INSIGHTS
2019-20

Findings from the UK Household
Longitudinal Study

ABOUT THE STUDY

Understanding Society provides key evidence about life in the UK. It is the largest longitudinal study of its kind and provides crucial information for researchers and policy makers about the causes and consequences of change in people's lives.

Our participants come from every area of the UK and the Study covers issues that affect all our lives, from family relationships, education and employment to health, social attitudes and behaviour.

IT COVERS ALL AGES.
Allowing us to understand the experiences of the whole population over time.

THE WHOLE HOUSEHOLD CONTRIBUTES.
We collect information on everyone in a household so that relations between generations, couples and siblings can be explored.

THERE IS CONTINUOUS DATA COLLECTION.
We interview participants every year so that short- and long-term changes in people's lives can be investigated.

WE HAVE NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL DATA.
All four countries of the UK are included in the Study, allowing researchers to compare the experiences of people in different places and in different policy contexts.

THERE IS AN ETHNIC MINORITY BOOST.
The sample sizes of different ethnic minority groups allow the experiences of specific ethnic minorities to be investigated.

IT IS MULTI-TOPIC.
Understanding Society covers a range of social, economic and behavioural factors, making it relevant to a wide range of policy makers and researchers.

IT CAN BE LINKED TO ADMINISTRATIVE DATA.
Study data can be linked, with consent, to administrative records from other sources, building a richer picture of households.

IT IS UNDERPINNED BY WORLD-LEADING METHODOLOGICAL RESEARCH.
Researchers have access to high-quality designed and harvested data supported by innovative experimentation, development and testing.

IT INCLUDES BIOMARKERS AND GENETIC DATA.
Data collected by nurses to measure people's health enable researchers to understand the relationship between social and economic circumstances and health.

Find out more about the Study online at **www.understandingsociety.ac.uk**

Sign up to our newsletter at **www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/email/signup**

Email: **info@understandingsociety.ac.uk**

🐦 @usociety

📘 Understanding Society – UK Household Longitudinal Study

WHAT WE FEEL AND WHAT WE ACTUALLY DO

FOREWORD

Capturing the complexity of the UK

Families, communities, work, education, health, political opinions, wealth and inequality – understanding what we feel and what we actually do, helps inform good government. Longitudinal studies like Understanding Society have the power to capture the complexity of individual and family lives and map the changes that take place over the life course.

Each person who takes part in Understanding Society contributes to a much bigger picture. The tens of thousands of households from all over the country that make up Understanding Society give an unprecedented view of contemporary life in the UK. At a time of social, economic and political turbulence, Understanding Society gives researchers and policy makers vital information on what is happening in real households, neighbourhoods and regions, and how changes are affecting them.

Understanding how the different aspects of life collide and diverge for all generations make Understanding Society a unique study for looking at life in the UK. Our oldest participants are now over 100 years old, and every year we have several hundred babies born into the Study. This huge breadth of life experience and circumstances makes Understanding Society both challenging and exciting for research. In 2020, we will be releasing our 10th Wave of data for researchers to use, while our fieldwork partners NatCen Social Research and Kantar Public will be out in the UK interviewing participants for Waves 11 and 12 of the Study.

It is always difficult to choose which research features in Insights. The data from Understanding Society is used by thousands of researchers from across the world, working in a vast range of disciplines. For this edition of Insights, we have chosen to focus on themes which resonate right across the UK. Social integration and cohesion is under scrutiny at the moment, as the country grapples with political and social divisions. Our Insights articles look at political and ethnic identity, whether we are becoming more segregated in society and whether social mobility is available to all.

Local and national links are explored in the section on geographical mobility. Featuring research on why people move long distances, the effect of moving on mental health and whether local roots impact on our political behaviour. Finally, we also feature research on health and employment using Understanding Society's biomarker and genetic data to look in more detail at how unemployment, poor quality jobs and being self-employed affect our health.

Each year our participants take the time to complete their survey. Understanding Society, and the incredible research that comes from it, only exists because people in all parts of the UK let us in to their lives and households. This has to be one of the great strengths of the Study – people of all ages contributing to our understanding of the times we live in.

> " At a time of social, economic and political turbulence Understanding Society gives researchers and policy makers vital information on what is happening in real households, neighbourhoods and regions, and how changes are affecting them.

Michaela Benzeval
Director, Understanding Society

SLEEPWALKING
TO SEGREGATION?
IF ANYTHING, IT'S
THE OPPOSITE

POLITICALLY
ENGAGED YOUNG
PEOPLE – WHY
ETHNIC MINORITY
TEENS ARE MORE
LIKELY TO SUPPORT
POLITICAL PARTIES.

POLLING
STATION

SOCIAL
MOBILITY –
ARE ETHNIC
MINORITIES
BEING LEFT
BEHIND?

POLITICAL
AND ETHNIC
IDENTITY

PROGRESS REMAINS PAINFULLY SLUGGISH

Adeeba Malik CBE
Deputy Chief Executive
QED Foundation

COMMENTARY

How long does it take for change to happen?

Living and working in a city like Bradford, we become very used to being the focus of research into the success or otherwise of multi-culturalism. People tend to know two things about Bradford: that it's 'full of Asians', and that it suffered serious riots at the turn of the millennium. If we're lucky, when questioned, they might mention a third: that the city was once at the heart of the industrial revolution, and that the wool industry on which its riches were built is now long gone.

It was, of course, the wool industry that triggered the greatest flow of integration into the city of, in particular, Pakistanis – from Mirpur and Kashmir – and Bangladeshis. Among them was my own father, Mohammed Sadiq Malik, who arrived in 1957 from Sialkot, a city near Lahore, and was lucky enough to be one of the very few English speakers who made the journey to Bradford at that time. These studies, into the social integration of immigrants, in many ways tell the story of how they have fared since, and whether the fortunes and economic prospects of their children and grandchildren have fared any better in more recent times.

The report by Herman, Lord Ouseley – former chair of the Commission for Racial Equality – into the causes of the Bradford Riots painted a picture of deep-rooted racial segregation and mutual lack of understanding and resentment between these and the indigenous white communities. Positively, the notion of Britain 'sleepwalking into segregation' is challenged by Rory Coulter and William Clark's more recent analysis of the Understanding Society data.

Coulter and Clark's suggestion that, in fact, immigrants are beginning to develop those more integrated communities themselves through social advancement, steered by economic success and personal aspiration, is an interesting premise, and one that's certainly borne out in many of the better off wards that make up the Bradford district. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it's also true that far from the 'white flight' that helped to create and foster segregation in the middle of the last century, those communities are happy to absorb and live alongside socially mobile South Asians of immigrant descent who share their values and pursuit of better homes, better education and a more comfortable lifestyle – although only to a limit. In our experience, too many incomers can still prompt departures in a previously white community – even though the underlying causes for this might be difficult to ascertain.

