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New study finds link between poor housing and ill health through blood sample analysis

Blood sample analysis finds that levels of C-reactive protein (CRP), a chemical associated with inflammation and stress, may be linked to housing type and tenure in the UK

This new study led by Dr Amy Clair for the ESRC Research Centre on Micro-Social Change at ISER was published in the *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*.

Rather than draw on subjective measures of health to explore the links between housing and health outcomes, the researchers looked at a more objective and reproducible measure of health, C-reactive protein, a chemical in the body that is associated with stress and inflammation. They used data from *Understanding Society*, UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS), which included extensive information from individuals and households, including housing tenure and type and blood samples to capture CRP levels.

After taking account of other potential stress factors, certain housing types and tenure were associated with raised CRP. Renters in the private sector had significantly higher CRP levels than home owners with a

mortgage and those living in semi-detached and terraced houses and flats had higher CRP than those living in detached properties.

Dr Clair said, "It may be that access to gardens or green space, which likely varies according to housing type, may partially explain this result, but this could not be tested with the current data. The significant findings for housing type and tenure point to an influence of autonomy and control. Where control is low, the sense of security is reduced, which may affect health through chronic stress responses. The findings support "arguments for greater consideration of the negative effects of the current private rented sector in the UK, characterised by greater insecurity, higher cost and lower quality than is typically found in other tenures".

Clair, Amy & Hughes, Amanda, 'Housing and health: new evidence using biomarker data' *BMJ J Epidemiol Community Health* 2019;73:256-262.



Considering the next steps for BAME equality in the workplace

Dr Malcolm Brynin presented his recent ESRC research on pay gaps at the Westminster Employment Forum, considering the next steps for government, employers and other stakeholders in improving opportunity and equality at work for people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds (BAME).

He joined a prestigious panel of influential industry and policy figures including Simon Woolley, Race Disparity Advisory Group and Director of Operation Black Vote, Dawn Butler MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Lord Sheikh, Vice-Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group for Race and Community.

As well as examining the government's consultation on ethnicity pay reporting, delegates discussed the way forward for the government's Race at Work Charter, which set five calls to action for signatories to improve recruitment and progression of ethnic minority employees – including requirements to appoint an executive sponsor for race, a zero-tolerance of harassment and bullying, and making equality the responsibility of all managers.

Depression links with social media twice as high among girls than boys

Girls are twice as likely to show signs of depressive symptoms linked to social media use compared to boys at age 14, according to new research by ISER's Dr Cara Booker with co-authors at UCL

