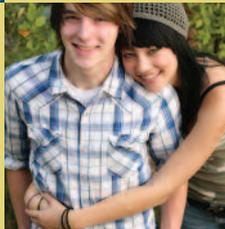




Institute for
Social and Economic
Research

Taking the Long View 2008-2009



About ISER

The Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) specialises in the production and analysis of large and often complex datasets. It collects and uses longitudinal data – evidence that tracks changes in the lives of the same individuals over time – household and other panel studies, as well as diary studies, and cross-national and historical comparative materials.

ISER is an interdisciplinary institute, with specialists in demography, economics, sociology, social policy and social statistics. It is an independent department of the University of Essex and is core-funded by the university and the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). ISER is organised as two divisions: a research centre; and a resource centre.

The research centre: MiSoC

The Research Centre on Micro-social Change (MiSoC) is the base for ISER's substantive research programme. 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 resource centre: ULSC

The UK Longitudinal Studies Centre (ULSC) is the national resource centre for promoting longitudinal research and for the design, management and support of longitudinal surveys. ULSC activities include managing the new UK Household Longitudinal Survey, *Understanding Society*, and the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS). The ULSC also runs a methodological research programme to improve longitudinal survey and analysis methods.

International links

The institute has a strongly international atmosphere, with the majority of its researchers originating from outside the UK. We frequently collaborate with research teams in other countries in comparative analytical programmes, in the organisation of international conferences, in the production of cross-national datasets and in the development of new national panel surveys. ISER also regularly hosts visits from researchers and research groups on the Essex campus, offering analytical advice as well as access to data resources.



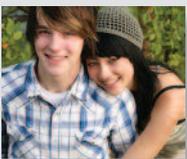
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From the Director

This report is an opportunity to salute ISER's 20th anniversary and to provide a potted history to explain our current profile.

In 1988, a multidisciplinary group at Essex had the idea that Britain needed a household panel survey like the US Panel Study of Income Dynamics and successfully applied to the ESRC for funds for an Interdisciplinary Research Centre to host this new study. On 1 April 1989, the Research Centre on Micro-Social Change (MiSoC) came into being, with Tony Coxon as inaugural director. Wave 1 of the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) began in September 1991. David Rose was acting Director until the appointment of Jonathan Gershuny in July 1993. After a successful ESRC review in 1994, the centre's contract was renewed for a further five years, and three new professors, Alison Booth, Stephen Jenkins and John Ermisch, were funded by the University. By the time our progress was reviewed again, the ESRC had changed its funding structures, distinguishing between resource and research centres. From 1999, our BHPS and related longitudinal survey activities were funded through the new United Kingdom Longitudinal Studies Centre (ULSC), while research activities were largely supported through MiSoC. Both centres received a further five years funding in 2004 after external review and competition. The Institute for Social and Economic Research is the umbrella organisation established in 1999 to house our ESRC centres, together with other activities which have grown substantially.

These other activities include teaching and training. In 2001, we established joint masters programmes with the Departments of Economics and Sociology; today these programmes have a large allocation of ESRC '1+3' quota studentships. Our PhD student numbers have grown from a handful to 25. We continue to receive a large flow of visitors through our EU-funded European Centre for the Analysis in the Social Sciences (ECASS).

New research programmes have developed alongside our traditional strengths. Work on time use, supported by a large ESRC grant, was led by Jonathan Gershuny until his departure to Oxford in 2006. A more contemporary example is tax-benefit microsimulation modelling for European countries, which receives substantial funding from the European Commission. Euromod's cross-national comparative research activities are now being complemented by our new ESRC-funded work on

Analysis of Life Chances in Europe (ALICE). A research area that will develop significantly over the next few years is health and health inequalities.

Although the ESRC continues to be our largest single funder, we receive project funding from government departments, agencies such as the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, and charitable foundations such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Leverhulme Trust and the Nuffield Foundation. We maintain links with the private sector through the Future Foundation, and with a variety of third sector organisations ranging from One Parent Families-Gingerbread to the Runnymede Trust.

All our work continues to be underpinned by complementary survey and research activities, and we continue to receive substantial recognition. In 2006, we successfully bid to ESRC to provide the Scientific Leadership team for the *Understanding Society* household panel study. Interviewing for the first wave of the study began in January 2009. Over the last year we have secured funding for MiSoC for the period 2009-14. In the recent Research Assessment Exercise, ISER contributed staff to the university's units of assessment in 'Sociology' and 'Economics and Econometrics', which were nationally rated first equal and third equal respectively.

