range of other goods and services, particularly transport, subsidised housing, furniture, and even clothes and toiletries.

# Information technology in the home

**ISER's Home On-Line Survey and related projects are generating valuable data on the impact of the new information and communication technologies on people's lives**



## Web-use and net-nerds

Computers are now widespread in British households. But while two-thirds of adults in households with incomes above the national average have access to the internet in their homes, less than a quarter of households below the national average have computers. Does this reflect a growing 'digital divide'? The answer turns on exactly how computers are used within households and until now, there has been a lack of good quality data on who is using the internet and what effect it has on their lives.

For example, it has been asserted, on the basis of cross-sectional data, that internet use leads to a loss of sociability, a diminishing level of participation in those activities that contribute to the formation of 'social capital'. The evidence for these claims – surveys indicating that people who use the web spend more time alone and less time in activities involving other people – seems, at first sight, quite straightforward and conclusive. But ISER research by Jonathan Gershuny shows that the argument is not quite as simple as it seems.

There are two quite distinct reasons for not taking the evidence of cross-sectional surveys at face value. First, the surveys use questionable methods: people asked directly to estimate how much time they devote to particular activities are in general unable to provide reliable answers. And second, estimating the effects of the web by comparing the activities of users and non-users as demonstrated by a single cross-sectional survey involves a logical fallacy. Processes of change cannot be explored merely by examining differences between people. Any difference between users and non-users of the web *may* be a consequence of the web – or it may reflect some other prior difference between people that relates to their *choosing to use* the web.

There are two quite distinct methodological implications. The first problem can be tackled by adopting a specific survey research technique, which requires respondents to keep a daily time-use diary. The second problem can be dealt with by making repeated observations to see what changes emerge by comparing behaviour before and after the start of web-use. Both are addressed in the new data sources ISER has been developing on the impact of the new information and communication technologies (ICT) on people's lives.

## Home On-Line

In 1999, with funding from BT, ISER launched the Home On-Line Survey, a panel survey of roughly 1,800 individuals in 1,000 randomly selected British households. Each adult was interviewed on their use of ICT products and services, and then asked to complete detailed diaries of their activities every day for a week. Children over 10 years old were also asked to complete time-use diaries. Two further waves of data on these individuals have been collected in the early spring of 2000 and 2001.

The main objectives of this study are to understand: individuals' attitudes towards ICT products and services; their motivations for and patterns of acquisition and use of these products and services; the effect of such acquisition and use on their social activities; and how and why these phenomena change over time. The intention is that the new data source will change the way the ICT sector, as well as those pursuing the 'e-society' agenda, think strategically about their markets, citizens and users. The data will be made available for both academic and commercial research via the ESRC Data Archive.

## People who start to use the web also actually increase the time they devote to out-of-home leisure activities such as going to the cinema and eating out at restaurants

The first results of the research programme are now beginning to emerge and Jonathan Gershuny's study points to a conclusion quite opposite to that suggested by cross-sectional data. When the measurements of time-use are done properly, the apparently negative effect of the web on sociability disappears; in fact, it appears that some aspects of sociability may actually be enhanced by web-use. In particular, it seems that those who start to use the web also actually increase the time they devote to out-of-home leisure activities such as going to the cinema and eating out at restaurants.

## Life in a digital Europe

The value of the data generated by the Home On-Line Survey has encouraged the European Union to provide funding through its Fifth Framework Programme for the 'e-Living' project, which BT is co-ordinating and in which ISER is a leading participant. Launched in January 2001, this project has established a co-ordinated set of pan-European longitudinal household panels in the UK, Norway, Germany, Italy, Bulgaria and Israel. The studies will generate quantitative survey data on changing patterns in ICT usage, social exclusion and market fragmentation; family, gender and youth; the environment; and work, home and home-working.

Cross-sectional surveys in this area might provide data on ICT penetration and access. But they reveal less about the effects these patterns have on people's lives because they cannot distinguish between gross and net patterns of change. Only longitudinal panel surveys like 'e-Living' can address fundamental questions of cause and effect at the individual level. These studies will measure the attitudes and behaviours of the same individuals at different points in time. Without such data, it is not possible to judge whether, for example, acquiring internet access leads directly to improved life-chances, a reduction in the time spent watching television or an increase in communication with family members outside the home.

