

PATHFINDER



The Pathways to Adulthood Newsletter



Welcome

Pushing the frontiers of research on productive youth development with a focus on the dissemination and application of these findings is the goal of a new and exciting endeavor, the PATHWAYS Post-Doctoral Fellowship Programme funded by the Jacobs Foundation.

Initiated in October 2008, the programme offers the opportunity for outstanding young scholars to work with experts in the field with the aim to develop and advance our understanding of the challenges facing young people today and ways of how to support the development of professional and social competences among young people. A consortium of several leading institutions located in Finland, Germany, Sweden, UK, and the US provides expert input and mentoring to the next generation of researchers engaged in the study of young people's life from a multidisciplinary perspective.

This first issue of the PATHWAYS Newsletter reports on a productive first year of collaborative work. During 2009 we disseminated our work at national and international level to academic as well as policy audiences. PATHWAYS Fellows presented their work at the 2009 meeting of the Social Research Association in London, the 2010 Meeting of the Society for Research on Adolescence (SRA) in Philadelphia, and at the meeting of the European Association

for the Research of Adolescence (EARA) in Vilnius.

Our research has been well received and was endorsed by key policy makers, including the UK Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, and the Finnish Minister of Education.

Some of the evidence generated is presented here. This includes a summary of a journal article published in *Social Indicators Research* by Martin Tomasik and Rainer Silbereisen, investigating perceptions of changing demands associated with globalization. A new field of research is introduced: the study of school burnout among school children at different stages of their education, which has been initiated by Katariina Salmela-Aro. An overview of a new book publication on the *Transition from School to Work*, edited by Ingrid Schoon and Rainer Silbereisen, will be given and comparative findings on the importance of school motivation are outlined.

Upcoming events in 2010 include workshops in Helsinki and in Jena, as well as an international PATHWAYS conference in London, focusing on gender differences in aspirations and attainment.

Please visit our website if you like to join our mailing list or find out more about our work and the team: www.pathwaystoadulthood.org

In Brief

Globalization in the Eye of the Beholder

Article by Martin J. Tomasik and Rainer K. Silbereisen
Center for Applied Developmental Science at the University of Jena, Germany
Page 2

One in five girls in upper secondary school suffers from school burnout

Article by Katariina Salmela-Aro
University of Helsinki
Page 4

Transitions from School to Work Globalization, Individualization, and Patterns of Diversity

A new book edited by Ingrid Schoon and Rainer K. Silbereisen
Page 6

School motivation predicts career development – even in the face of adversity

Article by Ingrid Schoon
Institute of Education and Jacquelynne S. Eccles, University of Michigan
Page 7

Gender differences in aspirations and attainment Conference

Forthcoming event at Institute of Education, London, UK
12-13 July 2010
Page 8

Globalization in the eye of the beholder

Psychological studies on the individual effects of radical political and economic transformations such as the breakdown of the Berlin wall are rare and those studies that exist have often produced ambiguous results. This is partly because such transformations were considered so powerful and ubiquitous that individual differences in being affected by such changes were thought to be ignorable. Recent research shows that there is vast interindividual variation in adjustment.

Martin J. Tomasik and Rainer K. Silbereisen
Center for Applied Developmental Science at the University of Jena, Germany

In this article we will present some empirical findings on the prevalence and distribution of demands of social change in Western and Eastern Germany that were recently published in *Social Indicators Research*. The results reported in this paper were based on an ongoing longitudinal study launched in 2005. About 3000 adults (16-43 years old) in East and West Germany were interviewed about their perception of demands associated with social change and how they dealt with them.

Study participants were asked for their endorsement of several statements (see examples below) on a scale ranging from 1 (does not apply at all) to 7 (fully applies).

Examples of demands of social change in work and family life

Work: When considering the past five years

- it has become more difficult for me to plan my career path.
- today I have to be prepared more for the possibility of reluctantly only working part-time instead of fulltime.
- the risk of losing my job has increased.
- my career plans were more often hindered by unforeseen events and circumstances.
- it is now more likely that I will be forced to accept a job requiring lower qualifications than those I have.
- there are currently fewer job opportunities for me.

