

Research Activities of the Population Investigation Committee

The historical records of the Population Investigation Committee (PIC) are held at the Wellcome Library (Ref. SA/PIC) and include minute books, annual reports, and research papers containing detailed information relating to the varied research activities involving the PIC. Below are details of the most prominent research projects.

National Survey of Health and Development

In 1946 a National Inquiry into Maternity Services was initiated to study children and their families. A Joint Committee consisting of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Institute of Child Health, and the Population Investigation Committee was established to enquire into the social and economic aspects of child bearing in Great Britain. The subjects of the Inquiry were the children of women who gave birth during the week ending 9 March 1946. The aim of the national sample was to ascertain the general experience of women during pregnancy and childbirth, the costs of childbirth, the use made of facilities, and the reactions of women to the services available. The preliminary report was published in *Population Studies* in 1947 and prepared by J. W.B. Douglas and Griselda Rowntree, both of whom were research associates of the PIC. Funding for the Inquiry and the subsequent follow-up studies was received primarily from the Nuffield Foundation. Others contributing funding towards the study were the National Birthday Trust Fund, the Ford Foundation, the Medical Research Council (MRC), Population Council Inc, the National Spastics Society, and the Population Investigation Committee itself.

In 1948 *Maternity in Great Britain* was published. Following the initial Inquiry, it was agreed that the information collected in connection with the Maternity Inquiry would provide a valuable basis for a follow-up study. The intention was to investigate a sample of the mothers and children, giving special consideration to comparative development and morbidity of premature and full term children. The follow up study was directed by J.W.B. Douglas with the assistance of Miss G. Rowntree. Illegitimate children were left out of the sample due to excessive difficulties experienced in tracing them. The sample consisted of approximately 6000 children, with a single questionnaire used to cover the entire sample. Unlike the original survey of 1946, the Joint Committee did not intend to publish a single report but instead to issue a series of papers covering various topics published in a range of publications.

Follow-up studies continued at different intervals focusing on different aspects covering accidents, infections, diseases, hospitalisation, the use of child health services, sleeping conditions, housing, occupational status of parents, and health visitors' assessment of maternal efficiency. In 1952, when the children were 6 years old a medical examination was carried out. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists withdrew from the Joint Committee and the Society of Medical

Officers took their place as part of the Joint Committee. From 1952 the follow-up study became known as the National Survey of the Health and Development of Children. At the beginning of each term the school nurses would visit the homes of the children to obtain further details and to find out about holiday sickness and accidents. Further medical examinations were carried out at the ages of 7, 9, and 11 and a review of home conditions made by the school nurse when the children reached the ages of 8 and 10. In collaboration with the National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales and the support of Scottish Council for Research in Education, the Joint Committee arranged for tests of reading ability and intelligence to be given to all children in the sample in Feb 1954.

In connection with the National Survey, the PIC provided a grant for the study of broken families in the survey sample, where normal family life had been broken through the death of a parent or through divorce or separation. The research was undertaken by Griselda Rowntree and an article published in *Population Studies* in Mar 1955.

The final medical examination and assessment was proposed for Jan 1957 should funding not be renewed. Information obtained by school nurses was amplified by the reports of teachers who had kept special records of all absences, completed a questionnaire describing the type of school and class and given an assessment of the child's ability and achievement. It was hoped to continue the Survey until the children left secondary school and the boys completed their National Service. It was also decided to test whether the sample of children had become atypical due to being under observation. As a result a sample of children of the original survey but not included in follow-up sample were given the same medical examination, and information collected on their use of medical services. The survey children were tested in arithmetic, reading and general intelligence with tests designed by National Foundation for Educational Research.

Children under five, by J.W.B. Douglas and J.M. Blomfield, was published in 1958. Additional special inquiries were undertaken including a study of internal migration of survey families, social concomitants of maladjustment among survey children (with support of the Medical Research Council), study of delinquency (with the assistance of the Home Office), and the analysis of the subsequent fertility of the 2000 survey mothers who had their first birth in 1946 (with a grant provided by Population Council Inc). The National Spastics Society also provided £2000 for an investigation into epilepsy and cerebral palsy among survey children.