As the research points out, however, such integration is painfully slow. The QED Foundation was established 30 years ago to help support the social and economic advancement and integration of ethnic minorities. That work is as vital as ever today, especially among Bangladeshis and Pakistanis who remain among the most deprived and disadvantaged groups in this country.

They are certainly the most likely to be 'left behind' as Yaojun Li identifies in his article. His research shows that the second generation of these South Asian groups, along with Black Caribbean and Black African people, still lag behind, particularly in access to professional and managerial jobs.

The mass of immigrants from places such as Mirpur and Attock, for instance, were extremely poor and the impact of that is still seen in Bradford today. Although parents have high hopes for their children's advancement through education, the levels of attainment remain disgracefully low, notwithstanding those now getting higher education degrees, and progress in improving them is painfully sluggish.

Whether this feeds into the ambivalence towards political and ethnic identity identified in Alita Nandi and Lucinda Platt's work is unclear, but education, age, life-stage and work all appear to be more important to immigrants than their political and ethnic identities, a factor shared with those from majority communities. The authors believe that these identities are stronger among second generation minorities but, interestingly, actual experience of harassment is more likely to feed a political position than an ethnic one. Nicole Martin and Jon Mellon's analysis goes further and identifies various factors that help to explain the higher level of political engagement among ethnic minority young people. This has to be a positive development, but it remains to be seen if it translates into influence and change.

What these four studies share is a refreshing alternative and more diverse view of the process of integration. Since 1990, QED has seen progress among ethnic minorities in all aspects of British UK life, but it is evident that a huge amount of inequality still exists. The Pakistani community is faring badly on virtually every indicator. Unless there is a determination to tackle these inequalities across Whitehall – and I mean every department – progress will remain painfully slow, and we will be talking about the same issues in 10 years' time and beyond.

SLEEPWALKING TO SEGREGATION? IF ANYTHING, IT'S THE OPPOSITE

RORY COULTER UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON
WILLIAM A.V. CLARK UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Britain was "sleepwalking to segregation" in 2005. Those were the words of Trevor Phillips, then head of the Commission for Racial Equality, in a speech he gave that year. And in 2016, the Casey Review suggested that social problems such as mutual mistrust, extremism, prejudice, inequality and limited social mobility are made worse when people live in divided communities, and don't interact with people from different backgrounds.

As a result, the prevailing mood in political thinking has long been that minorities should not be clustered together in deprived urban neighbourhoods. The polarised immigration debates of recent years,

terrorist atrocities in London in 2017, and the 2011 riots, have all contributed to an atmosphere in which policymakers espouse a commitment to creating more 'mixed communities'.

However, research using Understanding Society data – plus information from the 2011 Census – suggests that people from all ethnic groups have shared aims. When White Britons, Asians and Black people can afford it, they typically look for the same thing: a bigger house, in a 'better' area, with good schools and amenities. The trend is, in fact, towards gradual de-segregation through social mobility.

For all minorities, economic success leads them to move gradually out of the city centres where they initially tend to settle into more suburban or rural environments, which happen to have a higher proportion of White British residents. In particular, higher incomes lead Asians to move towards traditionally White British neighbourhoods as their income increases. And, rather than large-scale 'white flight' from neighbourhoods with a high concentration of ethnic minorities, the researchers found that White Britons generally do not seem to avoid minorities when they move.

This gradual mixing is probably a side effect of a common process of social mobility: less deprived areas have historically tended to be 'whiter', so minorities who move into a more advantaged area will often inevitably be heading for somewhere with a larger share of White British residents.

However, there is still less movement than there might be, and change is slow. The opportunities you have in the neighbourhood you grow up in will influence where you live later. Where you end up, in other words, is still very much shaped by where you start out. For example, the neighbourhood you move to is influenced by your educational qualifications and whether you own your own home. People born in poorer families and ethnic minority families face disadvantages compared to their White British counterparts which still have a significant effect on where they live later in life. And for some minority groups – especially Bangladeshis and Pakistanis – difficulties in the labour market help explain why they are disproportionately concentrated in deprived urban neighbourhoods.

Britain, then, is not 'sleepwalking to segregation', but there are persistent differences between neighbourhoods in terms of their ethnic make-up and socio-economic position. Although there is a trend towards integration, and movement towards more affluent neighbourhoods, people from ethnic minorities do on average tend to relocate to less advantaged neighbourhoods when they move – and to areas with a greater share of minorities – than their White British peers do.

We need to see more research in this area to understand how much these patterns are caused by the disadvantages many people face, or their fears of harassment and seeming 'out of place' in particular neighbourhoods. But we should also consider how much they are determined by choices – especially when it comes to religious and cultural differences. In the past, British politicians have specifically said

KEY POINTS

There are fears that segregation of minorities could threaten the cohesion, prosperity and security of British society.

In fact, people from different ethnic groups typically have common goals, and economic success allows them to act on these goals and move to more desirable neighbourhoods.

Higher incomes accelerate ethnic mixing by carrying Asians into neighbourhoods with a greater share of White Britons.

However, where you start out in life still determines where you end up, and people's opportunities in life affect the neighbourhoods they move to.

Ethnic minorities tend to move to less advantaged neighbourhoods than their White British peers.

they are concerned about the segregation of specific ethno-religious groups, so future studies need to ask whether – as well as wanting to remain near friends and family – people from some backgrounds also want to remain near religious and other cultural centres and specific services.

We also need more research into how place of birth, ethnicity, culture and income affect neighbourhoods in different ways in different parts of the country. This would help us understand how larger scale factors, such as the global economic crisis, and recent reforms to welfare and social housing are affecting different groups' social mobility.

> "
> Longitudinal studies, like Understanding Society, follow people's lives for longer and help us see in more detail how neighbourhoods develop and how they may be affected by changes in people's income and other socio-economic factors.

CITATION:

Coulter, R. and Clark, W. A. (2019), Ethnic Disparities in Neighbourhood Selection: Understanding the Role of Income. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 43: 947–962. doi:10.1111/1468-2427.12697

SOCIAL MOBILITY – ARE ETHNIC MINORITIES BEING LEFT BEHIND?

YAOJUN LI XI'AN JIAOTONG UNIVERSITY
& UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

KEY POINTS

There is strong evidence that first generation immigrants experience a setback in their social standing when they arrive in the UK.

There are some signs that the second generation is catching up with their white counterparts.