So, over 20 years ISER has flourished and grown, and I am confident that it will continue to thrive. We are very grateful to our funders, especially the ESRC and the University of Essex, for their continuing support and confidence in us. ISER's research output and related activities continue unabated, as the contents of this report testify.

My term of office as ISER Director finishes on 31 August 2009, and I am very pleased to report that I shall be succeeded by Heather Laurie.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen Jenkins".

Stephen Jenkins
Director

Ethnicity, identity and inequality

Ethnicity, identity and inequality have been the focus of some significant and high profile research at ISER in the last 12 months. Much of the research has not just informed, but led the way in generating wider debate and discussion of these issues. Lucinda Platt and other ISER researchers have been at the forefront of cutting edge projects working with key organisations and Government departments. They include, among others, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Recent research commissioned by the EHRC found that there are big differences in the hourly pay of full-time workers in the UK according to their ethnic group. Pay gaps relative to White British men were 20 per cent for Pakistani women and men, Black African women and Bangladeshi men. The research showed that these men and women earn less than 80 per cent of the hourly full-time wage of White men. Black African men and Bangladeshi women also had large pay gaps around 18 per cent and White British women had a pay gap of around 16 per cent, while Indian and Chinese men were relatively well paid.

The research, by Lucinda Platt and Simonetta Longhi, also looked at pay gaps for other groups – age, disability, religion, same sex couples – and found large gaps for disability and for some religious groups. Disabled women earned 20 per cent less than non-disabled, while for disabled men the gap was 10 per cent. There were also large gaps for Muslims – men and women – relative to Christians.

The study tried to ascertain the extent to which different levels of qualifications and occupations could help to account for differences in pay. It showed that differences in education helped to explain the pay gaps for a number of groups but that unexplained ‘pay penalties’ remained in most cases, most notably for the disabled.

Pay clearly plays a very important role in family incomes and low pay can increase the risks of child poverty among working families. Rates of poverty vary dramatically across ethnic

groups, one in five White children but two-thirds of Bangladeshi children are growing up in poverty at any point in time. It has also been shown that while workless families have high risks of poverty across all ethnic groups, risks of being in poverty for children in families with at least one worker are much higher for some groups than for others. For example, poverty rates in working families range from around 15 per cent for White children to around 25 per cent for Indian, Black African and Black Caribbean children, to over 50 per cent for Pakistani and Bangladeshi children.

Poverty rates in working families range from around 15 per cent for White children to over 50 per cent for Pakistani and Bangladeshi children

Forthcoming research for the Department for Work and Pensions by Lucinda Platt sets out to provide a much more detailed understanding of these differences in poverty and in poverty risks for particular family types across ethnic groups, using a range of cross-sectional and longitudinal data sources, and looking at sources of family income, poverty persistence and deprivation across ethnic groups.

This timely project, due to be published in May, comes as researchers are predicting the Government will fail to meet its promise to halve child poverty by next year unless another £4.2 billion is spent on the problem. The recent study for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation carried out by ISER’s Holly Sutherland in conjunction with the Institute for Fiscal Studies, shows that, even though the majority of children



living in poverty now have at least one parent in work, they are earning so little they are unable to raise their family above the poverty line.

Meanwhile other ISER research shows that not only are poverty rates higher among children from minority groups, but that ethnic minority children make up a larger share of children – nearly 20 per cent – than ethnic minorities do of the population as a whole – around 15 per cent. This has possible consequences for the share of future adults who will have experienced poverty as a child.

One factor contributing to the larger share of children from an ethnic minority is the growth in dual heritage or ‘mixed ethnicity’ families and children. This was one topic considered in a recent report on ethnicity and family commissioned by the EHRC. The research showed that children from one of the four ‘mixed’ categories make up three per cent of children, whereas only about 0.5 per cent of adults describe themselves as of mixed ethnicity. Increases in mixed race partnerships and the desire of people to acknowledge both, or all, aspects of their heritage result in a multiple heritage population that, though small, is clearly set to increase.

This itself raises questions about how people identify themselves, how they see different aspects of their background and identity contributing to their sense of who they are and whether that changes in different circumstances. A recent ISER working paper looked at the way in which questions about ethnicity are asked in surveys. It showed they did not capture some important aspects of how people see themselves, or adequately allow them to express fully their background and identity. This led to a project, led by ISER’s Alita Nandi, to develop a range of ethnicity related questions for Wave 2 of the UK Household Longitudinal Survey, *Understanding Society*. It’s believed these more focused questions will enable researchers to analyse how people think about themselves, what aspects of their ethnicity are important to them and how they relate to other aspects of their lives such as where and how they live.