The first survey covering the secondary school stage was carried out in Jun 1959. This included two separate questionnaires for each child. One filled in by teachers dealt with educational progress, and also with those symptoms and attitudes which might indicate maladjustment. The other was for the first time filled out by the children themselves and related to their job aspirations, hobbies, and included a series of questions designed to measure aggressiveness, extraversion,

and neuroticism. The National Spastics Society secured the services of a neurologist who examined survey children in London and the Home Counties who had a history of cerebral palsy, clumsiness of movement, fits, or educational backwardness. Survey children were given their last medical examination by the school doctor in Jan 1961 and given a third set of mental tests and asked to fill in a questionnaire on their job aspirations and interests. At the same time their teachers were asked to assess their ability and school achievement.

From Apr 1962, under Dr Douglas, a separate MRC unit was established at the London School of Economic and Political Science (LSE) to study environmental aspects of mental and physical illness. The work of the follow-up study was transferred to the new Unit of MRC. The Joint Committee dissolved itself and a smaller committee under the chairmanship of Prof. Moncrieff appointed. PIC staff continued to have involvement. It was financed by grants from the Home Office and the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research.

The National Survey continued to follow those in work and education. In 1963 all those still in education completed a questionnaire about their choice of course, study habits, and also information on hospital admissions and accidents. For those in employment a short questionnaire was completed on their 18th birthday in 1964 to bring job histories up to date. In 1965 a questionnaire survey was planned in conjunction with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and MRC Air Pollution Research Unit to obtain information on smoking habits and symptoms of respiratory disease to allow the investigation of the association between bronchitis, smoking and polluted air.

The fourth report in the series 'All Our Future' was published Oct 1968 by Peter Davies, describing progress at secondary school and examining the progress of a number of special groups including the short-sighted, left-handed, delinquent, and poorly adjusted. Information was collected at 18 monthly intervals by a combination of postal questionnaire and home visit. A new development in the follow-up included interviewing the mothers of the second generation of children. Interviews were planned for each family as the first-born child reached 4 years old in order to examine the association between the standards of care received by the mothers themselves and the care they give to their own children. When children reached 8 years of age they were retested with the same test their parents completed at that age.

In 1972 the collection of information began on the present living conditions of survey members, their employment, the level of skill used in their work, earnings, and their views of society. They were also asked about the social origins, employment and education of their spouses, and asked to complete a reading test. Other studies undertaken during the 1970s included comparing the survival of and the mental and physical functioning of babies weighing 2000 grams or less at birth in the 1946 and 1958 samples; the relation of early respiratory illness and smoke pollution to

respiratory symptoms in adult life; hospital admissions in infancy and early childhood in relation to disturbances of behaviour and learning in adolescence; studies of the physical characteristics of delinquents; and studies of infant feeding.

Towards the end of the 1970s the Neurosciences Board recommended that the study move to Bristol after 1979, when the Director, James Douglas, retired. Prof. John Colley was appointed the new director. The Survey was initially to continue for a seven-year period as an MRC external scientific staff team known as the MRC National Survey of Health and Development. Future plans included the continuation of annual contact with survey members by way of birthday card, the continuation and completion of the Second Generation Study, a postal follow-up of the whole cohort, and later a home interview study. The move took place in 1980 and severed the link between the Survey and LSE and the PIC. It became financed entirely by the MRC.

During the 18 years the National Survey was based at LSE members of the Unit published findings in 3 books, 19 chapters in other books, and 82 papers in scientific journals.