Family: When considering the past five years

- I have now to take more things into account when it comes to decisions concerning the relationship with my partner or family.
- it is more difficult to decide, given my present life circumstances, whether I want to have a(n)other child or not.
- the knowledge and experience of my parents now provide less sense of direction in my life.
- it is more likely that I now have to reckon with being or once again becoming financially long-term dependent on my parents.
- my personal contacts are now less reliable.
- it is now more likely that my partner could leave me.

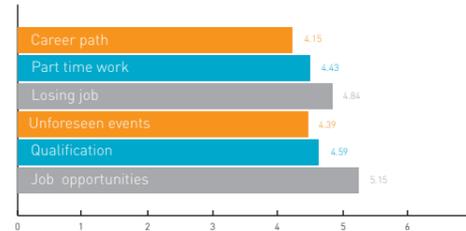


Fig 1 Family and relationship

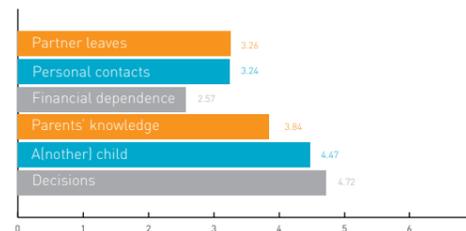


Fig 2 Work and occupation

In the domain of work, participants agreed most that compared to five years ago, there were fewer job opportunities for them, and that it was more likely that they will be forced to accept a job below their qualification (see Fig 1). In the domain of family life, participants agreed most strongly that they had to take more things into account when it came to decisions concerning their relationship or family, and that it is more difficult to decide whether they wanted to have a(n)other child or not (see Fig 2). These findings represent evidence that many people directly experience the effects of major societal trends in their everyday life.

Who is particularly affected by social change?

We tested hypotheses on who was particularly affected by a high cumulation of demands in work and family life (i.e. many demands perceived to occur at the same time) in order to identify groups in the population that were probably at risk of being overburdened by them. It turned out that for both work and family life the risk for a high load of demands were quite similar. However, we found substantial differences in demand cumulation between participants from Eastern and Western Germany, indicative of the higher level of social change people in the East had to deal with due to the more turbulent historical trajectory and more uncertainties in the labour markets. This finding thus stands for the aftershock still experienced by East Germans almost two decades after political unification.

Participants who were unemployed and in search of work, but also those outside the labour market reported a much higher cumulation of demands. This indicates the major role of employment status as a central resource in times of social change, and is in line with other research which found that those who are outside the labour market and are not protected by welfare state regulations or seniority are at highest risk to become the “losers of globalization”. Regarding partnership status we found that compared to participants who were married, those who are divorced or separated experienced more demands. Interestingly, subjects who reported being single or cohabitating were not worse off in terms of demands they experienced. In other words, it seems it is the loss of a relationship that makes people prone to uncertainty and not the different family arrangements they have entered. This conclusion, though, needs an important qualification since our data showed that not having a partner and at the same time being outside of the labour market was the strongest risk factor in our study. Not having the financial resources alone seems less a decisive factor for a particularly high confrontation with demands of social

change. It is the combination of lacking income and lacking spousal support which puts people at risk.

Those who are outside the labour market and are not protected by welfare state regulations, seniority and the like are at highest risk to become the “losers of globalization” (Hofäcker, Buchholz & Blossfeld, 2010). However: Not having the financial resources alone seems less a decisive factor than the combination of lacking income and lacking spousal support which puts people at risk.

Education as a means to strive against the odds

A factor making a difference in just one domain of life only was education, and it was no big surprise to find that subjects with higher education experienced fewer demands in their work context. Education is one of the few resources shielding off the negative consequences of social change – unless there is too much turmoil making educational certificates of the past obsolete. Education can become effective in two different ways. First, higher education is an important asset on the labour market and thus shields off demands related to career uncertainty and unstable work contracts. It allows individuals a smoother transition from school to work life and protects them from precarious career pathways. Second, even if confronted with many demands of social change, higher educated individuals probably have more resources to cope effectively, for instance, they may have better access to information or institutional support.