However, they still face disadvantages in the labour market – being less likely to get the best jobs than comparable white people.

There are also inequalities between ethnic minorities. Indians and Chinese are making progress, but Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Black Africans and Black Caribbean groups are lagging behind.

What is happening to social mobility, especially for people from ethnic minorities? Are second generation people from ethnic minorities catching up with White Britons, and becoming more integrated into society?

It's a subject which has been much studied in the last 30 years, because high levels of social mobility are seen as evidence of a vibrant meritocracy, while low levels are a sign of a rigid, exclusive society in which people are less likely to progress.

Research in this field tends to consider one of three measures of mobility: the effect of a person's origin on their education, the effect of their education on their 'destination' (where they are in the social hierarchy when their data are collected), and the effect of their origin on their destination. This new research considers all three measures at the same time, and looks at different generations of ethnic minorities.

This approach makes sense because these measures are very much bound up together – and they influence each other.

For example, we might expect that immigrants – who tend to come from poorer countries – will have lower social status and educational qualifications than the white people in the population they are joining. In fact, previous research shows that, while there are exceptions, people who leave their home country to make a life in another are likely to have a relatively high status compared to the bulk of the population they have left behind – but also when compared to the population they are joining.

However, language barriers, overseas qualifications, being unfamiliar with the UK job market, and racism (whether overt or more subtle) mean they see a decline in their social standing when they arrive in the UK.

This research confirmed that this was true, and that things were then different for their children. For the second generation, the influence of their origin on their education and destination suggested that they had greater mobility than white people. However, this mobility could be upwards or downwards, because, although ethnic minority families are more likely to encourage upward mobility, they are also less likely to be in a position to prevent downward mobility.

This is because second generation children from families with a relatively low social status are likely to find that their parents – whose social status declined when they left their home country – instil in them the importance of doing well in education. This will be truer for them than it is for white children from a similar background. But at the same time, ethnic minority families with higher social status don't have the same social capital as a white family at the same level, so their children will find it more difficult to maintain that status.

Either way, this research shows that, despite their educational achievements, second generation ethnic minorities still face disadvantages in the labour market. They are still behind their white peers in reaching 'white collar' status, and at much higher risk of unemployment. For example, Chinese men are more likely to have a degree than white men, but less likely to get the best jobs.

The research also shows that – despite the second generation showing signs of catching up with white people – some groups do better than others. Indian and Chinese people in the UK are making progress, while Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Black Caribbean people and Black Africans lag behind.

The researcher believes this is the first systematic attempt to examine origin, education and destination for these groups – using one of the UK's most authoritative data sets – and that it shows people from ethnic minority backgrounds having "a long and bumpy journey in Britain".

When she was Prime Minister, Theresa May said the continued disadvantages faced by ethnic minorities in Britain must be "explained or changed". This research shows that ethnic inequality persists over generations, and that there is growing ethnic polarisation, with both generations of Black Africans experiencing class declines. The need to overcome social exclusion is a challenge for government, employers and wider society.

> " Our analysis does show that in spite of their humble family origins, the second generation outperform their white peers in education but their excellences in human capital do not bring them equal returns to labour market positions.

POLITICALLY ENGAGED YOUNG PEOPLE – WHY ETHNIC MINORITY TEENS ARE MORE LIKELY TO SUPPORT POLITICAL PARTIES

NICOLE MARTIN UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER
JONATHAN MELLON UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

Over the last 50 years, the UK has seen a slow but steady decrease in British voters' attachment to political parties. Where once the political party that you supported was an important factor in your identity, newer generations of voters are less likely to personally identify with any political party and are more likely to switch between parties at each election. This gradual reduction in party political identity can be seen across all sections of the UK population, apart from one – ethnic minority young people.

Why have ethnic young people resisted the trend towards lower political party attachment, and why are they so much more politically engaged than White British teenagers? To answer these questions, two researchers used Understanding Society youth data and combined it with information about their parents to compare the young people's responses to questions about political identity and their parent's engagement with political parties. Taking a multi-generational approach allowed them to explore what the young people themselves thought, but also how parents' political identity influences their children's political beliefs. The research focused on young people aged between ten and fifteen, looking at how they acquired political partisanship and whether they retained this political identity in subsequent years of the Study.

Ethnic minority families generally tend to have higher levels of support for political parties – and in particular the Labour party - compared to White British families. Looking specifically at young people, the research found that in 2011–2012, 75% of ethnic minority 16-24 year olds report having a political party preference, compared with 64% of White British young people of the same age. White minority young people show a different relationship, with even lower levels of political party attachment than the white UK majority. Young people of mixed heritage were more likely to have a party attachment than white UK young people, but less than other minority groups.

So what influences this difference? Why are ethnic minority young people more interested in politics? One of the most important factors is that ethnic minority parents are more likely to have a party identity than White British parents of the same age – and this difference is picked up by adolescents. Parents are a strong influence on young people's political opinions, with parental political party identification strongly associated with young people acquiring their own party attachment. For example, children who were brought up in two-parent households where both parents have a party identification are 11-13 per cent more likely to have their own party attachment. Interestingly, it doesn't seem to matter if parents don't agree on which party they support – young people who are exposed to parents who support different political parties have an even higher rate of political party identification than those young people whose parents support the same party. This suggests that growing up in a family where politics is discussed and political views shared, even if you don't agree with each other, is an important factor in developing a party attachment, rather than exposure to one consistent political message.

Family also makes a difference to young people's politics when you look at the other activities family members are involved in. Adolescents whose parent is a member of a political, local or religious organisation are more likely to report a party preference. For example, having a mother who belongs to a political organisation is also a strong predictor of political attachment, with young people who have a politically engaged mother being 10% more likely to support a political party. This is important for this research because ethnic minority groups (at least among the age group of most parents) have higher levels of participation in community and religious groups than the white UK population. Family voting behaviour also plays a role, with party attachment being consistently related to how certain a young person's mother is that she will vote at the next general election.

Where you live also seems to have an impact on young people's political identification. Ethnic minority young people are disproportionally raised in Labour party areas of the UK and this appears to make a difference.

KEY POINTS

Ethnic minority young people (10-15) are more likely to know who they would vote for than white UK young people.

Parents' support for political parties has a strong influence on their children's political identity.

Family engagement in political, community and religious organisations helps young people form and retain political party attachments.

Labour is by far the most popular party among all young people in the UK, so Labour areas may be more conducive to gaining a political identity – perhaps because of the social composition of these areas, or perhaps because Labour supporters place a higher value on the importance of partisanship. Living in a Labour area increases all young people's political engagement by 6%.