For further information on the National Survey of Health and Development see

<http://www.nshd.mrc.ac.uk/>

The Scottish Mental Survey of 1947

In 1947 the PIC began a study in collaboration with the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) to examine the trend of intelligence in Scotland and to test the hypothesis that because of differential fertility, national fertility was likely to fall. The Survey, also known as Inquiries into the Trend of Intelligence covered approximately 87,000 children born in 1936 who were given the same intelligence test as that administered in the 1932 Scottish inquiry, and an individual questionnaire completed. A more detailed questionnaire was completed by a random sample of all children born on the first 3 days of each month in 1936, the '36 day sample', and individual Binet tests were applied to a random sample of all children born on the first day of each alternate month in 1936, the '6 day sample'. A proportion of children were double tested in order to have comparable data to translate the 1947 I.Qs into 1932 units as the Binet tests were different. The mean score of all the children was higher than that of 1932. The result of the survey showed that there had been no fall in measured intelligence (I.Q) since the previous inquiry. Similar studies were carried out in England with same broad results. The preliminary results were published in *The Times* in Nov 1948 by Godfrey Thompson.

In 1949 *The trend of Scottish intelligence: a comparison of the 1947 and 1932 surveys of the intelligence of eleven-year-old pupils*, was published by the Scottish Council for Research in

Education. The work of the Survey falls broadly into three sections. The first part the social survey of 11 year olds in Scotland, with the data used to show the distribution of children among different types of schools, frequency of attendance, the number of schools previously attended, the incidence of physical defects, variation in height and weight, with these characteristics examined against the background of parental occupation and size of family. The second part included an analysis with specific reference to the performance of the children in the intelligence tests of 1947 in relation to the 1932 results. The third part involved a general examination of the relationship between intelligence and social and biological factors. For example the survey yielded the largest collection of data on the intelligence resemblance of twins. An article entitled 'The intelligence of twins. A comparative study of eleven-year-old twins' by J. Maxwell and S.N. Mehrotra was published in *Population Studies* in 1949.

The Nuffield Foundation provided funds for a follow-up study of the Scottish children with the work carried out by the Joint Mental Survey Committee, which included a representative of the PIC. Another publication appeared in 1953, *Social Implications of the 1947 Mental Survey*, by James Maxwell for the Scottish Council for Research in Education. A follow-up sample of 1200 children included in the 6-day sample was begun in 1950 and continued throughout the 1950s. When the follow-up commenced it was decided to give the same intelligence test to the younger siblings when they attained the age at which the child in the sample had been tested, i.e. 11 years old. A third volume, *Eleven Year Olds Grow Up*, by John Macpherson was published in 1958 to deal with the period 1947-1954.

It was decided that the Survey in its current form should cease after the issue of the thirteenth schedule in Mar 1963. The survey at this point was still in touch with 1037 of the original 1208 members. Data on the higher education of sample members made was also available to the Robbins Committee. In 1963 a report was prepared to cover the age period 18-26 years old. The present activities of the Mental Survey Committee ceased with the publication of this report. A further follow-up survey was suggested to look at the children of members of the sample and measure their intelligence as they reach 11 years old. The final report of the Mental Survey Committee was published in 1967 covering the careers of the 6-day sample members from 1947-1964. Although the follow-up survey had ceased, one aspect continued – an annual search of the records of the Registrar General for the marriages of members and the births of their children.

For further information on the Scottish Mental Surveys of 1932 and 1947 see

<http://www.ces.ed.ac.uk/SSER/about/surveys.html>

Social Mobility and Teachers Inquiry

The first study of the relationship between fertility and social mobility was undertaken by the PIC in 1949 to investigate R.A. Fisher's hypothesis that social promotion in our society was achieved at the expense of family size. This was a preliminary investigation undertaken jointly by the Nuffield Research Unit of the London School of Economics and the Committee, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour. The first report concerning this research was published in *Population Studies* in Mar 1952.

In 1954 a related inquiry began in order to study the relationship between fertility and social mobility in a specific profession; the teaching profession. This Inquiry into the social characteristics of the teaching profession was undertaken by the University of London Institute of Education, Nuffield Research Unit, funded by a grant from the Nuffield Foundation. The Committee took an interest in the survey questions asked with David Glass being part of the Advisory Committee of the Inquiry. Two papers by Wolf Scott were published in *Population Studies* in Jul 1957 and Mar 1958.