With further research being commissioned already for the coming year, this will undoubtedly continue to be an area in which ISER makes a valuable, insightful and outstanding contribution.



Lucinda Platt has undertaken a wide range of research on ethnicity, identity and inequality in recent months. For further information about her work you can contact her at lp Platt@essex.ac.uk

EUROMOD a unique and remarkable resource

Calls from some European countries recently for closer co-operation on financial and economic policies have generated widespread attention and interest, particularly in the wake of the recent global financial crisis. But for some time now there have also been calls for more 'policy learning' across countries in the areas of economic and social policy, especially in relation to the Lisbon Agenda and policies designed to reduce poverty and social inclusion and to promote employment. But while the aims of European governments may be broadly similar, the specific national situations and policy approaches taken vary widely. This makes comparisons and cooperation a challenge.

Since 2004 ISER has led an international team of experts in the development of EUROMOD, the multi-country, tax-benefit model for the whole European Union. This unique research tool has enabled more effective research and analysis of some of the key policy levers – taxes and benefits – across Europe. In February this year, EUROMOD's usefulness and further potential were recognised with a €4.5m grant from the European Commission to update and upgrade the computer-based research tool, and to extend it to cover the whole enlarged European Union over the next three years.

EUROMOD helps us understand not just the effects of policies on areas such as poverty or income inequality in each country, but also the implications and likely impact of possible policy reforms or changes in national economic conditions, for example earnings distribution or unemployment. It has been recognised as a means by which 'policy learning' really can take place. Policy X from country A can be tried out in country B. It provides a framework for analysis that is comparable across countries but takes national specifics into account. As well as calculating distributional effects, it can also provide consistent estimates of budgetary cost and effects on indicators of incentives to work. It can be used as a platform from which to model changes in behaviour as a result of policy changes.



The current version of EUROMOD represents the accumulation of nearly 15 years of technical developments and expertise. Its coverage has recently been expanded from the original EU-15 to include Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia. The process of doing this has provided a 'roadmap' for expanding EUROMOD to cover all 27 countries and upgrading the old version of the model to make it easier to update, maintain and use.

As a multi-country model, EUROMOD is designed to be extremely flexible in order to accommodate a wide range of different tax-benefit systems. This also means it can be used for many different types of analysis and can accommodate new features easily. One example is the addition of some of the results from a recently-completed project (AIM-AP) into the EUROMOD database, permitting the analysis of the distributional effects of non-cash benefits, such as public education, healthcare and housing



subsidies, and indirect taxes alongside the effects of cash benefits and income taxes.

EUROMOD analysis, as a tool for monitoring the effects of policy and as input into evidence-based policy-making, has been taken up by international organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the policy Directorates of the European Commission. EUROMOD activity within some of the new member states has triggered interest in developing similar tools to improve policy-making at the national level.

Recent development of some national tax-benefit models within the EU has made use of EUROMOD. For example, it forms the basis of the Luxembourg Government model. Its framework is also being 'adopted' to help build similar models for other, non-EU countries. This is quicker and much more

cost-effective than starting from scratch and has the added benefit of offering the potential of comparative analysis with the corresponding countries and those in EUROMOD. This knowledge transfer has been successfully achieved for South Africa and is in progress for Turkey and five Latin American countries (LATINMOD). These spin off models make use of the generic tax-benefit modelling 'language', or set of building blocks – that has been developed for EUROMOD. There is plenty of potential to exploit EUROMOD's flexibility in this way and thereby spread ISER's state of the art development around the world.

EUROMOD helps us understand not just the effects of policies on areas such as poverty or income inequality in each country, but also the implications and likely impact of possible policy reforms or changes in national economic conditions

It is the 'community' of people working with, on, and around EUROMOD – its users and developers, as well as stakeholders more generally – that is one of the more remarkable and perhaps unusual features of its history. Part of its future will involve nurturing and encouraging this community as it grows. Some of the recent funding will be used to expand the team to enable us to take EUROMOD into a new phase. In addition we will be working consistently to raise awareness among researchers, international bodies and governments of how EUROMOD can be used to measure the impact of tax and benefit policies on people's living standards, to inform academic research in this area and ultimately help tackle inequality and poverty not just across Europe, but around the world.