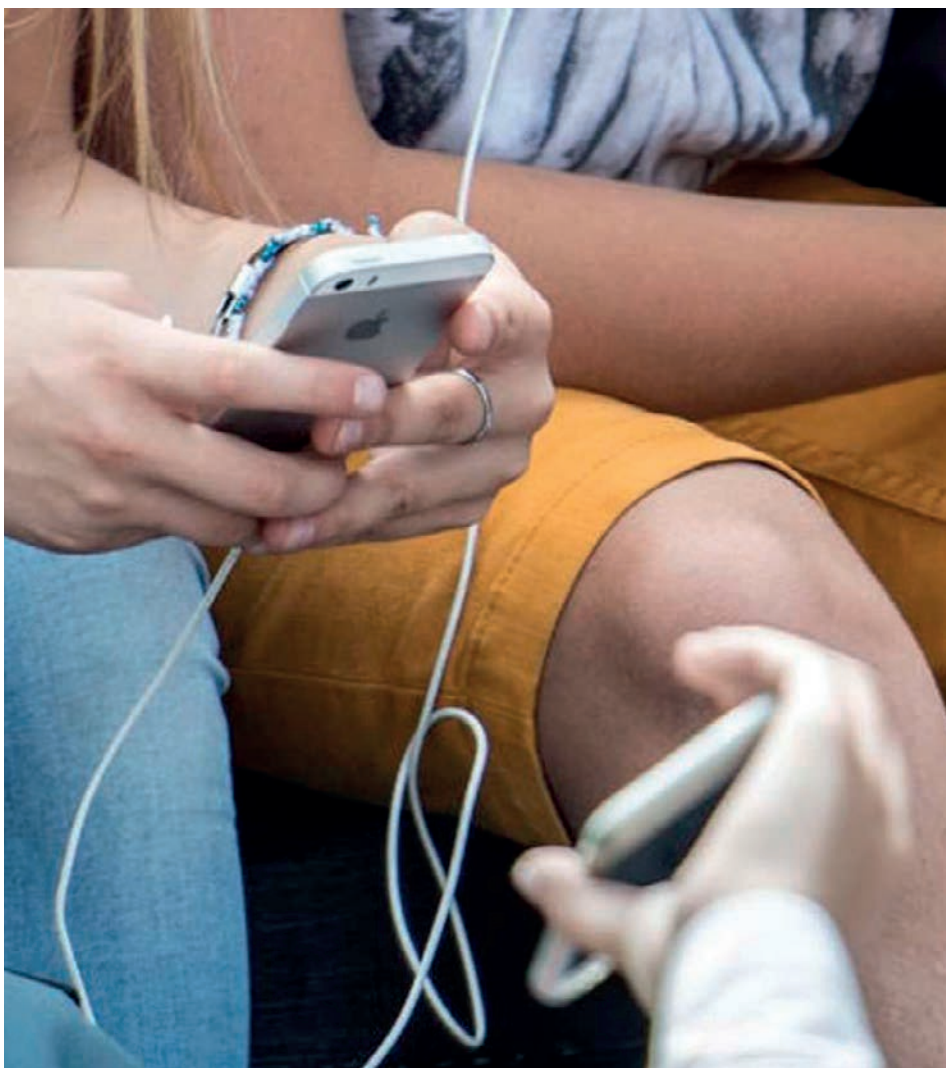
The research is the first of its kind to look at associations between social media and depressive symptoms and analysed data from nearly 11,000 young people from the Millennium Cohort Study.

The researchers found that 14-year-old girls were heavier users of social media than boys and that the higher the number of daily hours of social media use, the greater the increase in signs of having severe depression.

The experience of online harassment or cyberbullying and disrupted sleep were key factors linking social media use with depression, with girls more affected by both

than boys, as well as negative effects on body image in both boys and girls.

The findings were recently used as evidence in a new report from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Media and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing. The report set out recommendations for regulation of the industry, including calling for a tax on social media companies' profits to fund research and draw up clearer guidance for the public, and for more longitudinal research to provide robust evidence in the ongoing debate. The report can be downloaded at www.rsph.org.uk/our-work/policy/wellbeing/new-filters.html



Chronic stress levels 40% higher in full-time working women with children, but only working fewer hours reduces stress

A ground-breaking new study reveals the physical impact of stress on working mothers, with biological markers for chronic stress 40% higher in women bringing up two children while working full time

Published in the British Sociological Association journal *Sociology*, this research by ISER'S Dr Cara Booker, Professor Meena Kumari, Professor Michaela Benzeval and Professor Tarani Chandola of the University of Manchester showed that working from home and flexitime have no effect on women's level of chronic stress – only putting in fewer hours at work helps.

They analysed data on working life and readings of measures of stress response, including hormones levels and blood pressure from *Understanding Society*, the UK Household Longitudinal Survey.