This research suggests that the role of parents seems to be the key factor in whether young people engage with politics. Parents of white UK young people are less likely to have a party identity, are less likely to hold strong views on whether to vote and are generally less interested in politics – they are not sending any strong signals to their children about which political party to support. In contrast, ethnic minority parents transmit strong signals about choosing a political party to support and about participating in political processes.

> " Differences in levels of parental partisanship and political engagement are the key factors in explaining the difference in minority and white UK acquisition and retention of party attachment during this critical period of political development.

POLITICAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

ALITA NANDI UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX
LUCINDA PLATT LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

Across Europe there has been a rise in political parties focussing on an ethnic conception of a nation, explicitly opposed to immigrants and minorities and their claims to belonging. Publicly articulated concerns about the 'failures' of multiculturalism and integration have led to claims about a lack of minority endorsement of national identity and a rise in populist conceptions of what a nation is. But what evidence is there on the relationship between people's political and ethnic identities? Are the UK's (ethnic) minority and majority different in this respect?

Understanding Society asks respondents a broad range of questions about their lives including about their personal identities across different domains, which enabled the researchers to answer these questions.

The first thing that was clear from the analysis was that for most people their political and ethnic identities are not their main personal identity. For both majority and minority groups other sources of identity, such as age or life stage, gender, family, education and profession are more important.

This research found that most characteristics that are associated with stronger political identity are also associated with stronger ethnic identity and these are the same for both the majority and minority groups. One exception was that majority group women reported weaker ethnic identities than men while the opposite was true of minorities.

The researchers merged this data with the 2010 General Election results to measure the UKIP and BNP presence in the neighbourhood, and found it was associated with stronger ethnic, but not political identity, particularly among the majority. This suggests that the political messaging around 'in groups' and 'outgroups' propagated by these political parties may have led to a greater sense of awareness of ethnic identity, particularly among the majority.

For minorities, experiencing ethnic or racial harassment or being Muslim was associated with a stronger political but not a stronger ethnic identity. And the second generation, that is, ethnic minorities who were born in the UK, reported stronger ethnic and political identities than the first generation.

Some contextual factors, such as political mobilisation around issues of immigration, that might be expected to influence both these identities are difficult to measure in large surveys, and were not asked in this one. Instead, the researchers asked if, after accounting for the measured characteristics discussed above, the strength of the two identities was correlated. The answer was yes. And this correlation was stronger among the majority than the minority, and within the majority among those with affiliation to the Conservative party, or those with no party affiliation, and among those with less egalitarian beliefs.

In the past, research into ethnic identity has suggested that minorities place the most significance on their ethnicity. This research suggests that this is not the case – minorities, just like the majority, are more heavily invested in other aspects of their identity, such as their education, work or family life. The highly politicised public narrative around Muslims in particular being more invested in ethnic identity and self-segregation than other groups is also undermined by this research. Instead, it shows Muslims expressing their political identity, perhaps reflecting a more general politicisation of ethnicity. Against a backdrop of studies which have shown a decline in ethnic identity across the generations, this research suggests second generation minority groups are continuing to identify themselves by their ethnicity, but also becoming more politically invested than their parents.

KEY POINTS

Political and ethnic identities are less important to majority and minority groups than other identity domains, such as life-stage, work or education.

Political and ethnic identities are stronger among second generation minorities.

Having experienced harassment was significantly associated with a stronger political identity, but not an ethnic one.

There is evidence of co-evolution of political and ethnic identities, more so among the majority and among them for those with affiliation to the Conservative party or who have less egalitarian values.

> " Being Muslim and having experienced harassment were significantly associated with stronger political, but not ethnic, identity among minorities. Ethnic and racial harassment was also associated with stronger political identity but not stronger ethnic identity.

THE ASSOCIATION OF SELECTED INDIVIDUAL AND CONTEXTUAL CHARACTERISTICS WITH MAJORITY AND MINORITY POLITICAL IDENTITY

Net political identity

Net ethnic identity

● White UK   ▲ Ethnic Minority
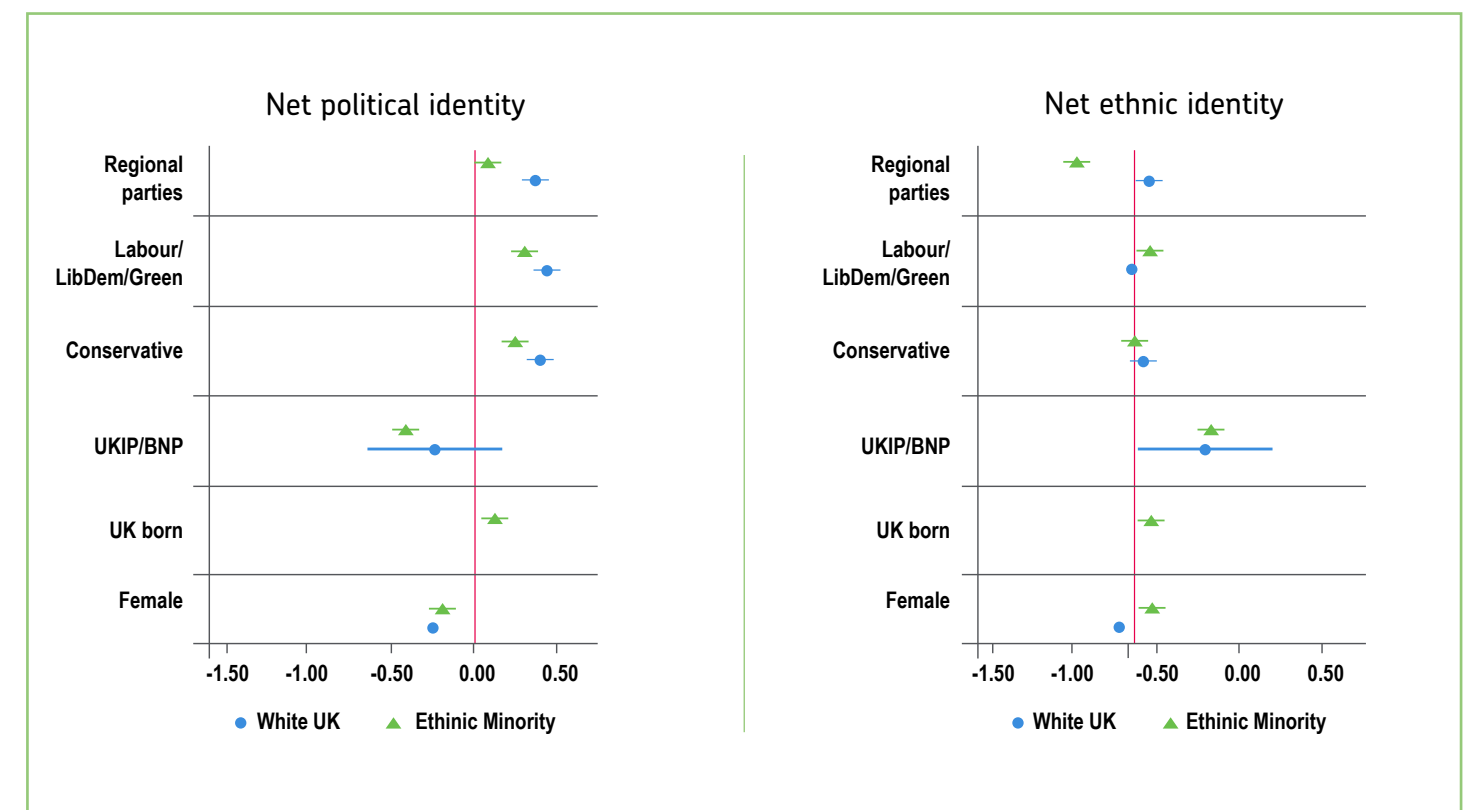
WORK AND HEALTH