David Glass received a grant of £30,110 from the Nuffield Foundation in 1976 for a three-year period to complete a longitudinal study of social mobility in Great Britain, using data collected systematically since the 1946 Maternity Inquiry. Upon his death in 1978, the study was completed by Ms McIlroy and Ms Britten.

Marriage and Divorce

In 1953 consideration was given to the future research programme of the PIC. It was agreed that a study of marriage habits in Britain would be an important and valuable contribution to demographic knowledge. The General Register Office co-operated in drawing a sample of about 500 marriage certificates from their records. This sample was drawn to study the possibilities of obtaining data on social class differences in marriage habits from the occupations given on marriage certificates. In addition to this, Griselda Rowntree was appointed to undertake a study into broken marriages, which included approximately 300 families from the National Survey of the Health and Development of Children, where normal family life had been broken through the death of a parent or through divorce or separation. The results were published in *Population Studies* in Mar 1955.

In 1954 the PIC obtained the co-operation of the President of the Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division of the High Court of Justice in extracting copies of certain particulars from divorce petitions lodged in the Divorce Registry. The information was transcribed by officials and included particulars from the original marriage certificate lodged with the petition, details of matrimonial

offences alleged, and certain information regarding the occupations of the parties and the children of the marriage. This was the first time such records were made available for research, making it possible to classify the divorce petitions by the social status of the parties, the number of children born to the marriage, the duration of the marriage, and the type of matrimonial offence alleged and/or found proved. The PIC also approved a grant to pay for the extraction of sample data for petitions filed in 1951, and hoped at a later stage to draw similar samples for 1931 and 1911. In order to obtain comparable material relating to the position in the 1870s, an analysis was made of all the divorce petitions for the years 1871-1872.

The PIC began to collect published statistics and conducted a new analysis of them including the occupations of husband at marriage, as well as the calculation of divorce rates by duration of marriage. The analysis of published sources illustrated the proportion of couples married in each year who obtained a divorce in the first or any subsequent year of their marriage. PIC also sponsored an inquiry into the changing habits and attitudes to marriage since the second half of the 19th century, under the direction of Miss Rowntree. All of these inquiries relating to marriage and divorce were undertaken under the supervision of the Marriage and Planned Parenthood Sub-Committee.

In 1957, marriage data was extracted for 1871, making it possible to combine the statistics so far derived with those of the censuses of 1871 and 1951. An interim report was published in *Population Studies* in Mar 1958 by Griselda Rowntree and Norman Carrier. By 1959 an analysis of newspapers, periodicals and other published sources as well as an analysis of official records of marriage and divorce was well underway. To complement the analysis the PIC decided to conduct field inquiries into marriage aspirations and into the circumstances affecting the age at marriage and the choice of partner. A grant of £10,000 was received from the Rockefeller Foundation to meet the cost of a national inquiry to cover marriage and marital breakdown and attitudes on family size and family limitation. An additional grant of £1000 was received from the Marriage Guidance Council of the Sir Halley Stewart Trust and £1000 from the Oliver Bird Trust. The latter grant was to enable additional questions to be asked and further analysis to be done on fertility and contraception on behalf of the Family Planning Association (FPA).

The survey was based on a stratified random sample of 3000 men and women both ever-married and still single between the ages of 16-59, and concerned with changes in courtship and marriage conventions, and attitudes to various economic and social factors which had in the past been commonly associated with marriage and the establishment of a household. The Survey also included questions on birth control practice, internal migration, marriage across the social classes and social mobility. The fieldwork was carried out by Social Surveys Ltd. (Gallup Poll) and Norman Carrier, then Research Secretary of the PIC, supported and offered his expertise alongside Research Officer Griselda Rowntree. The primary objective of the survey was to examine some of

the factors associated with the trend towards earlier marriage. At the suggestion and encouragement of the National Marriage Guidance Council the scope of the survey extended to include several questions on preparation and adjustment to marriage, on pre-marital attitudes to divorce, and on some of the circumstances in which cases of marital breakdown occurred. The survey contained 200 questions for married persons including those widowed or divorced, 120 questions for those engaged, and 50 questions for those neither married nor engaged.

