

Editor: Dr Melanie Channon

The British Society for Population Studies Newsletter

Croeso i Gaerdydd / Welcome to Cardiff

Summer must be over because conference season is upon us and it is time for me to welcome you to our annual conference at the University of Cardiff. This year’s conference theme is ‘An ageing population: opportunities and challenges’. We have two excellent plenary speakers: Professor Carol Jagger, Professor of Epidemiology of Ageing from Newcastle University will discuss ‘The health and care needs of future older population’ and Dr Brian Beach, Senior Research Fellow at the International Centre for Longevity will be talking about ‘Longevity in research and policy: What happens next’. We’ve also introduced an early career plenary, this year conducted by Dr Fran Darlington-Pollock, University of Liverpool whose talk is entitled ‘To move or not to move? Im-mobility, opportunity and inequality’. You can also read Fran’s report of the recent BSPS day meeting about stalling mortality in the UK on page 6 of this newsletter.

Finally, it’s time for me to take a little break from the newsletter as I will be on maternity leave from December (yes that’s a baby bump, if you happen to spot me at the conference). Baby Channon number 2 should be putting in an appearance sometime before Christmas. Don’t worry, though, someone equally capable will be taking over for the next few editions. In the meantime feel free to say hello and listen to me talk about menstruation in Nepal



(Monday 4.45pm) or sex in the city (Tuesday 1:30pm—sadly I didn’t think of the title). I’m also looking forward to the quiz (if I can stay awake that long), which is on Tuesday evening at 10pm... Enjoy the conference!

Email me: M.D.Channon@bath.ac.uk
Tweet me: [@frostyallyear](https://twitter.com/frostyallyear)
Tweet BSPS: [@bspsuk](https://twitter.com/bspsuk)

Contents

- Page 1: Introduction
- Page 2: BSPS council vacancies and AGM
- Pages 2: Postgraduate student rep
- Page 3: Spotlight on research: Francesco Rampazzo
- Pages 4-5: Stalling Life Expectancy: A BSPS day meeting report
- Page 6: Recent papers in Population Studies from BSPS members

BSPS 2019 AGM and Council changes from Sep 2019

The 2019 AGM of the British Society for Population Studies will take place at the University of Cardiff, during the 2019 annual conference, on Tuesday 7 September at 7.20pm. Any member not attending the conference is welcome to attend the AGM, but please advise pic@lse.ac.uk if you wish to do so.

This year, there will be two vacancies on Council as Jim Newman and Hill Kulu complete their four-year terms. They are not eligible for immediate re-election. Julia Mikolai (St Andrews) and Mark Fransham (LSE) have been duly nominated to fill the vacancies.

At the 2019 AGM, Piers Elias will also have completed his two-year term as President. Piers has been on the council for many years as he was a council member before being nominated as VP — he will be missed!

As is usual practice, the Vice-President Wendy Sigle will be elected to fill that vacancy. Wendy Sigle (LSE) has been nominated as Vice-President from September 2019. This will leave a vacancy for Vice President, for which Alice Reid (University of Cambridge) has been nominated.

Postgrad Student Rep: Alyce Raybould



Hi everyone,

Only a short one from me this time. Our student spotlight this edition is by **Francesco Rampazzo** who has just finished his second year at the University of Southampton. Francesco's PhD focuses on the use of Facebook data for migration analyses. Be sure to check out his work at both this year's poster session (Monday, 18:30) and in the Innovative Data & Methods session (Tuesday, 16:45).

In our Postgrad glory corner we have two pieces of student news to highlight. **Nikolett Somogyi** (University of Antwerp, Belgium), one of our newer student members, has received some press attention after presenting her work on Parents' Mental Health at the European Sociological Association Conference. You can hear more about her work in the 'work and well-being' session on Tuesday at 16:45. Secondly, **Joseph Harrison** (Stockholm University, Sweden) has passed his Demography Master's defence at Stockholm University. Congratulations both!

Wishing everyone a great conference, and as ever if you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me at alyce.raybould@lshtm.ac.uk, or follow me on twitter [@AlyceRaybould](https://twitter.com/AlyceRaybould).