Holly Sutherland leads the EUROMOD project. She can be contacted at hollys@essex.ac.uk



Health

The benefits of breastfeeding for health and illness prevention have been widely recognised. In developing countries, exclusive breastfeeding plays a considerable role in reducing infant deaths. However, the public health importance of breastfeeding in healthy infants in developed countries has rarely been quantified. Nevertheless, the Department of Health concurs with the World Health Organisation in recommending exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life.

In a series of papers, ISER's Amanda Sacker, together with colleagues Yvonne Kelly from University College London, Maria Quigley from the National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit, Oxford University and Scott Montgomery from the Karolinska Institute, Sweden, have investigated the effects of breastfeeding in healthy, term infants in the UK. The investigations were able to overcome many of the limitations of previous work through their use of data from the British Cohort studies.

One area that was looked at was the effect of breastfeeding on a child's development. Early identification of a delay in a child's development compared with his or her peers can be crucial in the prevention and treatment of abnormal behaviour and even long-term disability. Previous studies have hinted at positive effects of breastfeeding on developmental outcomes, but it was difficult to really prove the association because there are many other important factors that impact on infant development. Many studies used participants from highly selected groups, such as those born preterm or with low birth weight, and it is not clear how far the results of such studies can be applied to the general population.

The first study set out to remedy these shortcomings. Using the Millennium Cohort Study, a nationally representative longitudinal study of over 18,000 infants, the team looked at physical skills – standing, crawling and walking – as well as coordination – clapping and grasping objects. Parents were interviewed for the first time when most infants were aged nine months, and detailed information was collected on a range of socioeconomic and health factors.

The study examined how long a child had been breastfed, either exclusively or partially, and whether that had any effect on a child's motor skill development. They found that infants who were never breastfed were 50 per cent more likely to have gross motor delay and that increasing duration of breastfeeding seemed to be associated with a reduced likelihood of delay. The protective effect of breastfeeding could not be 'explained away' by biological, socioeconomic, or psychosocial factors and the researchers concluded that this effect was attributable to some component or components of breast milk or feature of breastfeeding and was not simply a product of advantaged social position, education, or parenting style.

A second study looked at the impact of breastfeeding on stress and in particular whether it was associated with less anxiety in children after their parents divorced or separated. Data from the 1970 British Cohort Study, which is following the lives of those born in one week in 1970, were used for this analysis and information collected on almost 9,000 children was used. The study found that children who were not breastfed and whose parents separated or divorced were nine times more likely to suffer anxiety than those children whose parents were still together. Among the breastfed group this association was much lower – only two times the risk, indicating that breastfeeding is associated with resilience against the stress linked with parental divorce or separation.

A third study aimed to measure the effect of breastfeeding on hospitalisation for diarrhoeal and lower respiratory tract infections in almost 16,000 infants who were members of the Millennium Cohort Study. This was the largest study of the effect of breastfeeding on hospitalisation in a developed country.

Approximately 12 per cent of healthy, singleton, full-term infants had been hospitalised at least once by the time they were eight months of age. Just over one per cent had been hospitalised for diarrhoea and 3.2 per cent for lower respiratory tract infections.

Infants who were never breastfed were 50 per cent more likely to have gross motor delay and increasing duration of breastfeeding seemed to be associated with a reduced likelihood of delay

The findings showed that exclusive breastfeeding did protect against hospitalisation for diarrhoea and lower respiratory tract infections and the researchers estimated that more than half of diarrhoea hospitalisations could have been prevented if all infants were exclusively breastfed, and 31 per cent could have been prevented if all were partially breastfed. Similarly, 27 per cent of hospitalisations for lower respiratory tract infections could have been prevented by exclusive breastfeeding and 25 per cent by partial breastfeeding.

The research team concluded that a population-level increase in breastfeeding would be of considerable public health benefit.

New projects on breastfeeding by ISER researchers aim to broaden the research to development in other domains of functioning that set the foundation stones for later life.



Amanda Sacker leads much of the health-related research at ISER. Her work is mainly concerned with life course epidemiology and inequalities in physical and mental health. She can be contacted at asacker@essex.ac.uk

Changing Relationships

Only twenty years ago, the British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, said that ‘The basic ties of the family at the heart of our society are the very nursery of civic virtue. It is on the family that we in government build our own policies for welfare, education and care’. And yet most recent social science books on ‘the family’ are rarely about the family as a whole. There is increasing evidence to show that we have moved from a concern with the family as a unit to a much more complex phenomenon, a network of relationships: between members of a couple, between parents and children, between the children themselves or perhaps wider family members. In one of the first collaborations of its kind, a team of sociologists and economists from ISER have produced a book that examines some of that evidence.