Where to go next?

We now have established evidence regarding which demands are prevalent in the population and which subgroups are particularly at risk to experience many of the negative consequences social change brings about. Particularly at risk are the unemployed, especially if they also have experienced a separation from their partner, people of low education, and those from Eastern Germany.

Future research will address, for instance, questions about antecedents of resilience vis-a-vis an overload of demands of social change by utilizing the demands measure as a developmental outcome variable, in order to identify successful pathways into adulthood. Also, we are going to analyse how people's load of demands changes over time as a function of their personal and social resources, and of their way to negotiate these demands. This will enable us to identify further risk and protective factors for a high confrontation with social change; and to delineate ways of dealing with social change that are adaptive in terms of the successful mastery of age-adequate developmental tasks, subjective well-being or health.

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One in five girls in upper secondary school suffers from school burnout

The transition from basic education to upper secondary school is a challenge for many young people. According to a recent study of school burnout among Finnish school children at different stages of their education, upper secondary school has been identified as a particularly challenging stage for many young people (Salmela-Aro, Kiuru & Nurmi, 2008). School burnout is a chronic school-related stress syndrome which manifests as exhaustion, cynicism about school and feelings of inadequacy (Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, Leskinen & Nurmi, 2009). Success-oriented female upper secondary school pupils are at the greatest risk, as up to 20 cent of them suffer from school burnout.

Katariina Salmela-Aro
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University of Helsinki

Success oriented girls are high achievers but they also develop burnout and tend to develop feelings of inadequacy, in particular, in upper secondary school. By contrast, boys who enter upper secondary school tend to develop more of a cynical, negative stance towards school. The FinEdu study was carried out in the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies comprising 1,800 young people. It was funded by the Academy of Finland and the Jacobs Foundation.

The study focused particularly on students' tendencies to well-being or problems during transitional stages in their education.

Transitions from one stage of education to the next have an impact on the well-being of young people and they need support during these life stages. A healthy level of self-respect is a protective factor

School burnout is a phenomenon to be taken seriously, as it can lead to depression later on in life. (Salmela-Aro, Holopainen & Savolainen, in press) and delay further educational transitions (Vasalampi, Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, in press).

The school environment

In basic education, school burnout is caused by a negative atmosphere in school, usually in the form of a stressful and restless working environment. Support from the adult staff of the school, especially the school healthcare services, helps reduce school burnout. Teachers who have a positive attitude and the ability to motivate students are extremely helpful for upper secondary school students. The more encouragement the students got from their teachers, the less likely they were to experience school burnout (Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, Pietikäinen & Jokela, 2008).



Burnout shared in the family

The results showed furthermore that parental work burnout was associated with adolescent school burnout – suggesting that burnout can affect the whole family. The associations were particularly strong between mothers and daughters and fathers and sons – suggesting gender typical patterns of transmission (Salmela-Aro, Tynkkynen & Vuori, in press).

The role of school engagement

For the first time in Finland, research was also conducted on burnout and academic engagement among students in higher education (Salmela-Aro, 2009). The data was provided by the Finnish Student Health Service (FSHS) and comprised information on 5,200 students. Results show that one in ten students in higher education suffers from burnout and one in three is at risk. However, the good news is that one in four students in higher education feel engagement for their studies. School engagement is characterised by energy, dedication and an ability to become absorbed in the work (Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, Leskinen & Nurmi, 2009).

The research evidence suggests that compared to other disciplines, medical students were most dedicated to their studies and least likely to suffer from burnout.

Students' engagement with their studies declines over time, which raises the question of what happens to the highly motivated students who enter higher education. A sense of optimism during university studies along with high self-esteem tend to predict job satisfaction ten years later on, while an avoidance strategy tends to predict work-related burnout.