Glory Corner

- ⇒ **Nikolett Somogyi** (University of Antwerp, Belgium) received some media attention for her work on Parents' Mental Health presented at the ESA conference. You can read more here: <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-08-parents-mental-health-young-children.html>
- ⇒ **Joseph Harrison** (Stockholm University, Sweden) passed his defence of his Demography Master's thesis.
Title: Exploring Educational Attainment by Immigrant Background: an analysis of PISA data in six OECD countries.
Supervisor: Ben Wilson, Stockholm University
Examiner: Gunnar Andersson, Stockholm University

Spotlight on Research:

Francesco Rampazzo,

Department of Social Statistics and Demography, University of Southampton

From October, I will be a third and final year PhD student at the Department of Social Statistics and Demography at the University of Southampton, supervised by Jakub Bijak and Agnese Vitali. I am lucky to also be a doctoral fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, where I am supervised by Emilio Zagheni. My supervisory team wouldn't have been complete without Ingmar Weber, Director for Social Computing at the Qatar Computing Research Institute. My PhD focuses on the potential use of digital traces (data that we create when using social media websites, and other technologies) for demographic research. I am studying ways to complement traditional data sources like surveys and census data with digital traces, considering the biases, pros and cons of the different data sources. At the moment, my interest is in obtaining better estimates of migration stocks of European nationalities living in the UK.

My doctoral journey started at the European Doctoral School of Demography (EDSD) through a scholarship from the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research. I was interested in understanding whether it was possible to estimate fertility through Facebook's Advertising data. The paper has been presented and published at the International Conference of Web and Social Media (ICWSM). Using cross validation techniques and a linear regression model, we estimated the mean age at childbearing for females and males across the World with data from Facebook and the United Nation's fertility estimates. We found there to be a high correlation between the UN and Facebook estimates of fertility; but this was just a first step towards more complex studies. In order to make our research transparent the code is available on a GitHub repository, and the data are available upon request.

<https://github.molgen.mpg.de/rampazzo/fertilityfacebook>

After the EDSD, I received an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) scholarship to start my PhD at the University of Southampton. My PhD is interdisciplinary having a demographic, statistical, and computer science component. My supervisory team has helped me in

shaping all three components of the project: from their previous experiences using digital trace data, to the methodologies needed for analysing the data sources. Specifically, using a Bayesian hierarchical model, we provide an estimate of the stock of European migrants in the UK by combining the Labour Force Survey (LFS) with Facebook Advertising data. I am now working on allowing the model to disaggregate the estimates by age and sex, and in my third paper, I will analyse a time series of Facebook data to identify trends in European migrants to the UK following the Brexit referendum.

Another experience that really shaped my PhD has been attending the Summer Institute in Computational and Social Science (SICSS). Organised by Matthew Salganik, Princeton University, and Chris Bail, Duke University, SICSS brings together approximately 25 students from all over the World interested in computational social science. Thanks to SICSS, I have started a collaboration with Katherine Hoffman Pham, NYU Stern School of Business, and Leah Rosensweig, Institute for Advanced Study in Toulouse (IAST) and MIT GOV/LAB, to understand whether social media platforms provide a cheaper, faster, and reliable mechanism to reach populations

that are currently expensive to survey in comparative contexts such as Kenya. You can come talk to me about this project at the BSPS poster session at 6:30pm on Monday, where we'll also be celebrating the 10 year anniversary of the ESRC Centre for Population Change (CPC), who I've been fortunate enough to be involved with during my time at Southampton. I will also be presenting the first paper from my PhD in the session 'Innovative Data: Innovative Data and Methods' at 4.45 pm September 10th.

On Twitter I am active as @chiccorampazzo or my email is f.rampazzo@soton.ac.uk



Stalling Life Expectancy: A BSPS Day Meeting

Report by Fran Darlington-Pollock

In 2014, improvements in life expectancy began to falter, with early evidence indicating signs of reversal amongst older ages. More recent data confirms such a reversal. Women living in the most deprived areas of England will not only live shorter lives than their more advantaged peers, their previous gains in life expectancy have now been lost. However, it is not just adults who are suffering with infant mortality rates rising for the third consecutive year. Early warnings of the changing patterning to life expectancy were denounced by the Department for Health as “a triumph of personal bias over research” (see Hiam et al., 2018), yet the evidence is increasingly hard to refute.

British Society for Population Studies members gained an insight into stalling and reversing life expectancy at the 2018 BPS Annual Conference following a galvanising plenary from Professor Danny Dorling, University of Oxford. Response to the talk highlighted the need to create the space for an open, critical and entirely public discussion of why and how stalling and falling life expectancy has come about. Should the change be dismissed as short-term fluctuation following flu outbreaks or cold-weather mortality? Are the patterns evident in the UK really so distinct from the experiences of those in Europe? How much responsibility should be shouldered by the instigators of the UK’s austerity drive?