The overall level of 11 biomarkers related to chronic stress was 40% higher if women were working full time while

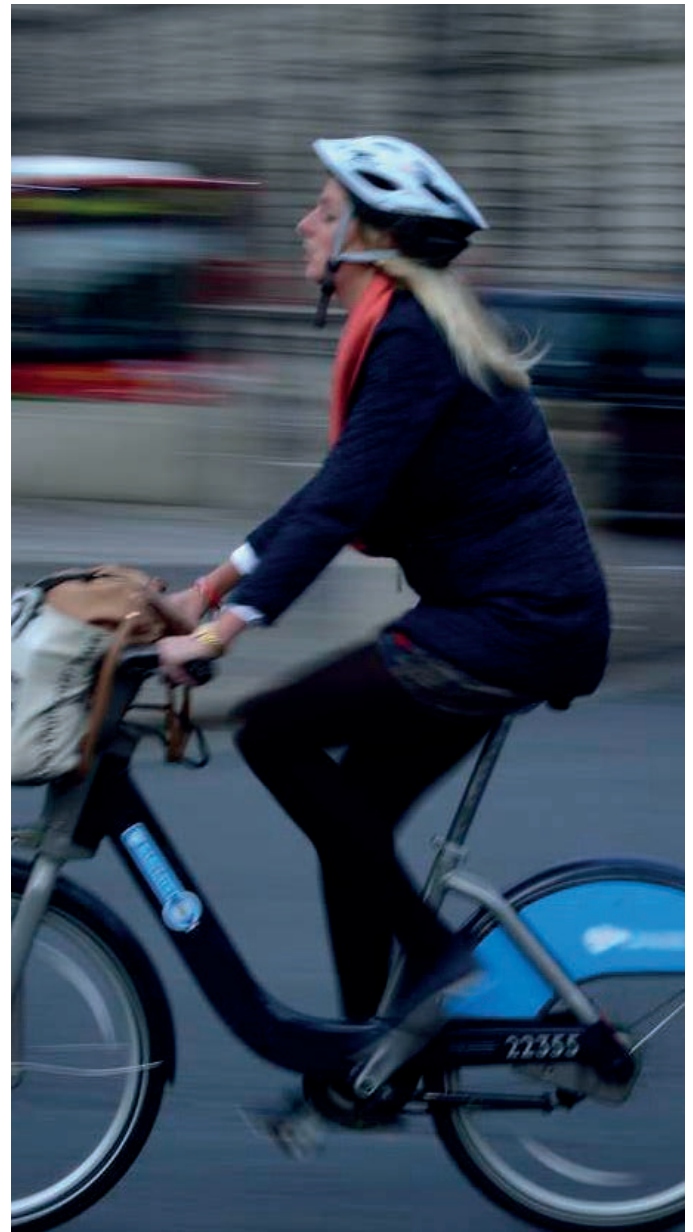
bringing up two children than it was among women working full time with no children. Women working full time and bringing up one child had an 18% higher level. Women with two children who worked reduced hours through part-time work, job share and term-time flexible working arrangements had chronic stress levels 37% lower than those working in jobs without the option of flexible work. Working flexitime or working from home with no overall reduction in working hours had no effect on reducing chronic stress.

The researchers said, "Work-family conflict is associated with increased psychological strain, with higher levels of stress and lower levels of wellbeing. Parents of young children are at particular risk of work-family conflict. Working conditions that

are not flexible to these family demands, such as long working hours, could adversely impact on a person's stress reactions."

Chandola, T., Booker, C., Kumari, M. & Benzeval, M., 'Are Flexible Work Arrangements

Associated with Lower Levels of Chronic Stress-Related Biomarkers? A Study of 6025 Employees in the UK Household Longitudinal Study', Journal Article, *Sociology* 28 February 2019.



What does it mean to be British and who defines it?

ISER's leading expert on social identities, Dr Alita Nandi, joined Shadow Home Secretary, Diane Abbott, Director of British Future, Sunder Katwala and Professor of Politics, Eric Kaufman on a panel at LSE's week-long festival 'New World (Dis)Orders', exploring how social science can tackle global problems.

This interactive public event featured representatives from different influential spheres in society who are shaping discourse on British identity, combined with direct audience engagement.



