



Active Transport and Health- Policy Seminar Abstracts
****Tuesday 7 January 2014, UCL**

Presentation 1: Active travel to school and the risk of obesity

The relationships between markers of physical activity, including the ways children travel to school and the risk of unhealthy weight will be examined. To do this, data from the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) when cohort members were aged 7 (and depending on data availability aged 11) are used. Obesity rates increase through the early childhood years, and social gradients become more apparent but the drivers of increased obesity rates are not well understood. The paper aims to explore the contribution of physical activity to the risk of obesity in early childhood. Initial analyses show that children from less well-off homes are more likely to walk or cycle to school but less likely to participate in out of school sports activities. The data also suggest that walking and/or cycling to school are linked to a lower risk of obesity.

Yvonne Kelly, who is Professor of Lifecourse Epidemiology at UCL and is the Associate Director of ICLS will present this work. Her research interests include the causes and consequences of socioeconomic inequalities in childhood health and development.

Presentation 2: Does active commuting predict healthy weight and body composition?

It is widely accepted that physical activity reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease and is an important factor in healthy weight maintenance. However, overall levels of physical activity have declined in the developed world, and tackling obesity is a public health priority. Active commuting is thought to be a particularly effective way of getting exercise, as it is easily adopted and likely to be maintained as part of one's daily routine. Using nationally representative data from Understanding Society, this study investigates the extent to which active commuting independently predicts body mass index (BMI) and percentage body fat in working adults. Commuting was defined using three categories designed to capture increasing levels of typically incorporated physical activity: private transport (car, taxi, etc); public transport (train, bus, etc); and active transport (walking or cycling). The results show that compared to private transport users, men and women who commuted via public or active modes had significantly lower BMI scores and lower percentage body fat. Adjustment for various factors which independently affect both commute mode choice and body weight (e.g. age, diet, socioeconomic position, limiting illness/disability, etc.) did not alter these results. These findings corroborate results from other studies suggesting that incorporating a greater level of physical exertion into the journey to work may help individuals maintain a health weight and body composition. The use of objectively measured height, weight and percentage body fat observations from a large nationally-representative sample increases our confidence in the reliability of these findings.

****NB. New Date**

http://www.ucl.ac.uk/icls/policy_seminars
RSVP essential. Email: icls@ucl.ac.uk

Ellen Flint, who is a Research Fellow in Social Epidemiology at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, will present this work. Her interests broadly lie in the spatial and temporal patterning of health outcomes and their social determinants. Ellen's research to date has involved the application of quantitative analytical methods to large, longitudinal datasets. Research areas include: active travel and cardiovascular health; working poverty, unemployment and mental health; food retail environments and diet-related health outcomes.

Presentation 3: Bus passes, active travel and health.

This presentation will draw on two papers co-authored by the presenter. This is an ongoing programme of work which uses data from major British sources to investigate use of active transport among older people in the UK, the impact of the National Bus Pass scheme on older people's travel, and the relationship of active transport with health. The first paper uses the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) to show that older people who are eligible for free bus travel use public transport more and have reduced odds of obesity. The second paper uses data from the National Travel Survey (NTS) and finds that older people with a bus pass use public transport more often and walk more frequently.

Elizabeth Webb, who is a research associate in UCL's Department of Epidemiology and Public Health working with the ESRC International Centre for Lifecourse Studies in Society and Health (ICLS), will present this work. She has previously worked at Imperial College London and was awarded her PhD from UCL in 2008. She has an interest in active travel and its benefits for health across the life course.

Presentation 4. Attitudes to transport and willingness to change behavior.

This presentation will report data from the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA). BSA is one of Britain's most well-known and respected social surveys and enables us to see how attitudes to a wide range of important social issues have changed since the mid-1980s. It will present data from a series of questions on transportation. The presentation will have a particular focus on how people's attitudes toward travel with respect to the environment and climate change have changed in recent years. It will also look at people's willingness to change to more environmentally-friendly modes of transport.

Eleanor Taylor, who is a Senior Researcher at NatCen Social Research will present this work. She is part of the British Social Attitudes research teams and also works on the National Travel Survey.

Glossary

The British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) is an annual statistical survey conducted in Great Britain by NatCen Social Research since 1983. The BSA involves in-depth interviews with over 3,000 respondents, selected using random probability sampling, focused on topics including newspaper readership, political parties and trust, public expenditure, welfare benefits, health care, childcare, poverty, the labour market and the workplace, education, charitable giving, the countryside, transport and the environment, the European Union, economic prospects, race, religion, civil liberties, immigration, sentencing and prisons, fear of crime and the portrayal of sex and violence in the media. The BSA was not conducted in 1988 and 1992.

Cohort studies sample a cohort (defined as a group of subjects experiencing some event - typically birth - in a selected time period) and study them at intervals through time.

The English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) collects multidisciplinary data from a representative sample of the English population aged 50 and older. The survey data are designed to be used for the investigation of a broad set of topics relevant to understanding the ageing process. Themes covered include health trajectories, disability and healthy life expectancy, the determinants of economic position in older age; the links between economic position, physical health, cognition and mental health; the nature and timing of retirement and post-retirement, labour market activity; household and family structure, social networks and social supports; patterns, determinants and consequences of social, civic and cultural participation and predictors of well-being. ELSA is run by teams at University College London (UCL), the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), National Centre for Social Research and the University of Manchester. Current funding for ELSA will extend the panel to cover a period of 12 years. ELSA is funded jointly by the National Institute on Aging in the US and a consortium of UK government departments.

A longitudinal study is a research study involving repeated surveys of the same individuals over long periods of time — often many decades, unlike cross-sectional studies that are conducted for a set period.

The Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) follows the lives of a sample of about 19,000 babies born in the UK in the year 2000/2001. It is the fourth longitudinal birth cohort study conducted in the UK and is aimed at creating a multi-purpose dataset which describes the diversity of backgrounds into which children are born in the beginning of the 21st century. The MCS is funded mainly by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and various government departments and managed by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS)

The National Travel Survey (NTS) is the primary source of data on personal travel patterns in Great Britain. The NTS is an established household survey which has been running continuously since 1988. It is designed to monitor long-term trends in personal travel and to inform the development of policy. Survey fieldwork is conducted by NatCen Social Research. Data collection consists of a face-to-face

interview and a one week self-completed written travel diary. Approximately 20,000 individuals, in 8,000 households, participate in the NTS each year.

Understanding Society is an interdisciplinary study of the socio-economic circumstances of adults and children in 40,000 British households. It is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and run by the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER). The study allows for deeper analysis of a wide range of sections of the population as they respond to regional, national and international change. Understanding Society will greatly enhance our insight into the pathways that influence peoples longer term occupational trajectories; their health and well-being; their financial circumstances; and personal relationships and attitudes. The study captures biomedical data on 20,000 participants and place this alongside rich social histories, helping to weigh the extent to which people's environment influences their health. The first data collection took place in 2009