In addition to the field work and advice on sampling and questionnaire layout, Social Surveys Ltd originally agreed to carry out the coding, punching and basic tabulations of the mass of material collected. However, the offer to provide the basic tabulations was withdrawn in 1960 due to cost. In the limited analysis up to this point priority was given to the treatment of the birth control data and a special report prepared for the FPA Working Party in Dec 1960. During the 1960s several articles were published in *Population Studies* on various aspects of the survey predominantly written by Griselda Rowntree, Rachel Pierce, and Norman Carrier. A report 'Marriage in the 1950s' was circulated by the National Marriage Guidance Council, and another paper on teenage marriage read at the British Association in Sep 1962. Other related studies were begun such as a study at Leeds University of the employment of married women, and the data on internal migration analysed at the Centre for Urban Studies at University College London. A symposium was planned entitled 'Aspects of Marriage and the Family in Britain 1870-1961'. Unfortunately this symposium did not take place.

Following the resignation of both Miss Rowntree and Miss Pierce in 1965, Norman Carrier continued the cohort analysis of divorce in England, Valerie Oppenheimer analysed information on the employment of women, and David Glass and Dr S. Thapar continued the investigation of regional changes in marriage patterns since the 1930s.

Family Planning Inquiry

In 1959-1960 the Population Investigation Committee carried out a multi-purpose survey relating to marriage and divorce, and birth control practice. As a result a number of articles were published in *Population Studies* relating to birth control practice, teenage marriage, marital breakdown, involuntary childlessness and social and economic factors associated with differential age at marriage.

During the mid-1960s the PIC decided to carry out a second survey of birth control practice and family planning. A national study involving the completion of a questionnaire by a random sample of women was carried out by the PIC between 1967-1968 with grants from the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and the Nuffield Foundation. The study was initiated by

David Glass and Mrs C. Holbraad, with the sampling scheme designed by Prof. M. Quenouille and the fieldwork carried out by Nowland and Co. Ltd and Spencer Marketing Services Ltd.

Fieldwork began in 1967 covering a stratified random sample of women under 60, whose marriages remained intact until the date of the survey or until they had reached their 45th birthday. A further sample of married couples were interviewed separately to provide information on the degree of agreement between husbands and wives in respect of certain data, such as the extent and nature of contraceptive practice. As a result of 1959/60 investigation, the questionnaire was designed to be more probing and more specifically focussed on family planning. A preliminary paper relating to the Survey was prepared for the IPPF and published in *Family Planning* in Jan 1969. There were 18 punched cards for each woman. Topics to be examined included the ever-use of birth control by marriage cohorts and by marriage duration; persistence of birth control practice by 'ever-users'; and attitudes towards existing channels of information and advice on birth control. In 1969 two interim papers were produced, one by C.M. Langford dealing with the use of professional advice on birth control, the second by David Glass examining the changes in the prevalence and types of birth control practice.

British Peerage

An attempt to contribute knowledge to the field of the British Peerage was suggested by Thomas Henry Hollingsworth, who had previously carried out a study of the demography of British Ducal families. This previous research was limited and no real pin-pointing of change could be done. As a result, the PIC initiated a full scale study in 1959. It was financed by a Senior Sociological Scholarship awarded to Hollingsworth by the Nuffield Foundation, \$10000 granted to the Committee by the Rockefeller Foundation, and £1000 from the Eugenics Society.

Initially the inquiry was to cover the whole of the peerage from Dukes to Barons, with legitimate children of all peers dying between 1603-1901. It was estimated that the total number of individuals would be 35,000. However the result was much smaller. In 1961 it was decided to extend the study to include the legitimate children of all peers dying up to 1938. The result of the research was published as a supplement in *Population Studies* in Nov 1964.