Professor Sonia Bhalotra chaired gender bias and assessment panel for *The Lancet*

Professor Sonia Bhalotra chaired a panel on 'Gender Bias and Assessment' at the launch of *The Lancet* women's theme issue 'Advancing women in science, medicine, and global health'

Gender equality expert Professor Bhalotra led discussions between academics from across the social sciences, which focused on the role of both conscious and unconscious gender bias in areas including grant funding, hiring, performance assessment and evaluation, and promotion to leadership positions, and how to overcome this barrier to women's advancement.

Dr Richard Horton, Editor-in-Chief of *The Lancet* said, "Something has gone badly wrong in global health. The global health community has abdicated its responsibility for achieving gender justice in health. Current leaders in global health consistently miss opportunities to make gender equity their priority. Instead, we have to listen, engage, amplify and advocate".



During economic uncertainty women postpone or give up having children: explaining the post-WWII baby boom

While economic uncertainty can affect fertility rates, things have changed over the 20th century, according to new research for the ESRC Research Centre on Micro-Social Change at ISER by Dr Bastien Chabé-Ferret and CEPR's Dr Paula Gobbi

Theories to explain the sudden rise in birth rates between the early 1940s and the late 1960s, known as the baby boom, included the return of mobilised soldiers, the wave of optimism after the end of the war and women leaving the labour force, giving them more time to raise families. However, these theories have since been proven inadequate in explaining the extent of the baby boom.

Because children require significant financial and time investments, having them during periods of high economic uncertainty is perceived to be riskier. During a prolonged period of economic turbulence, women may not only delay childbearing, but even reduce the total number of children they have over their lifetime. Variations in economic uncertainty may explain as much as 60% of the one child difference in fertility between the trough and the peak of the baby boom. However, things seem to be changing since the end of the war. The fertility

rate of cohorts born after 1945 seems much less affected, if at all, by economic uncertainty. This may be due to the broadening age window during which women are having children, or because of new instruments that counteract the effect of economic fluctuations, such as the development of the financial sector or the implementation of various safety nets (unemployment benefit, universal health coverage, etc.).

The researchers said, "This could have important implications for the current discussion about the impact of the Great Recession on fertility rates. Indeed, birth rates have shown a sharp decline in the US since 2008. However, women now have more flexibility to delay and catch up when conditions are more favourable."

Chabé-Ferret, Bastien & Gobbi, Paula, 'Economic Uncertainty and Fertility Cycles: The Case of The Post-WWII Baby Boom', CEPR DP13374 December 2018.

Opening the black box: towards a transparent and widely-used tax-benefit model for the UK

The Nuffield Foundation is funding a project to adapt the UK component of the EUROMOD tax-benefit microsimulation model to make it more flexible, accessible and transparent

EUROMOD enables researchers and policy analysts to calculate the effects of taxes and benefits on household incomes and work incentives for the population of each country and for the EU as a whole.

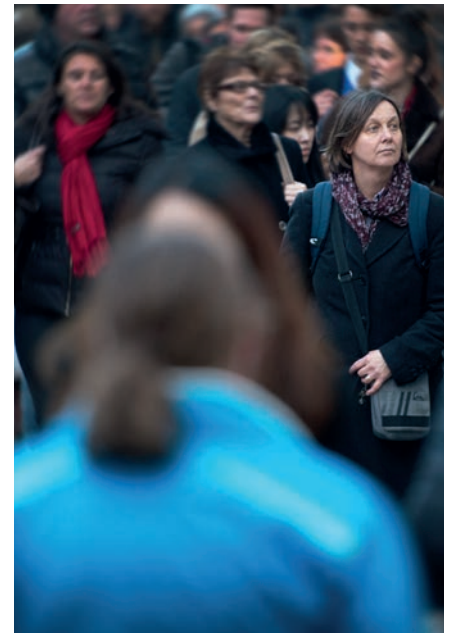
Professor Mike Brewer is leading developments on EUROMOD-UK which aim to meet increasing demand for tax-benefit modelling capacity among UK organisations (and individuals) and to promote its use more widely as a way to improve the evidence base informing current policy debates.