HOW DOES BEING SELF-EMPLOYED AFFECT PEOPLE'S HEALTH?

A POOR QUALITY JOB COULD BE WORSE FOR YOUR HEALTH THAN BEING UNEMPLOYED

PIZZAS, CALZONE
KEBABS & CURRI
KIDS UNDER 5 EAT FR
5 WHITEHALL STRE

UNEMPLOYMENT, UNDERWEIGHT, AND OBESITY

THERE IS MUCH TO BE POSITIVE ABOUT

Dr Fiona Aldridge
Director for Policy and Research,
Learning and Work Institute

COMMENTARY

Flexible work can't be an end in itself

This year's annual findings report from Understanding Society offers new and important insight into the relationship between work and health – with particular focus on the impact of unemployment, self-employment and poor-quality employment on our bodies.

In general, we know that good employment supports good health, while unemployment is linked to poor health. At the Learning and Work Institute, therefore, we are focussed on making sure everyone who can work has access to good work with opportunities to develop and progress.

And there is much to be positive about. At 76%, the UK employment rate is at a record high and unemployment has been falling for the past six years.

Yet our economy faces profound challenges, too. While employment has risen, far too many people remain stuck in low pay, unable to make ends meet. And while unemployment has fallen, stubbornly persistent employment gaps remain for some groups and in some places.

As our economy changes, and as working lives become longer, it is critical that we better understand the relationship between work and health. The use of biomarkers – such as cholesterol levels, blood pressure and body fat distribution – in these studies help us do just that. In enabling researchers to move beyond self-reported measures of health, to focus instead on the objective signs of health that employment status has on our bodies, these studies can help us with early or more precise diagnosis and to anticipate physical and mental health conditions to come.

The study by Amanda Hughes and Meena Kumari highlights that, while we know unemployment is linked to greater risk of ill health and mortality, we know much less about its impact on the weight of job seekers – in terms of both underweight and overweight.

Developing our understanding of the different impact on particular groups should allow us to target health improvement policies better, thereby protecting job seekers from long term health conditions associated with weight that can affect their ability to find and keep work. The finding that the effect of unemployment on people's weight is greater the longer they are out of work adds to the wider evidence base on the scarring effects of long-term unemployment, and should raise our commitment to tackling this issue.

The analysis by Tarani Chandola and Nan Zhang, however, is a powerful reminder that while finding a job *can* be good for us, the theory that 'any job is better than no job' is not necessarily true when it comes to our health and wellbeing. Instead, the quality of the job is a key factor is determining whether getting back to work improves or harms our health. As the government renews its commitment to delivering its Good Work Plan, it is imperative that there is a focus not only on maintaining the quantity of available work, but also on improving its quality.

Finally, the study by Pankaj Patel, Marcus Wolfe and Trenton Williams demonstrates that the self-employed exhibit greater levels of 'allostatic load', that is wear and tear on their bodies, and that the longer they are self-employed, the greater this load is. This is an issue of growing salience; one of the key features of our labour market over the past decade has been the rapid growth of self-employment, rising from 12% of the labour force in 2001 to more than 15% in 2019.

Helpfully however, the authors identify that this load can be reduced through a range of coping strategies. And as the number of people who are self-employed has grown, extending beyond those who naturally see themselves as entrepreneurs, it becomes more important that we better understand how to support the self-employed to cope with the stresses of their situation – perhaps with lessons too for managing stress across the wider workforce.

> " The finding that the effect of unemployment on people's weight is greater the longer they are out of work adds to the wider evidence base on the scarring effects of long-term unemployment and should raise our commitment to tackling this issue.

HOW DOES BEING SELF-EMPLOYED AFFECT PEOPLE'S HEALTH?

PANKAJ C. PATEL VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY
MARCUS T. WOLFE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
TRENTON A. WILLIAMS INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Being self-employed can be highly demanding, but we still know very little about the effects that the stress of self-employment might have on the body. Could being self-employed have a significant effect on long-term health?

Previous studies have looked specifically at links between self-employment and stress, but had mixed results. Some research suggested that self-employed people had more stress than employed people, while other research suggested lower levels of stress for the self-employed. However, new research using biomarker data is showing us clearer links between self-employment and health.

Biomarkers are objective signs of health, such as cholesterol levels and blood pressure, which were collected in Waves 2-3 of Understanding Society, allowing researchers to look at health alongside social and economic data. In particular, a set of biomarkers allowed researchers to consider 'allostatic load', or the wear and tear on the body caused by our lives and lifestyles – which can be a precursor to a number of serious physical and mental health conditions.

This study suggests that self-employment is associated with higher levels of allostatic load, and that the longer people are self-employed, the higher their levels will be. But it also suggests that the relationship between self-employment and allostatic load can be reduced by certain coping strategies.

These results differ from previous findings on stress and self-employment, because biomarkers are objective – unlike traditional, self-reported measures of health. The researchers suggest that allostatic load and stress biomarkers complement self-reports of stress that are perhaps based on individuals' perceptions of recent and previous episodes of stress.

Because there are so many different ways that being self-employed could affect health, it's important to get a better understanding of the association between self-employment as an occupation and individual health and wellbeing. It's possible that entrepreneurs have higher levels of allostatic load because of the multiple, demanding roles they play in their business – or that greater uncertainty and instability, and the accompanying financial risk associated with self-employment could influence individual health. On the other hand, their allostatic load could be lower because they have a greater feeling of autonomy and control over their work, because being able to choose what to do on a particular day could help with managing stressful situations.

