

## EDITORIAL

### **A forward stride**

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This issue is the first in *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies*' tenth volume. It is also the first to be produced under the new partnership of the Society for Longitudinal and Lifecourse Studies with Bristol University Press, a new not-for-profit, international publisher of world-class scholarship. The agreement offers the journal a range of benefits and opportunities to be expected from a professional publisher, including an improved author submission system and editorial and production service, a more functional hosting platform for the content and greater visibility through increased marketing and discoverability initiatives. The objectives and scope of the journal as an interdisciplinary international forum for the use of longitudinal evidence to understand the interrelated domains of the human life course remain. The partners aspire to increase the journal's global outreach in terms of readers, contributors and subject matter, and to consolidate its scientific impact. This issue well illustrates the range of the Society's interests, from conceptual methodology to the business of collecting and disseminating longitudinal data, with authors from social and health sciences, as noted below, and evidence from several countries: UK, the US, Australia and Russia.

The first article raises conceptual issues for the empirical study of health inequalities over the life course. In *Reconstructing the mixed mechanisms of health: The role of bio- and sociomarkers*, Virginia Ghiara and Federica Russo, specialists in the philosophy of science, propose a new way to approach the social component of health determination through the identification of sociomarkers at the individual level. These would be analogous to the biological markers (such as body mass index (BMI), inflammation, blood pressure or DNA) that are increasingly being used in social epidemiology, which they argue is facing the risk of 'biological reductionism'. Social markers seek to identify mechanisms or pathways through which the social environment gets 'under the skin' of an individual person. They are not necessarily causes of disease, but signals of the process. For example, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) such as the incarceration of a parent, neglect or abuse can indicate the likelihood of poor health outcomes. The authors argue for disease and illness to be studied holistically with a mix of social and biological information. This implies that the 'social' also has a place in the analysis of recovery from poor health. The authors' call for a holistic

approach across biological and social factors is very much in line with this journal's policy to encourage a cross-domain approach to research on the life course.

The second article includes social, biological and behavioural variables in an empirical study of excess body weight in childhood and early adolescence. Benedetta Pongiglione and Emla Fitzsimons, an epidemiologist and an economist, report on *Overweight and obesity in childhood and adolescence* in a cohort of children born around the millennium in the UK, up to mid-adolescence at age 14. It provides large-scale longitudinal evidence of the evolution of the 'obesity epidemic' in British children (where overweight is more common than obesity per se). While the proportion of the cohort who were either obese or overweight grew substantially from early to mid-childhood, it stabilised between age 11 and 14, when the numbers entering these categories with increased BMI were roughly offset by those with BMI change in opposite direction. Salient predictors of levels and changes in excess weight at 14 range from maternal smoking in pregnancy, birthweight, low socio-economic status of the family, the onset of puberty, low physical activity, late nights, and smoking in adolescence, all of which may have consequences further on the life course, and which can inform policies towards the current generation of children.

The third paper takes off at an age where the previous one finishes, moving to the transition from adolescence to early adulthood and to the Midwestern USA. In *The long-term effects of time use during high school on positive development*, Jasper Tjaden, Dominique Rolando, Jennifer Doty and Jeylan Mortimer (an interdisciplinary team combining sociology, economics and health care) use data from the longitudinal Youth Development Study in St. Paul, Minnesota gathered between 1987 and 2000. It is based on classroom surveys during each of four high-school years (age 14/15 to 17/18) and a postal follow-up at 26. The authors create an index of positive development based on 'objective' attainments in education and (at 26) the labour market combined with the subject's assessment of expectations and satisfaction, and focus particularly on those who report doing better or worse at 26 than at 18. Recognising that adolescent life is not confined to school attendance, they ask how the way adolescents spent their time out of school might be related to outcomes at ages 18 and 26. Using the teenagers' report of time spent in three key activities, they find that, all else equal, homework was related to favourable outcomes, and spending weekday evenings with friends with unfavourable outcomes. Spending time in (organised) extracurricular activities, such as sport or theatre, though a potential investment in non-cognitive or social capital, showed a more moderate 'return' in 'positive development', at 26 only. It will be interesting to see how such a picture changes for those whose youth is lived in the era of social media and electronic devices.

In the fourth paper, Nicola Pensiero and Ingrid Schoon (quantitative social science and developmental psychology) also follow adolescents through their final years of secondary education. The title summarises their paper: *Social inequalities in educational attainment: The changing impact of parents' social class, social status, education and family income, England, 1986–2010*. Its focus is on the key transitions through which education attainments lead on to social mobility or immobility in adulthood. They consider three domains of inequality in parental background, and three hurdles to be surmounted, between no qualifications at 16 and passing A-level exams, normally at 18, the gateway to university. The evidence comes from two cohorts who reached 16 in 1986 and 2005/6 (British Cohort of 1970 and Next Steps, respectively), each followed to age 20 over periods with contrasting economic and policy environments.

The contribution of this paper is to point to the importance of the earliest hurdle at age 16 in reinforcing multidimensional intergenerational disadvantage.

We then present two Study Profiles, from two further countries: *An introduction to the Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth (LSAY)*, by John Moore and Ronnie Semo, and the Russian panel study *Trajectories in Education and Careers*, by Valeriya Malik. These studies are also concerned with the transition from mid-adolescence to early adulthood, and both have authors specialised in the study of education. They have a common feature in linking the results collected from a class of 14/15 year olds (ninth grade) assessed under the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). These results are linked to follow-up data – to age 25 in Australia, and to age 20, so far, in Russia. Each study follows several cohorts. In LSAY there are four linked to PISA starting in 2003, preceded by two starting in 1995 and 1998. Annual questionnaires cover a wide range of topics. The national cohort in Russia started more recently, with students in 2012 completing PISA assessments at 14/15, linked to results of the TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) maths assessment from 2011. It was also preceded by other smaller, regional cohorts, and is complemented with an in-depth qualitative study. The follow-up questionnaires in Russia cover aspirations and expectations as well as education and employment attainments, some of the topics asked of the teenagers in St. Paul such as homework, and other activities, plus, in this case, social media. Results document how young people in Russia, as in many other countries, come to an education crossroads in their mid-teens, where academic and vocational tracks divide. There has already been a large body of research done on the longer-running Australian data set, as indicated in the profile. There are also several other PISA-linked longitudinal surveys cited in the profiles. Taken together or separately these two studies offer good opportunities for further secondary and collaborative research, of which we are pleased to make our readers aware.

Although it was not by design, it is perhaps fitting that the inaugural issue of the new venture should feature the transition to adulthood as a theme of four of the six papers. While the content of this issue confirms continuity rather than a change of direction, one sign of the new departure is the journal's new cover image. The Society for Longitudinal and Lifecourse Studies is marching forward through time, like the people depicted. The lives our studies follow also leave footprints and cast shadows as they go. The shadows repeat a motif in the original cover (silhouetted pedestrians advancing into light), which served our first nine volumes. The rippled sand in the new cover is also a metaphor for the passage of time, which featured, for example, in the cover the classic book about the 1946 British birth cohort, *The Imprint of Time* (Oxford, 1991) by Michael Wadsworth, one of the founders of this journal. The final choice of an image for the new cover was inspired by the image printed below. It symbolises the life course with rivulets of water flowing through various channels in sand ripples. It is included, at the publishers' suggestion, to commemorate the young photographer, one of many whose life course ended too soon, as a dedication to this new venture.



Photo: Ben Martin 1985–2009