On 5th July, BPS organised a free day meeting seeking to address these questions. Practicing clinicians, epidemiologists, demographers, public health practitioners, campaigners and geographers came together to present and debate their views, engaging with an audience drawn from across BPS membership and beyond. Attendees spanned local and national government organisations, the third sector, media, activists and researchers.

Welcomed by the President of BPS, Piers Elias, Professor Danny Dorling then opened the event painting a bleak picture of health, social care and life expectancy, reporting what we already know and why we need to know more. Between June 2014 and June 2015, ONS data revealed that there had been 52,400 more deaths compared to the same period a year before. This re-

flects one of the largest single year rises in mortality in England and Wales since 1840. However, while previous peaks are explained by war, severe winters, cholera and influenza, austerity seems a more likely culprit for the 2014-15 and continued excess. Turning to the latest release of mid-year population estimates and bringing this story up to date reveals continued dramatic changes in mortality for men and women. For example, 9,493 more men died in England between 2017 and 2018 than the preceding 12 months.

As Danny’s plenary drew to an end, he asked us how bad mortality has to get before we are bothered, sentiments echoed by Dr Ingrid Wolfe when discussing the consecutive rises in infant mortality in a panel session later in the afternoon. This is, she argued, “the worst possible canary in the mine”. However, as Danny urged, we should not be distracted by reversals when even a stalling to life expectancy should not have happened. The opening plenary concluded with a lively audience Q&A chaired by Gemma Ware, Society Editor for *The Conversation*. Indeed as one audience member tweeted, Danny drew a dispiriting comparison with unemployment under the Thatcher government in the 1980s: while we once seemed to view incrementally rising unemployment as a price worth paying, we seem to now view deaths of the elderly in the same way.

The following session saw talks from academics and the public sector, beginning with evidence revealing that though we were *once* living longer, this was not necessarily healthier (drawing a comparison with Danny’s early warnings of the change in mortality). Presenting work with colleagues at UCL, Professor George Ploubidis explored the implications of changing patterns of poor health for life expectancy using the Health Survey for England. Worse health and a stronger association between mortality and health amongst more recently born cohorts defy the basic premise of the epidemiologic transition. George concluded asking, why now? As the audience pondered this question, Chris White of the ONS examined changes in avoidable mortality revealing slowing rates of improvement in avoidable deaths for both males and females. Crucially, the evidence suggests that the changing trends in avoidable deaths are having an effect on the wider slowing of mortality and life expectancy gains.

Stalling Life Expectancy: A BSPS Day Meeting cont...

Dr Veena Raleigh of The King's Fund took a broader view, comparing changing patterns of life expectancy at birth across European countries: females do not fare well. However, in contrast to Danny's arguments Veena emphasised that some of the peaks and troughs we have seen in age-specific mortality rates since 2011 do coincide with flu and cold patterns as reported by Public Health England and EuroMOMO. She concluded that while the UK does compare poorly with European peers for health and social care spending, there are several UK-specific and pan-European factors at play driving changing mortality. Veena argued for better international dialogues and collaboration to address this.

Maintaining the international comparison, Dr Jennifer Dowd examined trends in mid-life mortality, asking whether the US was an anomaly through a comparison of the UK and Canada. Leveraging the ONS Longitudinal Study and StatCan, Jennifer evidenced the levelling off and possible increase in over-all mid-life mortality in the UK and a slow down in Canada. She concluded emphasising the need to understand how similarities and differences in the social, economic and political climate across countries influences population health.

The final presentation of the session came from Julie Ramsay and Maria Kaye-Bardgett of National Records Scotland. Shifting the geographic focus to Scotland, they revealed stalling life expectancy across Scotland with falls apparent in the most deprived areas. However, experiences vary between ages. Mortality rates were found to have worsened amongst those aged 35-49 and 90+, with further evidence to suggest that mortality worsened the most for younger age groups in the most deprived areas, and older age groups in the less deprived areas.