Commitment to studies predicts lesser probability of burnout in working life

Strategies used in handling stress and responsibilities during university studies could indicate whether a person is likely to suffer burnout during his or her early career. If a student experiences increase in optimism while in university, he or she is more likely to show dedication toward work and engagement toward his or her career. Constant avoiding of tasks, on the other hand, could foretell dissociating oneself from one's work as well as an augmented likelihood of exhaustion and burnout after entering working life.

The relationship between attitudes during university studies and surviving the challenges encountered during one's early employment career is another focus of research activity at the Helsinki University Collegium for Advanced Studies. The longitudinal study was designed to examine the development of motivation during and after university studies (Salmela-Aro, Tolvanen & Nurmi, 2009).

The results showed that students' optimistic attitudes toward their studies and career resulted in higher levels of work engagement 17 years after leaving university, highlighting the long-term benefits of early commitment and attitudes towards one's studies.

Pessimism and noncommittal behavior, conversely, predicted burnout and exhaustion in work during the next 10-17 years after finishing studies. Focusing on the tasks at hand and finding positive strategies of handling stress could supply a student with mental resources crucial in making the transfer into the world of everyday work and competitive career construction.

According to the results of the study, attempts to change negative attitudes affecting a student's performance are quite rare. This, however, should not need to be the case, for attitudes and survival strategies are far easier to alter than many other personal characteristics.

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"This research finding has considerable importance for the efforts to encourage young people to make a faster transition into further studies and working life." The results are now used in the large school reform which will be conducted in Finland

(Minister of Education, H. Virkkunen March 18th, 2010).

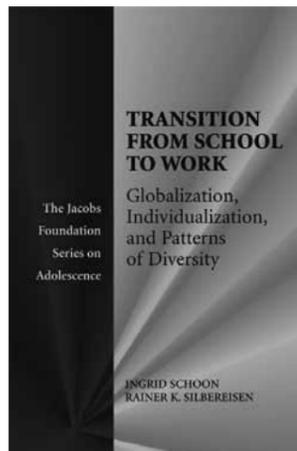
"Professor Katariina Salmela-Aro's work has substantially influenced the large-scale reform which will be now conducted in the Finnish Educational System."

Henna Virkkunen, Minister of Education and Science, Finland

Transition from school to work

Globalisation, Individualisation and patterns of diversity

Edited by Ingrid Schoon
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This volume makes an important contribution to the growing literature on the transition from school to work. It provides a unique perspective on the global changes that have transformed school-to-work transitions since the 1970s; offers an integrative conceptual framework for analysis; and promotes a comparative, cross-national understanding of school-to-work transitions in a changing social context. The articles assembled in this volume compare and assess variations in school-to-work transitions across Europe and North America, providing empirical evidence on how young people negotiate the different options and opportunities available and assessing the costs and returns associated with different transition strategies. Unlike many other volumes on this subject – which are pitched at either the macro or micro level – this volume attempts to integrate both perspectives, capturing the complexity of this critical life course transition. Furthermore, the authors address policies aimed at improving the capacity of individuals to make effective transitions and at enabling societies to better coordinate educational and occupational institutions.

“This book will have a lasting impact on the field”

Rand Conger, University of California, Davis

“Transitions from School to Work offers an embedded, relevant, positive, and global developmental scientific perspective on a critical life-course transition”

Willem Koops, Utrecht University

Contents

Part I Introduction

1. Conceptualising school-to-work transitions in context
2. Thinking about the transition to adulthood: from grand narratives to useful theories

Part II Transitions and Global Change

3. Is stable employment becoming more elusive for young men?
4. Youth outcomes in the labour markets of advanced economies: decline, deterioration, and causes
5. Uncertain and unable to commit: a 14-country comparison of the impact of globalization on the early life course

Part III. Individual Decision Making

6. It was not my choice, you know? Young people's subjective views and decision-making processes in biographical transitions
7. From paradigm to paradox: parental support and transitions to independence
8. Job attitudes and job aspirations in a changing labourmarket: Germany, 1991–2006
9. Escaping the gender trap: young women's transition into non-traditional occupations

Part IV. Mapping Diversity and Change

10. Polarization and diversity in the assumption of work and family related roles: evidence from two British birth cohorts
11. Transitions to adulthood: linking late adolescent life styles to family and work status in the mid-20s
12. Challenges of transitioning into adulthood

Part V. Interventions and Policies

13. School related burnout during educational tracks: antecedents and consequences
14. Building skills for positive developmental pathways and successful vocational careers in adulthood: intervention programmes within the school context
15. Integrated transition policies for European young adults: contradictions and solutions
16. The future at work: labour market realities and the transition to adulthood.