# The UK Longitudinal Studies Centre

ULSC is developing a national strategy for the funding and execution of the major UK longitudinal surveys

7. AGE	8. MARITAL STATUS	9. SPOUSE PARTNER NUMBER	10. PAID EMPLOY
1 Best guess if 2 exact age not 3 known	Married 1 Living as couple 2 Widowed 3 Never married 4 Under 16 5 6 0	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0
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## Developing a national strategy

The past year has been an exciting one for longitudinal researchers in the UK – not just at ISER. Two important new surveys have been launched, a cohort of children born in the Millennium year, and a panel of elderly people. There have been substantial extensions to the BHPS; and other major new surveys are in the pipeline. The existing cohort and panel surveys have continued to flourish, with new data becoming available for three of them and improvements being made to access and documentation.

As the institution responsible for ESRC's interest in longitudinal data resources, ISER's UK Longitudinal Studies Centre (ULSC) has been at the heart of these developments. ESRC's remit for the ULSC includes the development of a national strategy for the funding and execution of the major UK longitudinal surveys.

As part of the national strategy, ISER has been working with the principal investigators of each of the existing surveys to identify ways of taking advantage of *ad hoc* funding opportunities without detriment to long-term goals. A quality framework has also been developed, which will serve as the cornerstone of ESRC thinking in the planning, funding and evaluation of longitudinal data collection.

The overall framework is being supplemented with a template for quality profiles that are to be produced for each longitudinal study. The first quality profile has been drafted, covering the first ten years of the BHPS. In due course, quality profiles should form an important part of the assessment of ESRC funding applications, providing valuable information for users and for survey evaluation.

## BHPS rolls on – and expands

Ten waves of BHPS data are now available for users. Wave 10 included questions on household assets and debts, last carried at wave 5, providing the first longitudinal data for Britain on patterns of wealth accumulation over time. Wave 11 is in the field.

The Scottish and Welsh extension samples added to the BHPS at wave 9 have been re-interviewed. These each consist of 1,500 households, which, when added to the original BHPS households, give a combined sample size of 2,000 households in each country. The data for wave 2 of the

extensions have been released with the wave 10 BHPS data and ESRC funding for a further three waves of data collection for the extension samples has been confirmed.

A further development has been the addition of a substantial sample in Northern Ireland. Joint funding between ESRC and government departments in Northern Ireland for three waves of panel data collection has been confirmed. The first round of data collection went into the field in October 2001, coinciding with wave 11 of the BHPS and aiming to interview 2,000 households.

The extension samples open up the possibility of longitudinal comparative research between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It will also be possible to compare the Northern Ireland data with the Republic's Living in Ireland Survey to provide an all-Ireland analysis.

## Supporting the research community

The ULSC provides a range of additional resources for the research community. 2001 saw the launch of an online database on longitudinal studies, a joint project with the Office for National Statistics. Training events have been run throughout the year to support users in handling the BHPS data and developing their longitudinal research skills. And development work on a new 'front-end' for accessing and downloading longitudinal data via the web, including BHPS data, is continuing. This will provide enhanced access to data for users, simplifying the process of selecting variables for analysis and producing matched longitudinal data files.

As other countries seek to construct national panels, the ULSC acts as the first point of contact for many research teams in need of advice. During 2001, ISER has provided assistance to new panel surveys being established as far afield as Switzerland, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Israel, South Africa and Australia – as well as closer to home in the London Borough of Newham.

## Methodological research

Peter Lynn, formerly Director of the Survey Methods Centre at the National Centre for Social Research, joined ISER as Professor of Survey Methodology in June 2001. He has been developing a programme to evaluate and advance the methods used for longitudinal research, focusing in particular on issues of immediate relevance to the existing UK surveys.

One specific concern is the use of 'dependent interviewing'. This is where responses from one wave of a panel are used in questioning at the next wave. This can have a number of effects on longitudinal data – some good, some bad – and their nature depends on the form of dependent interviewing used and the particular context. Careful evaluation of these effects is needed to inform future survey design. ISER is actively looking for opportunities to mount experimental studies.

