Ageing of the Health, Work and Retirement Study Cohort: Life history project

Mary Breheny, Sally Keeling
Massey University, University of Otago

Lifecourse Impacts

- Early life events influence later outcomes
  - Across time from early to later life
  - Across domains (eg from health to work)
- Cumulative advantage/disadvantage
- Events in social context
- Events in policy context
Life History Interviews

- English Longitudinal Study of Ageing
- Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement (SHARE) in Europe
- Health Retirement Study
- Australian Life Histories Study

Life Event Domains

- Childhood health and healthcare
- Childhood socioeconomic conditions
- Adult health and healthcare
- Adult work history
- Lifetime accommodation history
- Personal relationships
- Traumatic events and discrimination
Life Event Questions

SHARELIFE childhood socioeconomic conditions

- Number of rooms
- Facilities (fixed bath, cold running water, hot running water, inside toilet, central heating)
- Number of books

NZ socioeconomic status historical

- Suitable clothes for school/full school uniform
- Participation in sports/lessons/activities
- Subjective assessment of childhood SES

Life Event Analyses

- Compare social policy differences on outcomes across countries
- Compare social policy differences on outcomes across cohorts
- Compare impact of events such as recessions on later outcomes
Royal Commission on Social Policy 1988

“Royal Commissions are a long established feature of New Zealand political life, a way in which difficult issues can be parked for some time, and then quietly forgotten. The grand-daddy of the latter was the 1988 Royal Commission on Social Policy which produced five massive volumes. Most of them famously remained in their wrapping”. (1986-1988)

[Royal Commissions – Famously Unread, Michael Field, Fairfax Media, 25/03/2009]

Family and relationships – key policy steps

- 1930s: 1936 & ext 1939- Widows’ Pension + deserted wives; 1936, Social Security Act
- 1940s: School leaving age raised to 15 yrs; Family benefit universal, 1946
- 1950s: 1954 Mazengarb Report (Moral Delinquency in Chn and Adol); 1959, Capitalisation of Family Benefit for Housing
- 1960s: Consolidation of Social Security Act 1964
- 1970s: 1973 DPB; DPB reviewed in 1976
- 1980s: Liable parent contribution scheme linked to DPB; Child Care Subsidy, 1983; Solo fathers eligible for DPB, 1987
- 1990s: CYPF Act and Commissioner for Children established
- 2000s: by 2001, DSW policy “Managing for Outputs”
Health

- 1930s: Sickness and Invalids benefits 1939/ males only.
- 1940s: Standards of fitness for houses (damp and overcrowded)
- 1950s: State resp for public hospital funding
- 1960s: Royal Commission (Woodhouse 1966, re Workers Compensation)
- 1970s: ACC Scheme (extended to non-earners) from 1.4.74; 1974: Disability Allowance
- 1980s: Era of Hospital Boards
- 1990s: "Green and White paper", 1991, Era of RHA/TFA and health market; 1992, User part-charges (w/d by 1993, for inpatient hospital) & Community Service Cards; Res Care Subsidy replaced Rest Home Subsidy and integration of asset and income tests
- 2000s: PHO introduced and CSC phased out; Office Disability Issues estab – 2002; 2005 – major adjustment to asset threshold levels for RCS; Enhanced case management for SB and IB

Paid Work

- 1930s: Unemployment Act, 1930/ Males
- 1940s: Minimum Wage Act
- 1950s:
- 1960s: Govt Service Equal Pay Act
- 1970s: Equal Pay Act applied to private sector, 1972; 1979, Unemployment Benefit available to married women
- 1980s:
- 1990s: Unemployment benefit tightened stand-down and thresholds for eligibility; 1992 55+ Benefit introduced
Health and Ageing Research Team

Unpaid Work

- 1930s – 1950s: Policy framework “invisible”
- 1960s: 1962-1972 National Service re-introduced, all males aged 20+ yrs
- 1970s: 1975 Benefit for married male caregivers
- 1990s: 1992 – Student Allowances and Loans

Health and Ageing Research Team

A tale of two sisters .....

- The elder, born in 1935
- Married in 1955, after 2 years at University, lived and worked on husband’s family orchard
- 1st child born in 1960, 2nd in 1962
- Separated and divorced in 1966 (pre DPB & Matrimonial Property Act)
- Completed extramural degree and teacher training by 1970
A tale of two sisters ..... 

- The younger – born in 1948
- University degree completed in 1970, and teacher training in 1972
- Married in 1972, lived mostly in urban/metropolitan areas
- No paid parental leave available until 1988, based on sector agreement
- Limited career continuity

Thomson’s Selfish Generations?

- NZ’s big ‘winners’ – those born between 1920 and 1945
- Cf The “Greedy Boomer’s” argument
- What are the long term effects?
- What experiences of the welfare state do individuals accumulate through life as a result of being born in one year rather than another?
- Focus on generation as birth cohort, fixed across the life course

Conclusions

- Examine long term consequences of life events
- Place these events in a social and policy context
- Effects of policy depend on cohort, gender, ethnicity etc
- Understand how policy intersects with theoretical understandings of the production of health inequalities