Published in January of this year, *Changing Relationships* has attracted widespread interest not just in the UK, but around the world. It explores the social and economic connections that exist between people such as parent-child relationships and marriages or partnerships but also other observable relationships such as people who live together only some of the time, and friendships.

The book focuses on the way in which we interact and explores what degree of interaction makes a relationship meaningful. For example a brother and sister might be related, but if they don’t interact then their relationship is no more meaningful than the relationship between two strangers. Spouses certainly have a relationship, by definition, while currently residing together, but here too the relationship might resolve to virtually nothing after a separation. Parents and children vary enormously in the extent to which they maintain an observable relationship once children have left home.

Changing Relationships explores some of these shifting relationships and the interactions that take place within them; couples who have a romantic relationship but do not live together; how we choose our partners and our friends; the effects of income on a child’s decision to leave home; the effect of divorce on a couple’s income; how, why and when couples decide to move home – to mention just some of the issues examined.

The book’s editors, Malcolm Brynin and John Ermisch conclude that, after a period of rapid social change, the

questions of interest are no longer about the social function of the family, how stable it is, or even what it can provide for its members, but how relationships are formed and dissolved, how long they last, and how they affect their members. In short what is at issue is not the decline of the family, so much as the rise of the relationship.

There is increasing evidence to show that we have moved from a concern with the family as a unit to a much more complex phenomenon

Changing Relationships offers a fascinating insight into the idea that nowadays there is doubt as to what counts as family, so that the boundaries of the network of relationships we call the ‘family’ are rather blurred. The book’s strength lies in this collaborative approach where the social and economic factors that impact so heavily on all our lives are examined side by side.

***Changing Relationships* is published by Routledge**



**The book’s editors
Malcolm Brynin and
John Ermisch**

Living apart together

Most of us are aware of couples who have a steady relationship, but do not live together. Despite living at different addresses, they are regarded by themselves and others as a couple. This phenomenon has come to be called 'living apart together' or LAT for short. In a chapter in *Changing Relationships*, John Ermisch and Thomas Siedler take a look at some of the evidence from the British Household Panel Study and the German Socio-Economic Panel on living apart together.

In Britain, live-in partnerships, be they formal marriage or not, have been forming later in people's lives. In the new millennium the vast majority of partnerships begin with couples moving in together. These two changes lie behind the large postponement of marriage and motherhood in women's lives. About one half of people living together split up while the rest get married. Another factor of note is how soon couples find someone else after a break-up. In the case of those who were living together, one half find a new partner within about two years, but it takes over seven years for one half of those who were married to find a new partner.

These developments not only mean that more people are spending time without a live-in partner, but also that increasing numbers are living apart together (LAT). So what or who is a LAT, how long do these relationships last and what might this phenomenon mean in the wide-ranging analysis and debate about the changing nature of relationships?

It mainly involves young, never married people aged under 25, and is particularly common among students. But LAT also occurs after separation or divorce, with one fifth of LATs coming from this group. Overall, between one fifth and a quarter of 16-35 year-olds report being in a 'LAT relationship', compared with 18 per cent who are living together. LAT is a more common lifestyle for the better educated, irrespective of age.

In both Britain and Germany about one third of people in a LAT relationship in one year are also in a LAT relationship 5 years later, although their partners may have changed. The German

evidence allows a more detailed analysis of the duration of LATs. It suggests that the 'average' LAT lasts about 4 years, with about 45 per cent splitting up, 35 per cent moving in together and 10 per cent getting married within 10 years. The British evidence on LATs is more limited but suggests they may be shorter in duration: about two-fifths of the relationships in progress in a given year had been going on for two or more years. At the other extreme, about one fifth started less than six months ago. It also appears that the LAT partner usually lives nearby (there is not similar evidence for Germany).

As far as trends are concerned, evidence from Germany indicates that it has been around to a similar extent back to at least the early 1990s. Thus, it may not be a new phenomenon, but rather one that has been overlooked. In any case, it is now the most common form of partnership until people reach their mid-20s, when people begin to live together. As such, it certainly deserves more attention and study.



Survey success

Survey teams hit the streets in January this year for the first round of interviews for the UK Household Longitudinal Survey, better known as *Understanding Society*. This much-awaited new study will collect information annually from across 40,000 UK households and has been described as the most ambitious household survey ever undertaken in the UK.