Another factor to consider is that different people will respond to the same challenges in different ways. This research indicates that problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping both helped to lower allostatic load. In other words, some self-employed people either focus on solving the problem – perhaps by asking for advice, using previous experience, or negotiating – or manage their emotional response, by distancing themselves or thinking about the situation differently.

This suggests that it's not simply down to different people having different responses, but different types of people. There is evidence that people who are suited to being entrepreneurs are more likely to choose self-employment, while those with different traits will choose a different career path – so it may be that entrepreneurs are particularly good at dealing with the pressures involved, and thus feel less stress. However, the effect is small, and while the benefits are feasible, coping strategies may not lead to large improvements in allostatic load.

This research tells us more than we knew before about coping with stress. It may be that people who make more use of problem-focused coping have lower levels of allostatic load, and thus better health and wellbeing. This suggests a direction for future research to help us understand health and self-employment better.

The findings also suggest new ways in which we can use biomarkers – for example, to research work and stress more generally. Biomarkers could be used to investigate subjects such as employee turnover, changing jobs, and other ways in which stress plays a role in workplace change. They could also help us understand more about decision-making, crisis management, and other scenarios where people in the workplace face physiological strain.
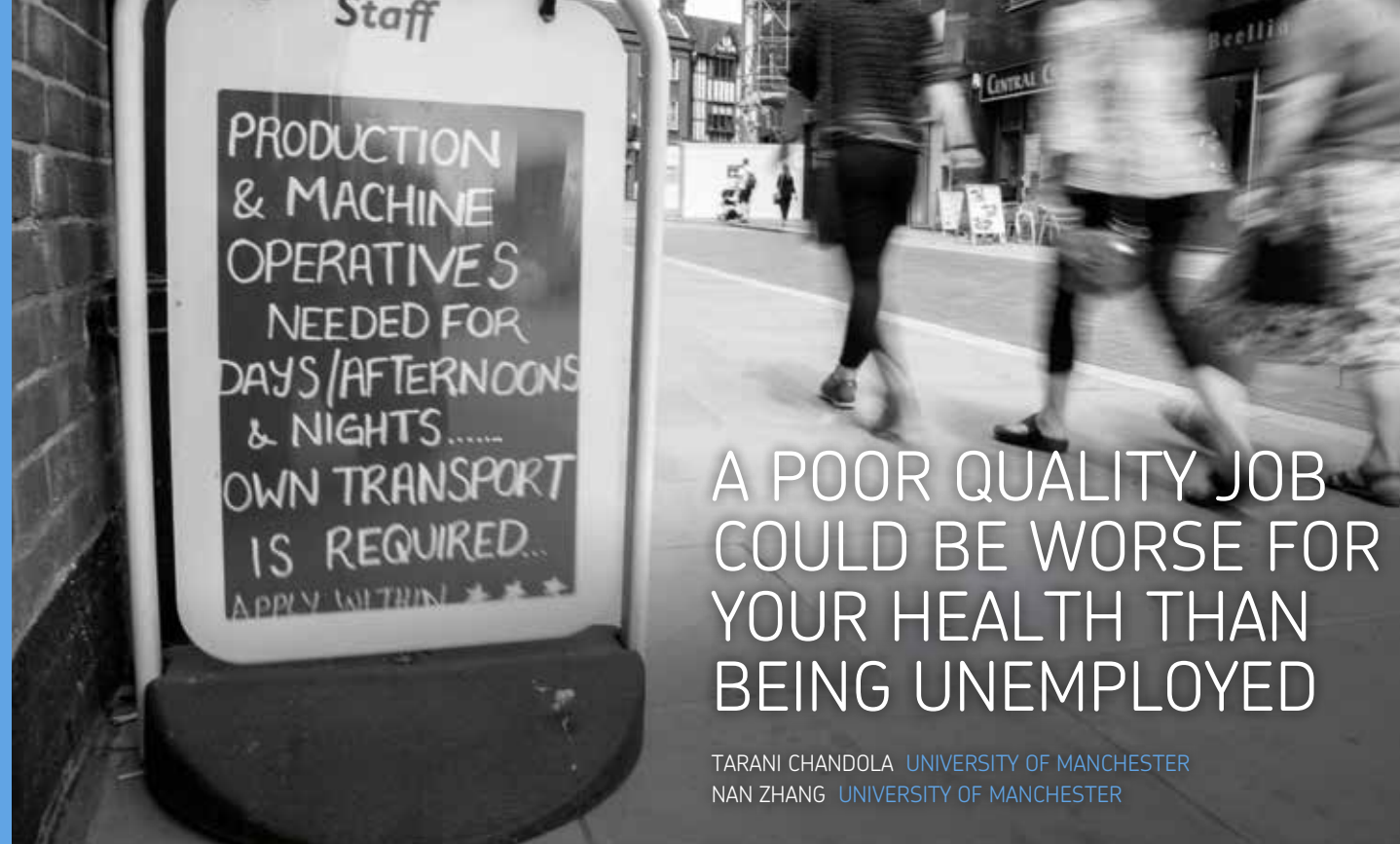
KEY POINTS

Self-employed people have higher levels of allostatic load, and the longer they are self-employed, the higher their levels will be.

Allostatic load, measured by biomarkers, is the wear and tear on the body caused by our lives and lifestyles.

Allostatic load can be a precursor to a number of serious physical and mental health conditions.

The association between self-employment and allostatic load can be reduced by focusing on solving the problem or managing one's emotional response.

Biomarkers could tell us more about workplaces and management more generally.

> " Entrepreneurship and self-employment are inherently emotional activities and individuals who engage in such endeavours often experience intense levels of both positive and negative emotions.

A POOR QUALITY JOB COULD BE WORSE FOR YOUR HEALTH THAN BEING UNEMPLOYED

TARANI CHANDOLA UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER
NAN ZHANG UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

Any job is not necessarily better than no job.

Unemployment is linked to poor health, and finding a job can be good for us – but the quality of a job can affect our health.

Good work is good for health, but poor quality work can be detrimental for our health.

We must take job quality into account when we consider unemployed people's 'success' in finding work.

---

earnings, job security, job satisfaction, job anxiety (the extent to which people felt uneasy, worried or unhappy about a job), job autonomy (how much influence one has over tasks and workload) and the quality of the working environment.