Another important issue for all longitudinal data is sample attrition and the associated bias. There is some evidence that the nature and extent of survey non-response in general may have been changing in recent years. ISER will be investigating the nature and effects of panel attrition, and studying methods of adjusting for the effects at the analysis stage, through weighting and other techniques.

A third important research area concerns measurement error – the extent to which survey responses reflect the 'true' answers to questions. Many factors may combine to produce measurement error, including saliency, memory effects, motivation to answer accurately, social desirability, cognitive ability, question wording and interviewer style. ISER will be investigating some of these issues, focusing on those aspects of measurement error that are particularly important in a longitudinal context, notably 'seam effects', where implausibly high levels of change are observed in continuous histories at the point of overlap between two recording periods.

## ISER aims to extend the frontiers of knowledge about longitudinal research methods while addressing the practical concerns of those who fund and use longitudinal surveys

There are many other important methodological issues besides these three. ISER's aim is to develop a broad-ranging research programme that will push forward the frontiers of knowledge about longitudinal research methods while also addressing the practical concerns of those who fund, implement and use longitudinal surveys.

# 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 ISER's 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 families

*Fertility and Female Labour Supply* by Maria Iacovou, ISER Working Paper 2001-19, October 2001

*Family Composition and Children's Educational Outcomes* by Maria Iacovou, ISER Working Paper 2001-12, June 2001

## Research on employment

*Temporary Jobs: Stepping Stones or Dead Ends* by Alison Booth, Marco Francesconi and Jeff Frank, *Economic Journal*, forthcoming in 2002

*Option or Obligation? The Determinants of Labour Supply Preferences in Britain and Actual and Preferred Working Hours* by René Böheim and Mark Taylor, ISER Working Papers 2001-05 and 2001-06, April 2001

*The Impact of Bargaining Institutions on Employer-provided Training in Britain* by René Böheim and Alison Booth, ISER Working Paper 2001-08, May 2001

## Research on poverty

*The Dynamics of Poverty in Britain* by Stephen Jenkins and John Rigg with the assistance of Francesco Devicienti, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report No.157, December 2001

*Outcomes for Children of Poverty* by John Ermisch, Marco Francesconi and David Pevalin, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report No.158, December 2001

## Comparative research

*Young People's Lives: A Map of Europe* by Maria Iacovou and Richard Berthoud, ISER, December 2001

*The Outcomes of Teenage Motherhood in Europe* by Richard Berthoud and Karen Robson, European Panel Analysis Group (EPAG) Working Paper 22, October 2001

*The Dynamics of Child Poverty in Industrialised Countries* edited by Bruce Bradbury, Stephen Jenkins and John Micklewright, Cambridge University Press, 2001

## Research on information technology in the home

*Web-use and Net-nerds: A Neo-functionalist Analysis of the Impact of Information Technology in the Home* by Jonathan Gershuny, ISER Working Paper 2002-1, January 2002

## Research on methodology

*Developing Quality Standards for Cross-national Survey Research: Five Approaches* by Peter Lynn, ISER Working Paper 2001-21, September 2001

*Recommended Standard Final Outcome Categories and Standard Definitions of Response Rate for Social Surveys* by Peter Lynn, Roeland Beerten, Johanna Laiho and Jean Martin, ISER Working Paper 2001-23, October 2001

*Separating Refusal Bias and Non-contact Bias: Evidence from UK National Surveys* by Peter Lynn and Paul Clarke, ISER Working Paper 2001-24, November 2001

## Conference papers and reports

A report on John Ermisch's ESRC conference presentation and papers from the BHPS research conference and the ISER-hosted conference on *The Future of Work* are available on ISER's website: [www.iser.essex.ac.uk](http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk).

## ULSC 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/)) and is available online at Manchester Information and Associated Services (MIMAS) ([www.mimas.ac.uk](http://www.mimas.ac.uk)).

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

The new online database on longitudinal studies is available at [www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/projects/ldr4ss/index.php](http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/projects/ldr4ss/index.php)

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Richard Berthoud, Marco Francesconi, Maria Iacovou

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