Dame Karen Dunnell, Chair of the Longevity Science Panel and former National Statistician and Chief Executive of the ONS, chaired the closing panel session. This panel spanned academia, clinicians, the third sector and practitioners. We were fortunate to hear a lively discussion on perceptions of why life expectancy appears to have faltered and fallen; experiences on the front line; and a powerful call to action both to prevent more deaths of our children and elderly, and to unite to tackle inequality. Dr Ben Barr, clinical lecturer at the University of Liverpool questioned our response to

stalling life expectancy: echoing Danny's earlier concerns, he asked why when GDP stalls do we act, yet stalling life expectancy simply promotes calls for more data collection? Presenting an alternative view, Professor Mike Murphy of the LSE urged caution as to the methods and data used, arguing that life expectancy is a contaminated measure.

Sharing experiences from the front line of Public Health and Medicine, Professor Dominic Harrison (Director of Public Health for Blackburn with Darwen) and Dr Ingrid Wolfe (Clinical Lecturer (KCL) and Consultant in Child Public Health) shifted the focus towards action. In Blackburn with Darwen, an area where life expectancy is actually reversing, people are not dying from new unusual causes. Cuts to services dramatically impact upon population health, indeed cuts to public health expenditure, expenditure which has been found to be more productive of health than NHS expenditure, has a price (Martin et al., 2019). So do we need more research, more evidence? For Dr Ingrid Wolfe, the answer is no. We simply need to act. Dr Wanda Wyporska, Executive Director at The Equality Trust agreed, highlighting the need for effective campaigning as we know that simply presenting an evidence base to policy makers is not enough.

While it is undeniable that the continuing debate over the most appropriate methods and data used to demonstrate changing mortality and faltering life expectancy is important, increasing avoidable or preventable mortality, the relative performance of the UK in life expectancy at birth compared to comparable European countries and excess deaths cannot be ignored. This day meeting shone additional light on these issues, and gave an opportunity for a diverse group of people to come together and debate.

References

Hiam, L., Harrison, D., McKee, M., Dorling, D. (2018) Why is life expectancy in England and Wales 'stalling'? *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 72(5):404-408.

Martin, S., Lomas, J., Claxton, K. (2018) Is an Ounce of Prevention Worth a Pound of Cure? *Estimates of the Impact of English Public Health Grant on Mortality and Morbidity*. Centre for Health Economics Research Paper 166. The University of York.

Recent papers in Population Studies from BSPS members

- ⇒ Fertility trajectories and later-life depression among parents in England - Emily M. D. Grundy, Sanna Read & Heini Väisänen – open access
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00324728.2019.1649450>
- ⇒ Adapting the Own Children Method to allow comparison of fertility between populations with different marriage regimes - Alice Reid, Hannaliis Jaadla, Eilidh Garrett & Kevin Schürer – open access
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00324728.2019.1630563>
- ⇒ Does broadband Internet affect fertility? - Francesco C. Billari, Osea Giuntella & Luca Stella – open access
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00324728.2019.1584327>
- ⇒ Family size and educational attainment in England and Wales - Tak Wing Chan, Morag Henderson & Rachel Stuchbury
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00324728.2019.1577479>
- ⇒ Mixed marriage among immigrants and their descendants in the United Kingdom: Analysis of longitudinal data with missing information - Hill Kulu & Tina Hannemann – open access
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00324728.2018.1493136>

Advanced STATA: Programming and other techniques to make your life easier.

A five day course from the Population Studies Group, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Course dates: 4 - 8 November 2019.

As well as being a powerful tool for statistical analysis, Stata offers a variety of commands for manipulating your data and for formatting, arranging and exporting your results. This intensive short course is aimed at researchers and other professionals, from any discipline, who regularly use Stata for analysis but want to learn how to work more efficiently. It would be particularly suited to those who are about to embark on large analyses and who would like a quick guide on how to automate the repetitive parts of the process. We will cover a range of topics including:

- efficient ways of working using do files commands that allow you to manipulate data and to easily create new summary variables and datasets.
- Stata's commands for accessing and outputting results including putdocx to send output to Word documents and two simple commands to write text files and Stata datasets containing results.
- creating new commands (programs) for Stata.

The course has run since 2008 and has been a great success. Participants have consistently commented on the excellent teaching and feedback includes "I learnt so much in such a short time", "I would recommend this course" and "This has saved me months of work". Each year we find that many people have had the course recommended by a friend or colleague.

More information about the course as well as enrolment instructions can be found here: <https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/study/courses/short-courses/advanced-stata>