Isolation and Health Policy Seminar
Wednesday 21 June 2017, UCL Haldane Room.

Abstracts

Introduction: In the last decade, the Europe 2020 strategy included targets to prevent older people from being socially excluded and the Campaign to End Loneliness was launched in the UK. With the relationship of health and well-being with social isolation and loneliness being increasingly recognised, this seminar of four presentations showcases recent research on longitudinal changes in health and social isolation and what might be done to break the link between them. The first presentation reports on changes in walking speed and difficulties in activities of daily living for socially isolated and lonely older people. This is followed by a talk which asks whether it is poor health that leads to social isolation or social isolation that precedes declines in health. The third presentation explores what aspects of where older people live influence how isolated they feel. The fourth talk considers whether sustaining enjoyment of life, implicit in ideas of social inclusion, can lead to a longer life.

Seminar Co-ordinator: Amanda Sacker, Professor of Lifecourse Studies, UCL and ICLS Director.

Presentation 1: Social Isolation and Loneliness: Prospective Associations With Functional Status in Older Adults

Abstract: This analysis examined the associations between social isolation and loneliness, and two measures of functional status (walking speed and difficulties in activities of daily living such as dressing or eating) in 3070 participants aged 60 years and over who participated in the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing. Individuals who were more isolated and those who were lonelier had slower walking speeds after 6 years. This effect was more marked among individuals who were more socioeconomically disadvantaged. Lonely participants were also more likely to have an increase in difficulties with activities of daily living after 6 years.

Speaker: Aparna Shankar is a Senior Lecturer in Behavioural Medicine at St. George’s, University of London. Her research focusses on the role of social connections in health and well-being, particularly among older adults.
Presentation 2: Chicken or egg? Social exclusion and health in older age

Abstract: Social exclusion of the elderly is a key policy focus but evidence on the processes linking health and social exclusion is hampered by the variety of ways that health is used in social exclusion research. We present research investigating longitudinal associations from health to social exclusion and vice versa using a theoretical framework that did not conflate them. Poor health predicted later social exclusion. Given heath status at baseline, those who were more socially excluded also had poorer health outcomes. Modifiable factors that might reduce the link between social exclusion and health will be discussed.

Speaker: Amanda Sacker is Director of the ESRC International Centre for Lifecourse Studies in Society and Health. Her work focusses on how social environments influence health across the life span.

Presentation 3: Neighbourhoods, social exclusion and health in later ages

Abstract: The role of place in ageing well is emphasized in policies such as age friendly places, which focusses on services, facilities and access. A complementary concept is age enabling places where older people feel empowered. In this presentation, we show how environmental press can lead to social exclusion and poorer health.

Speaker: Gopalakrishnan Netuveli is the Professor of Public Health, Institute of Health and Human Development, UEL where he leads the ageing well stream of research. His current work include evaluating public health programmes in the UK as well as low and middle income countries.

Presentation 4: Sustained enjoyment of life and mortality at older ages

Abstract: In this work we test whether the number of reports of enjoyment of life over a four year period is quantitatively associated with mortality, using data from ELSA. We found that mortality was inversely associated with the number of occasions on which participants reported high enjoyment of life. The results add a new dimension to understanding the significance of subjective wellbeing for health outcomes by documenting the importance of sustained wellbeing over time.

Speaker: Paola Zaninotto is a Lecturer in Medical Statistics at UCL. Her main research interests are on physical health and wellbeing at older ages, and on statistical methods for longitudinal data.

RSVP essential: icls@ucl.ac.uk
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 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 English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) is a unique and rich resource of information on the health, social, wellbeing and economic circumstances of the English population aged 50 and older. The current sample contains data from up to six waves of data collection covering a period of eleven years. The ELSA includes objective and subjective data relating to health and disability, biological markers of disease, economic circumstance, social participation, networks and well-being. The multidisciplinary and longitudinal nature of the data allows for the examination of complex relationships and causal processes.

Statistical significance is the probability that an effect is not due to just chance alone. It is an integral part of statistical hypothesis testing where it is used as an important value judgment. In statistics, a result is considered significant not because it is important or meaningful, but because it has been predicted as unlikely to have occurred by chance alone.

The UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) is now known as Understanding Society. It is the largest panel survey in the world, supporting social and economic research. Its sample size is 40,000 households from the United Kingdom or approximately 100,000 individuals. As a panel survey, Understanding Society is a form of longitudinal study which means that the survey consists of information about the same individuals at regular intervals and so can be used to track changes in people’s lives and attitudes over time. It can also be used to measure phenomena such as poverty persistence, unemployment duration, duration of marriage or cohabitation and analyze the factors that affect these durations. 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 enhances our insight into the pathways that influence peoples longer term occupational trajectories; their health and well-being, their financial circumstances and personal relationships. The study is mainly funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, and led by the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Essex.