New methods and procedures will establish a regular release of EUROMOD-UK in advance of the Autumn Budget, based on

the most recently released Family Resources Survey (FRS) data and with policies and incomes projected to the following fiscal year.

Additional features will facilitate the analysis of policy options in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England separately as well as the UK as a whole while further innovations will make the use of the model less complex and more user-friendly for non-academic and novice audiences.

Martyn Evans, CEO of the Carnegie Trust, welcomed the project, saying, "This is great news. (...) It could have very significant real world positive impact. It may well transform the insight and advocacy of campaigning."



ISER evidence on racial harassment harm shared with the Independent Office for Police Conduct

Researchers Dr Alita Nandi and Dr Renee Luthra from the Institute for Social and Economic Research shared their findings on the impact of racial harassment with investigators at the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC).

The research, using nationally representative data on ethnic minorities in the UK, has demonstrated a high prevalence of ethnic and racial harassment and a strong association between experiencing ethnic and racial harassment and mental health.

It has particular relevance to the IOPC because ethnic minorities are likely to be mistrustful of authorities, including the police, in the face of widespread personal experience of harassment, and experiences of ethnic and racial harassment will result in ethnic minority clients who are more anxious and depressed.

The researchers have also recently presented the findings to third sector groups and health professionals supporting ethnic minorities in Bradford.





Updated release of tax-benefit microsimulation model EUROMOD and new studies for SOUTHMOD

An updated release of EUROMOD, the tax-benefit microsimulation tool developed by ISER at the University of Essex, includes tax-benefit policies up to 2018 for all countries, 2016 input data for all countries and revisions to older policy systems and datasets.

To access the EUROMOD model I1.0+, please complete the online form available at www.euromod.ac.uk/using-euromod/access/request-I1-0

New studies for the SOUTHMOD project, the UNU-WIDER initiative to create microsimulation models for developing countries based on EUROMOD, were presented at the international Think Development Think WIDER conference in Helsinki.

Grandparents' social class affects grandchildren's opportunities throughout their lives

Grandparents play an important role in shaping grandchildren's life chances over their life courses, from formulating higher aspirations in adolescent years to securing higher educational and class positions in adult life

Dr Min Zhang from the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex with Professor Yaojun Li from the University of Manchester show that the advantages passed on by grandparents to their grandchildren are over and above those passed on by their parents and are independent of parental characteristics.

In the first systematic study of grandparental effects on occupational aspiration and educational and class attainment in contemporary Britain, using data from the British Household Panel Survey

and its successor *Understanding Society*, the researchers followed three generations of each family, until the grandchildren reached adulthood, looking at levels of education, employment status and home ownership.

They found that young people with highly educated professional class grandparents were more than twice as likely to obtain higher education qualifications as children with manual working-class grandparents. Grandsons with self-employed grandfads were significantly more likely to be self-employed, even if their fathers were employees, and girls were similarly influenced but not to such an extent.

Dr Min Zhang said, "Our study shows that grandparents' class still affects grandchildren's life chances in contemporary UK society just as earlier research showed for mid-20th century Britain and that the effects are manifested at different stages of the life course, from occupational aspiration as teenagers to educational attainment as young adults to occupational destination as adults. Among the many factors that might explain the persisting grandparental class effects, increased life expectancy and accumulated resources among the grandparental generation are the main reasons. Grandparents may also have human capital knowledge or symbolic influences on grandchildren's attitudes, values and practices."

Zhang, Min & Li, Yaojun, 'Family fortunes: the persisting grandparents' effects in contemporary British society', *Social Science Research* 77, 179 -192 January 2019.





Half of workers on minimum wage move onto better paid jobs within a year, but most remain stuck in low paid work

New research by Dr Silvia Avram of the ESRC Centre on Micro-Social Change and Professor Susan Harkness of the University of Bristol on the impact of the minimum wage found that women are more likely than men to be trapped in low paid work

Published by the Low Pay Commission, the study analysed data from *Understanding Society*, the UK Household Longitudinal Study, to look at the wage progression of minimum wage job holders between 2009 and 2016 and whether the substantial increases in the minimum wage during this period affected rates of progression.