***Understanding Society* is led by a specialist team of survey experts at ISER. With £15.5m initial funding from the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the study represents the largest single investment in academic social research resources ever made in the UK.**

But while much attention has been focused on launching this challenging project and its potential to contribute to social science, a wide range of impressive work has gone on at ISER to improve survey methodology. Peter Lynn has not only led much of the work within ISER, but also played a leading role in broader initiatives to raise the profile of research into survey methodology. These have included the organisation of a series of international workshops on Panel Survey Methods and sessions and talks at a variety of conferences and events including the Royal Statistical Society, the European Survey Research Association and Statistics Canada.

The study represents the largest single investment in academic social research resources ever made in the UK

Recent research by Peter Lynn and Heather Laurie studied the use of incentives and gifts in to the context of longitudinal surveys. The study showed that even small increases in cash incentives were helpful in preventing respondents from dropping out. More detailed research is planned into the targeting of specific groups with incentives and into longer term effects on a panel.

A study by ISER's Steve Pudney and Gabriella Conti looked into the way in which survey questions are asked and shed new light on the differences in answers given by respondents interviewed orally rather than filling in a questionnaire privately. It also found that respondents answer differently if their partner or children are present and concluded that questions about subjective well-being, happiness or satisfaction should be asked, where possible, by a suitably 'private' mode in order to obtain a full and frank response.

Research by Annette Jäckle into the causes of measurement errors in panel survey data about events has resulted in a new theoretical framework that unifies earlier theories and evidence. This promises to be highly useful to survey designers.

Peter Lynn was the driving force behind a successful bid for a £1.1m grant from the ESRC to create the Survey Resources Network (SRN), a central bank of survey resources whose aim is to support the work of the UK's research community and raise the standards of social science research. Together with the UK Data Archive and the Department of sociology at the University of Essex, ISER is working in partnership with National Centre for Social Research, LSE Methodology Institute, Institute of Education and the University of Southampton to establish the SRN.

In the coming months the SRN's role will be to foster and disseminate best practice in the design and administration of survey research, provide and extend online resources for researchers using existing surveys and forge and strengthen links between academics, policy-makers and survey practitioners. It will also advise the ESRC and the broader research community on strategy matters relating to the use of surveys in the UK.

Peter has also found time to produce a book on survey methodology. Published by Wiley, *Methodology of Longitudinal Surveys* looks at the broad range of issues involved in designing, carrying out and analysing a longitudinal survey. The book contains contributions from the world's leading experts in this field and provides a summary of the state of the art of longitudinal surveys as well as useful insights into panel surveys around the world.



Peter Lynn leads research on Survey Methodology at ISER and can be contacted at plynn@essex.ac.uk



Life chances in Europe: comparative research across the 'new Europe'

ISER has a long track record in comparative research, but the last 12 months has seen a team of researchers embarking on new wide-ranging and highly innovative cross-national project.

Analysis of Life Chances in Europe (ALICE) combines substantive research on incomes, poverty, work and family formation with work on cross-national research methodology. The team, led by Maria Iacovou and Richard Berthoud, includes about a dozen researchers, most based at ISER, but some visiting in order to take part. The £400,000 project, which is funded by the ESRC, will run through 2009-2010.

Most existing cross-national research on Europe has been based on the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) which carries data on 15 Western and Southern European countries. ALICE is based on its successor, the Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), which covers all 27 countries of the newly enlarged EU.

While the pre-enlargement EU-15 states have been extensively studied, the new member states, most of which are in Central and Eastern Europe, have received much less attention. ALICE provides a unique opportunity to explore and compare the conditions prevailing in these so-called transition economies.

Early indications are that the old Eastern bloc countries differ systematically from other European countries. One example comes from some preliminary work undertaken by the ALICE team on incomes. The research shows that across most of Europe, there is an inverse relationship between incomes and poverty, in other words countries with high per capita incomes have lower rates of poverty and inequality than countries where incomes are low. However, it appears that some Eastern European countries buck this trend: Hungary, for example, has very low real incomes, but also relatively low levels of poverty and inequality.

Another innovative feature of this research lies in the fact that it uses two complementary approaches to analyse income distribution and poverty. Standard income analysis is based on reported income – that is, the incomes reported by respondents in surveys such as the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS). The data can be used to calculate measures of income distribution, indices of inequality, poverty lines, poverty rates, movements in and out of poverty, and other poverty indicators. An alternative approach is based on a purpose-built tax-benefit simulation programme 'EUROMOD', which uses some measures of reported income, such as earnings, but which then simulates the taxes and benefits which apply to individuals, families and households.