Using self-reported (physical and mental) health scores, the researchers found that starting any kind of job was not linked to an improvement in physical health. Starting a good job was linked to an improvement in mental health, but there was no difference in mental health scores between those who started poor quality jobs and those who remained unemployed.
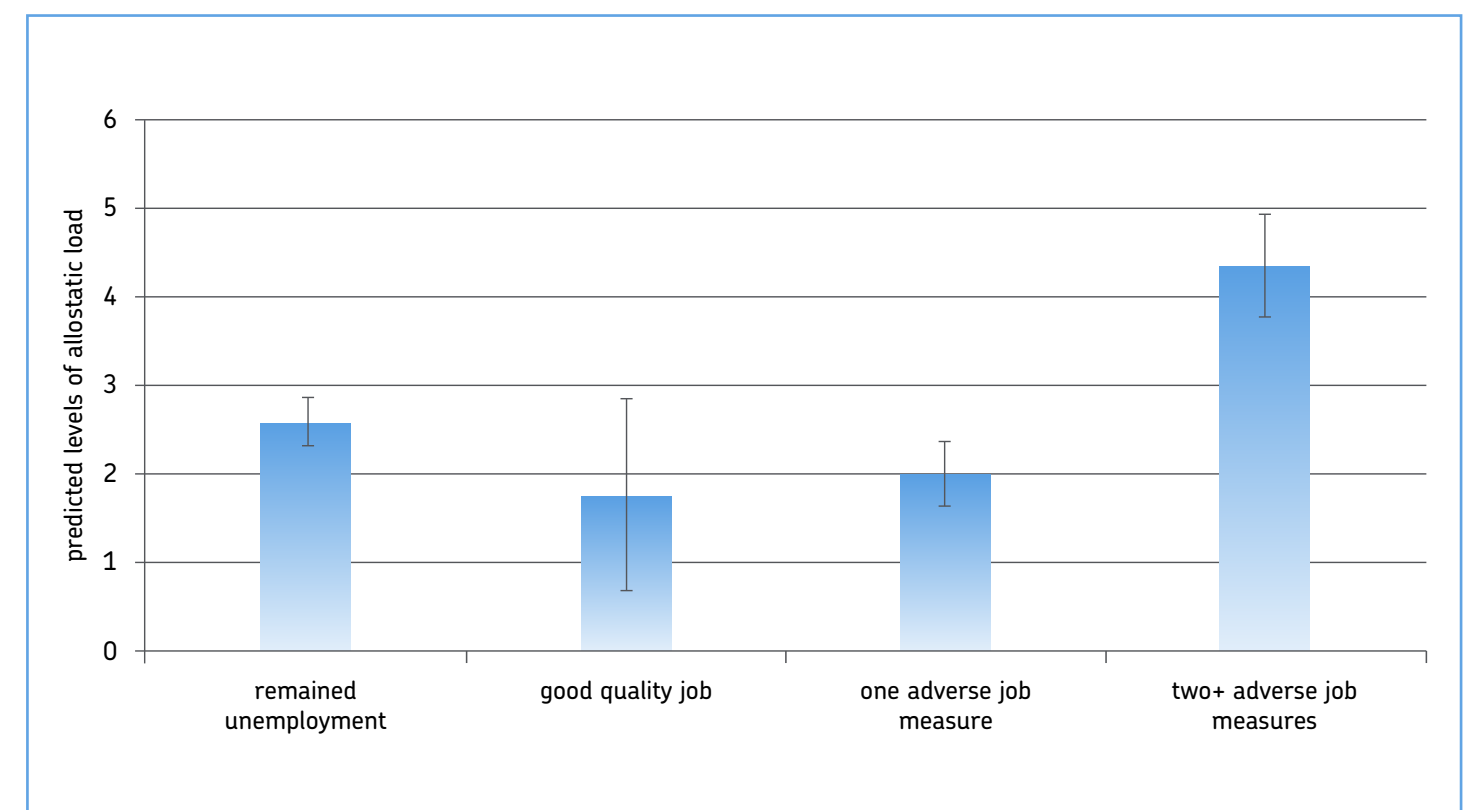
There is an assumption that any job is better than no job when it comes to our health and wellbeing, but this research contradicts that theory. It found that getting a poor quality job was linked to higher levels of long-term stress than staying unemployed. It also seems to contradict the fact that job loss during recessions is linked to increased suicide rates. However, this research is based on objective biomarkers, rather than subjective, self-reported health measures. Biomarkers measure 'subclinical' disease – that is, signs in the body which people are not usually aware of, but which may lead to illness. If people in poor quality work have these adverse levels of biomarkers, they may be on a path to metabolic or cardiovascular disease. This would be a different route to ill health than the suicides associated with recessions.

People who had gone into poor quality work had similar levels of mental health to those who were still unemployed, but they had worse results in terms of biomarkers. The researchers couldn't say that the poor quality

work caused the allostatic load, but they found little evidence of health selection – people with poor physical or mental health being more likely to find poor quality jobs.

The researchers concluded that job quality must be a consideration when we think about people's 'success' in leaving unemployment and finding a job. While they may stop claiming unemployment benefits, the quality of the job they find may have significant implications for their long-term health and wellbeing – and these also represent a cost to the state.

Unemployment is linked to poor health, and finding a job can be good for us – but new evidence suggests that the quality of a job can affect whether getting back into work improves or harms our health.

The previous evidence on this issue was based on self-reported measures of health and wellbeing, but the new study uses biomarker data – objective measures such as cholesterol, proteins in the blood, blood pressure, and body fat distribution. Taken together, the biomarkers add up to what we call allostatic load – the wear and tear on the body which can be a sign of serious physical and mental health conditions to come.

The researchers wanted to compare the health of people who moved from unemployment into poor quality work with those who stayed unemployed. In particular, they wanted to see if there were differences between the two groups' levels of biomarkers related to long-term stress.

They found that people over 50 were most likely to remain unemployed, and least likely to transition into a good quality job. Women, people with degrees, and those living in their own homes were least likely to remain unemployed. People with existing health conditions, poor mental health, or who had been unemployed for several years, were the most likely to remain unemployed.

There was a clear pattern of high allostatic load for people who moved into poor quality work, and low allostatic load for those who found high quality work.

People who stayed unemployed tended to have the lowest scores for self-reported physical and mental health (indicating the poorest health), but they also had lower levels of allostatic load than people who got poor quality jobs. The study measured job quality by considering

---

> "
> Job quality cannot be disregarded from the employment success of the unemployed and may have important implications for their health and wellbeing.

PREDICTED LEVELS OF ALLOSTATIC LOAD BY JOB TRANSITION AND ADVERSITY

Bar chart showing predicted levels of allostatic load (y-axis, 0 to 6) by category: remained unemployment (~2.6), good quality job (~1.75), one adverse job measure (~2.0), two+ adverse job measures (~4.3).