It also looked at what sort of jobs and what sort of people were moving onto better paid work after a spell working on the minimum wage.

It found that around half of minimum wage workers succeed in finding better paid employment within a year but that of these, four fifths remain in low paid employment. Women, part-time workers, previously unemployed and people working in sectors such as food and accommodation services, and textile manufacturing, have the

lowest chances of moving off minimum wage and onto jobs paying more than two thirds of the median hourly wage.

Low Pay Commissioner Professor Sarah Brown said, "The research we commission is vital for our understanding of the effects of the minimum wage rates we recommend. Over the last 20 years our commissioned research has helped us to successfully fulfil our remit of raising pay for the lowest-paid without causing unemployment. We are very grateful to the passion and commitment of academics from the UK and beyond who have put time and effort into what is a vital area of research, with a real impact on people's lives."

Avram, Silvia & Harkness, Susan, *The NMW/NLW and progression out of minimum wage jobs in the UK*, report for the Low Pay Commission, November 2018.

Professor Peter Lynn interviewed on BBC Radio 4 programme *More or Less*

Peter Lynn, Professor of Survey Methodology at ISER, was interviewed by the BBC Radio 4 numbers and statistics programme *More or Less* about the recent Holocaust Memorial Day Trust survey of British views on the Holocaust, where he explained why the survey is unlikely to be accurate.

Peter is *Understanding Society*'s Associate Director for Methodology and is President of the International Association of Survey Statisticians. His research interests encompass all aspects of survey methodology, with a particular focus on methods for longitudinal surveys. Listen to the full interview at www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m00028cf





Understanding Society Scientific Conference 2019

This international conference, sharing research based on longitudinal household panel studies, will be taking place on July 2-4 at the University of Essex



We're planning a full three days of papers, discussions and workshops, with plenty of opportunities to meet and talk with colleagues from around the world who also use *Understanding Society*.

Sessions at the 2019 Scientific Conference will include:

- adolescence, technology and wellbeing
- geography, jobs and debt
- partnership and employment
- ethnicity and immigration
- event history analysis and
- political socialisation.

Plus there will be a variety of survey methods sessions, advice on working with policy

makers and hands-on training on longitudinal data analysis.

Our keynote speakers are: Professor Tarani Chandola from the University of Manchester, who will be exploring issues around work, health and wellbeing; Professor Hill Kula from the University of St. Andrew's, who will be speaking on partnership change and fertility; and Monica Costa Dias from the Institute of Fiscal Studies, who will discuss IFS work on local labour markets and the gender pay gap.

Registration opens in early April. You can find the full programme, details of fees and the booking form on the conference website at www.understandingsocietyconference.co.uk

New book from Professor Mike Brewer

Professor Mike Brewer, Director of the ESRC Research Centre on Micro-Social Change at ISER, has a new book published this summer.

What Do We Know and What Should We Do About Inequality is part of a new series published by Sage, with overviews of key issues of public concern based on social science research, featuring topics often misrepresented or simplified in the mainstream media.

Available to pre-order, it will be published on 17 June, and covers issues including how we measure inequality, how the UK compares to other nations, geographical inequalities as well as differences between ages or generations and what we could do to tackle inequality.



The Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) is based at the University of Essex and receives funding from the university and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Established in 1989, the Institute incorporates the **ESRC Research Centre on Micro-Social Change (MiSoC)** and **The Microsimulation Unit**, which is responsible for the EUROMOD project. ISER is home to ***Understanding Society***, the UK household longitudinal study which collects information annually, providing valuable new evidence about the people of the UK, their lives, experiences, behaviours and beliefs.

If you are interested in finding out more about the articles in this newsletter or about ISER's work, please contact Louise Clarke Cullen at lcullen@essex.ac.uk

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