These two approaches are complementary, and may be expected to generate different results. When looking at the incomes of people with low earnings, for example, it is likely that the standard approach will underestimate these incomes because some people under-report the benefits they receive. The microsimulation approach, on the other hand, may overestimate their incomes if it assumes that everyone takes up all benefits to which they are entitled. By using the two approaches together based on a common data set, it's hoped

researchers can gain useful insights into the interpretation of results, and possible modifications of both methods.

As well as the substantive research already mentioned, ALICE also includes components which investigate issues in cross-national methodological analysis. A number of challenges emerge in cross-national research, which are not present in work based on a single country. One fundamental issue is whether data sets are properly comparable between countries. Even where surveys have been designed to be comparable between countries, cross-national surveys face several important tests of comparability, including differences in measurement properties of survey instruments, differences in non-response bias and differences in the effects of sample design on estimates. In this project, research will focus on the third of these – the effect of the detailed sample design on the accuracy of estimates. By making this part of the wider programme, the team will be able to apply the results empirically and assess whether correcting for the effects of sample design leads to a substantial improvement in the accuracy of estimates.

ALICE combines substantive research on incomes, poverty, work and family formation with work on cross-national research methodology

Cross-national research also throws up challenges in terms of the way in which the various influences on behaviour and outcomes are modelled, and how the results may be appropriately interpreted. The ALICE team is particularly interested in the size of what might be referred to as the 'country effect' in relation to the overall range of differences between individuals; they are also interested in the degree to which these 'country effects' may be explained by differences in social policy or economic factors.



Maria Iacovou and Richard Berthoud are leading the ALICE research team. They can be contacted at maria@essex.ac.uk and berthoud@essex.ac.uk

A year at ISER

Here are some other ISER highlights from the last 12 months.

Jamie's dinners add up to better results for pupils



ISER research shows that celebrity chef Jamie Oliver's campaign to improve school dinners resulted in pupils doing better at school in English and Science and in helping schools cut rates of absenteeism. The study was carried out by Research Associate Michèle Belot and Jonathan James from the Department of Economics at the University of Essex.

Research highlights

Heart and health

Amanda Sacker and colleagues find that coronary heart disease has a more detrimental effect on physical and mental health among those in more disadvantaged socioeconomic positions.

Housework hits women's wages

Mark Bryan and Almudena Sevilla Sanz of the University of Oxford find that women earn less than men because they carry out more domestic chores such as cooking and cleaning. The research also shows that women in couples spend up to eight hours a week more than their partners on housework and much of it is done late in the day when men are putting in extra time at the office.

Working mothers

Research from Alison Booth and Jan van Ours find that the dream of being a corporate high-flyer is losing its appeal for women with children. The research, which used the British Household Panel Survey found that women with part-time jobs were the happiest.

Unemployment and divorce

Research by Morten Blekesaune using the British Household Panel Survey finds that the costs of being unemployed are not simply financial and that married couples who lose their jobs are more likely to divorce.

Crime and drugs

Steve Pudney explores the factors that determine whether or not young people turn to crime and drugs as part of research commissioned by the Home Office. He uses the Offending, Crime and Justice Survey, to examine the extent of offending, anti-social behaviour and drug use, particularly among young people aged from 10 to 25. The research will be used in Government efforts to target resources more effectively at reducing levels of crime and illegal drug use.

Who gets the benefit?

Stephen Jenkins and Lorenzo Cappellari find that the fall in the percentage of working age adults receiving safety net benefits is due mainly to a decline in the rate of entry into benefit receipt between one year and the next.

Popular kids earn more

Research by Steve Pudney and Andrea Galeotti shows that being popular with your peers at school could mean you earn more as an adult. The research, which uses data from the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study, finds a clear link between a student's popularity and their level of earnings later in life.



Judicial Reviews

Research involving Lucinda Platt shows that legal challenges to local authorities help them to improve the service they deliver. Lucinda teamed up with Maurice Sunkin from the Department of Law at the University of Essex to examine the scale and pattern of challenges against local authorities; the relationship between challenges and the quality of service delivered according to Government performance measures; the incentives and obstacles to implementing judgments and the difference that judgments make to local authorities.

Other highlights

Survey starts

Understanding Society goes into the field. It will interview 100,000 individuals in 40,000 households each year making it one of the most ambitious studies of its kind.

Government briefing

16 ISER researchers give a series of presentations to the National Equality Panel. Areas cover current and future research including pay gaps, child poverty, disability, taxes and benefits, parenting and child development.

RAE success

ISER contributes staff to the Economics and Econometrics and Sociology Units of Assessment for the UK-wide Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). Sociology is ranked equal first and Economics and Econometrics are ranked third equal.