School motivation predicts career development – even in the face of adversity

School engagement among university students has shown to improve performance and prevent burn-out after entering working life (Salmela-Aro, Tolvanen, & Nurmi, 2009). The role of school motivation and engagement in promoting successful career development has also been established among adolescents within the British and US context. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that school motivation and engagement is an important resource capacity for younger students planning their careers.



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Based on findings from the British cohort studies, it could be shown that school motivation expressed at age 16 is associated with educational and occupational aspirations (Schoon, 2010), time spent in full-time education (Schoon, 2008), the timing and sequencing of family and career transitions as well as adult socio-economic status (Schoon, Martin & Ross, 2007; Ross et al., 2009). School motivation can also act as a 'reserve capacity' enabling young people to turn around a potentially problematic transition, such as early school leaving and teenage parenthood (Sacker & Schoon, 2007; Schoon & Polek, in press).

The importance of school engagement as a potential antidote to declining academic achievement, for promoting a love for learning that will last for a lifetime and not just the schooling period cannot be underestimated, especially as there is evidence to suggest that school motivation and engagement is malleable to interventions (Eccles, 2004; Fredricks, Alfeld & Eccles, 2010).

Raising interest and engagement in school is a crucial lever for setting in motion positive chain reactions, for opening up opportunities and new perspectives, and supporting engagement with society and its institutions.

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Conference announcement

Gender differences in aspirations and attainment

This conference will bring together experts from different disciplines and from different countries, drawing on evidence from longitudinal studies and large scale surveys to examine the multiple influences on gendered career choices and development in a changing social context. It aims to examine antecedents, correlates, and outcomes associated with gender differences in career aspirations and attainment in a global context. The conference will take an explicit longitudinal perspective, addressing issues related to gender and social inequalities in motivation and attainment during the school years and in the transition to adult roles.

Where

Institute of Education,
London, UK

When

12-13 July 2010

This conference is co-sponsored by the Jacobs Foundation and the ESRC Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies (LLAKES)

For more information and to request an invitation please see our website or contact our organiser Clare Sullivan:

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We're hoping the event will help to shape the next wave of research on gender differences in career choice and attainment, and its application to practice and policy development around the world.

Key topic areas to be addressed are:

- Early influences (childhood and adolescence).
- Life planning: how do young people see themselves and their futures.
- Adulthood: gender differences in career pathways and attainment across domains (work, income, family, health and well-being) and their link to earlier influences
- Social, economic, institutional, and cultural constraints and opportunities: how is career planning and attainment shaped by structural forces such as social background, policy agenda, labour market opportunities, and economic cycles.
- Methodological considerations



- The major objective of the programme is to promote the next generation of researchers through funding, mentoring and collaboration
- The mission of this Collaborative Post-Doctoral Fellowship Programme is to stimulate innovative, interdisciplinary, and comparative research of productive youth development.
- Our programme brings together experts in the field from the UK, Germany, Finland, Sweden and the US from seven international Universities
- We engage with different stakeholders in how best to equip young people for mastering the challenges of growing up in a changing social context.

Principal Investigators and participating institutions

- Lars Bergman – Stockholm University
- Jacquelynne S. Eccles – University of Michigan
- Katariina Salmela-Aro – University of Helsinki
- Barbara Schneider – Michigan State University
- Ingrid Schoon – Institute of Education, University of London
- Rainer K. Silbereisen – University of Jena
Ulrich Trautwein -University of Tübingen

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