



## Policy Seminar Abstracts

### Early Childhood Health & Development Tuesday 6 December 2011, University College London

#### **Presentation 1.** Health inequalities in the early years - Evidence from the Growing Up in Scotland Study

The 2008 report of the Ministerial taskforce on health inequality in Scotland - *Equally Well* - highlighted the early years as a priority area of concern. The Scottish Government's *Early Years Framework* is committed to leveling the outcomes and opportunities for all children and identifying those children at risk of poor outcomes. January 2012 sees the re-introduction of universal child reviews (at 24-30 months) which will include assessments of language development and behaviour. The presentation addresses the following questions:

- What is the extent and character of Scotland's health inequalities in the early years?
- What factors, if any, correlate with the avoidance of negative early health outcomes, among families from disadvantaged backgrounds?

Catherine Bromley is Deputy Director of the Scottish Centre for Social Research, part of NatCen. She joined NatCen's quantitative research department in 1998 and specializes in the design and analysis of large-scale surveys. Her main research interests are health inequalities and the early years. In January 2012 she will be starting a PhD at the University of Edinburgh exploring inequalities in children's cognitive development and screening/surveillance practice in Scotland.

#### **Presentation 2.** Does family structure and changes in family structure affect child health, and, if so how?

In spite of much public debate around families, marriage and child outcomes, the UK literature on this topic remains incomplete. In this talk, information and analysis from the Millennium Cohort Study will be presented to determine whether family structure and changes in family structure are associated with children's physical health - as opposed to the more commonly reported outcomes such as cognitive function or education achievements - and to explore potential pathways through which these associations operate.

This presentation will show that change happens in a variety of different family types and that socio-economic factors such as income,

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employment status, education are important predictors of both family structure and child health.

Lidia Panico is a postdoctoral fellow at the Gender Institute, London School of Economics (LSE). Her Ph.D. work explores the relationship between family structure and child health using longitudinal techniques; she is continuing this research at LSE. Her research interests include socio-economic and ethnic inequalities in outcomes for children and the use of longitudinal data and methods.

**Presentation 3. Breastfeeding and cognitive development.**

Frank Field's review on poverty and life chances found overwhelming evidence that children's life chances are most heavily predicated on their development in the first five years of life. The most cost-effective way to help and support young families is in the earliest years of a child's life. Using data from the Millennium Cohort Study we present some findings on the relationship between breastfeeding and cognitive development. The role of duration and exclusivity of breastfeeding practices for cognitive test scores and Foundation Stage Profiles at 5 years are described. We discuss the beneficial effects for children's life chances from policies that encourage prolonged breastfeeding.

Amanda Sacker is Professor of Quantitative Social Science at the Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex and the ESRC International Centre for Lifecourse Studies. Her research interests include life course epidemiology and inequalities in physical and mental health. She is particularly interested in modelling techniques for longitudinal studies.

**Presentation 4. Time for bed?**

Sleep is essential for the maintenance of healthy functioning throughout all stages of life. Families often experience competing time pressures – on the one hand for children there are unprecedented opportunities and expectations for extracurricular activities, and, on the other hand, we see parents and carers working long and/or unsociable hours. In turn, these often conflicting time pressures might impact unfavourably on the amount of sleep children get. And in the face of prevailing attitudes on child rearing raise questions for parents and carers – *Is there a bed time that should be adhered to? Or not exceeded? Is it OK for children to stay up until parents/cares get home from work?* Using data from the Millennium Cohort Study we look at relationships between bedtimes and markers of child development.

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Yvonne Kelly is Professor of Lifecourse Epidemiology at the Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex and the International Centre for Lifecourse Studies (ICLS). Her research interests include ethnic and social inequalities in child health and development, and the processes and pathways that underlie inequalities.

### **Glossary**

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. A Household panel survey is an important sub-type of cohort study. This type of study draw representative households, following all individuals through time on a usually annual basis.

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

Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) follows the lives of thousands of children right across Scotland from infancy through to their teens. As one of the largest studies ever done in Scotland it provides information to help develop policies and plan services for children and their families. 8,000 children were enrolled into the study in 2005-06, 5,000 were babies (~10 months) born between June 2004 and May 2005, 3,000 were toddlers (~34 months) born between June 2002 and May 2003. A further 6,000 children born between March 2010 and February 2011 will be enrolled during 2010-11. Families will be visited when their baby is 10 months old

GUS is commissioned and funded by the Scottish Government and is being carried out by the Scottish Centre for Social Research (ScotCen) in collaboration with the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR) at the University of Edinburgh and the MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit in Glasgow.

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)