Senior Fellow

Ray Pahl is one of only three Senior Fellows elected to the British Academy in 2008 – one of the highest honours available to scholars in the social sciences.

Visiting ISER

A total of 32 visiting researchers are welcomed as part of the European Centre for Analysis in the Social Sciences programme. A range of mainly post-doctoral and senior researchers from Austria, Bulgaria, Switzerland, Germany, Spain, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Slovenia take part in the programme which aims to share research facilities with young researchers in order to create a pan-European Research community and to foster good cross-national research in and on Europe.

PhD success

Four students are awarded their PhDs and will receive their certificates at one of the university's graduation ceremonies in July. There are currently 25 PhD students at ISER, many of whom come from abroad. We continue to attract researchers of the highest calibre, who appreciate the stimulating and supportive environment on offer.

Further reading and references

Details of all ISER's projects and publications are available on the website at <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk>. Below are some further references relating to the articles in Taking the Long View 2008-2009.

Ethnicity, identity and inequality

Who are the UK's minority ethnic groups? Issues of Identification and Measurement in a Longitudinal Surveys

ISER Working Paper 2008-26

by Jon Burton, Alita Nandi and Lucinda Platt (2008)

Pay Gaps Across Equalities Areas

Equalities and Human Rights Commission report

by Simonetta Longhi and Lucinda Platt (2008)

Ethnicity and family: Relationships within and between ethnic groups: An analysis using the Labour Force Survey

Equality and Human Rights Commission report

by Lucinda Platt (2009)

EUROMOD

Swapping Policies: Alternative Tax-Benefit Strategies to Support Children in Austria, Spain and the UK

Journal of Social Policy 36/4 625-647

by Horacio Levy, Christine Lietz and Holly Sutherland (2007)

Bargain O. (ed) Microsimulation In Action: Policy Analysis in Europe using EUROMOD, Research In Labor Economics Vol 25, Elsevier

Improving the Capacity and Usability of EUROMOD

EUROMOD Working Paper EM4/08

by Holly Sutherland, Francesco Figari, Orsolya Lelkes, Horacio Levy, Christine Lietz, Daniela Mantovani and Alari Paulus (2008)

Health

Breastfeeding and Developmental Delay: Findings from the Millennium Cohort Study.

Pediatrics 2006;118:e682-e689

by Amanda Sacker, Maria Quigley and Yvonne Kelly.

Breastfeeding and Hospitalization for Diarrheal and Respiratory Infection in the UK Millennium Cohort Study.

Pediatrics 2007;119:e837-e842

by Maria Quigley, Yvonne Kelly and Amanda Sacker

Changing Relationships

Changing Relationships by Malcolm Brynin and John Ermisch
Routledge Advances in Sociology (2009)

Survey Methodology

Methodology of Longitudinal Surveys edited by Peter Lynn
Wiley (2009)

The Use of Respondent Incentives on Longitudinal Surveys

ISER Working Paper 2008-42

by Heather Laurie and Peter Lynn (2008)

If you're Happy and you Know It, Clap Your Hands! Survey Design and the Analysis of Satisfaction

ISER Working Paper 2008-39

by Gabriella Conti and Stephen Pudney (2008)

Life Chances in Europe, ALICE

Social Europe: Living Standards and Welfare States

Edward Elgar Publishing

by Richard Berthoud and Maria Iacovou (2004, eds)

TÁRKI European Social Report

TÁRKI

by I.G Toth. (2008, ed.)

Other

Impact of Coronary Heart Disease on Health Functioning in an Aging Population: Are There Differences According to Socioeconomic Position?

Psychosomatic Medicine Volume/Edition 70

by Amanda Sacker, Jenny Head and Mel Bartley (2008)

Does Housework Lower Wages and Why? Evidence from Britain

ISER Working Paper 2008-03

by Mark Bryan and Almudena Sevilla Sanz (2008)

Unemployment and Partnership Dissolution

ISER Working Paper 2008-21

by Morten Blekesaune (2008)

The Dynamics of Social Assistance Receipt: Measurement and Modelling Issues, with an Application to Britain

ISER Working Paper 2008-34

by Stephen Jenkins and Lorenzo Cappellari (2008)

Popularity

ISER Working Paper 2009-03

by Gabriella Conti, Andrea Galeotti, Gerrit Mueller and Stephen Pudney (2009)

Judicial Review Litigation as an Incentive to Change in Local Authority Public Services in England & Wales

ISER Working Paper 2009-05

by Lucinda Platt, Maurice Sunkin and Kerman Calvo (2009)

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