UNEMPLOYMENT AFFECTS DIFFERENT GROUPS' HEALTH AND WEIGHT IN DIFFERENT WAYS

AMANDA HUGHES UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL
MEENA KUMARI UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX

We know that not having a job brings an increased risk of ill health and mortality, but the links between unemployment and weight are not as well understood. There has been research into possible links between unemployment and body mass index (BMI), but with inconsistent results.

New research using Understanding Society data has started to fill that gap in our knowledge. One paper has found that jobseekers were more likely to be underweight, and less likely to be overweight, than similar people who had not recently been unemployed. The link between being unemployed and being underweight was particularly clear among men, the longer-term unemployed and jobseekers from households with a lower income.

The higher risk of being underweight may be less pronounced for women because men still typically earn more. That is, a woman whose male partner has a job may be insulated from the effects of unemployment if he is contributing more to household income than she is. Motherhood – which can affect both a woman's BMI and her status in the job market – may also be complicating the results.

The association between being unemployed and being underweight was also greater for those who had been unemployed for longer (10 months or more). There are long term health conditions associated with being underweight, which could affect a person's ability to find and keep work. The researchers took these – and symptoms of depression and anxiety – into account, but this did not explain the increased risk of being underweight. The researchers therefore believe the most likely explanation is that unemployment was affecting people's weight, rather than vice versa – and affecting it more the longer they were out of work.

Household income also appeared to influence the link between unemployment and weight. Poorer jobseekers were more likely to be underweight than those with a higher income. We tend to think that people with a smaller budget will choose cheaper food, rich in energy (especially in the form of sugar) and low in nutrients, which can lead to obesity. However, the UK's Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey found that men on low incomes reduced their overall energy intake compared to the gen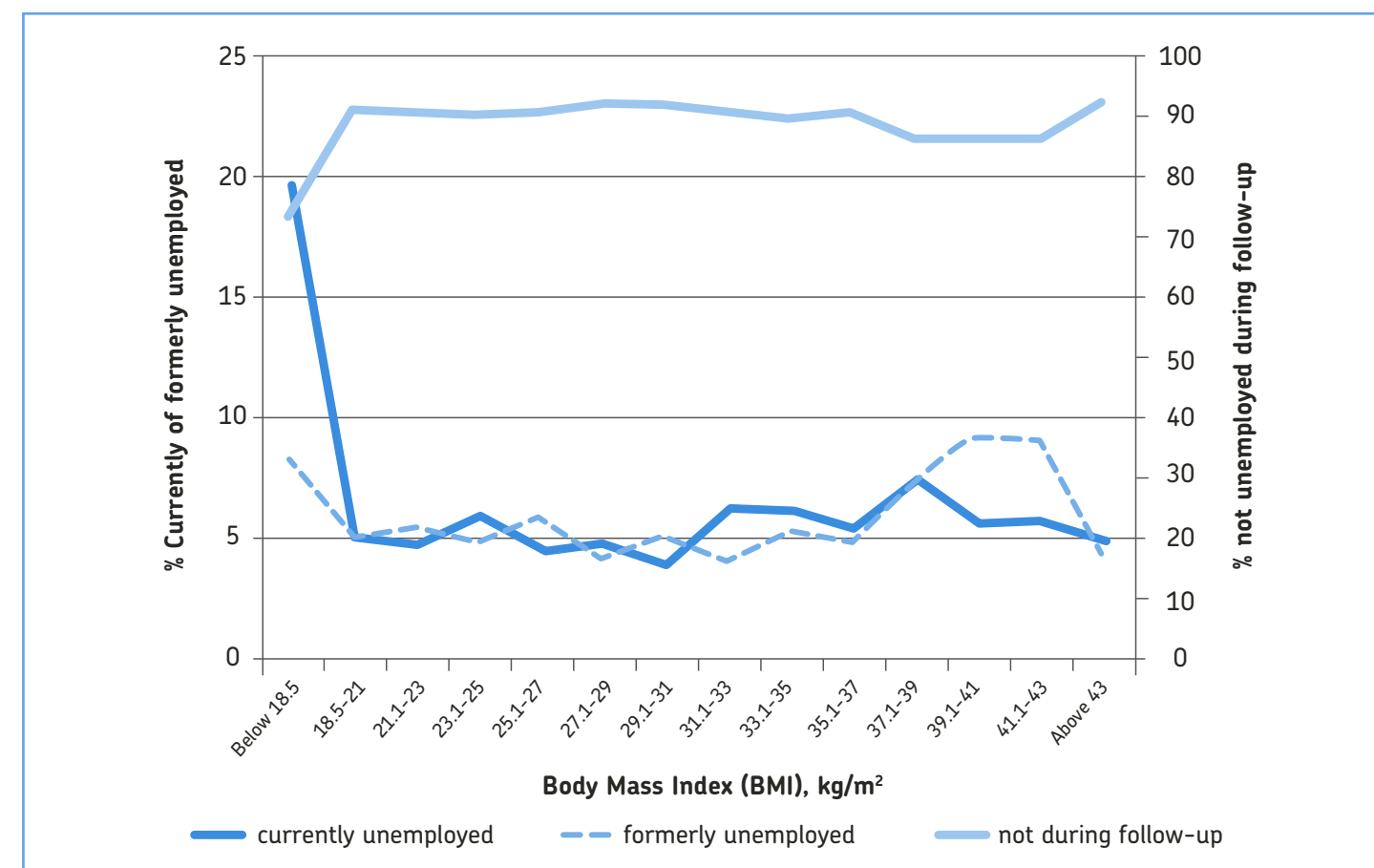eral population. This suggests that a very restricted income leads people to eat less overall. This could explain why they are underweight – especially if any household income from other sources does not provide a safety net.

Alongside the increased risk for unemployed people of being underweight, jobseekers were also at greater risk of obesity – but only if they did not smoke. We know that nicotine suppresses appetite, and that smoking speeds up our metabolism, so – although it comes with a great many health risks – widespread smoking may be 'protecting' jobseekers from obesity. It could also reflect competing priorities between tobacco, food, and other essentials when smokers find themselves on a severely restricted budget.

Physical activity may also affect the relationship between unemployment and weight. The British Time Use Survey suggests that people without jobs are less likely to have a car, and more likely to engage in 'active transport' – to walk or cycle, rather than driving or taking public transport. This may reflect that not just running a car but even bus fares can be unaffordable on a very low income. However, differences in reported activity did not explain the increased risk of being underweight among the unemployed. This suggests differences in how much energy people take in (their diet) as well as how much they expend (how much physical activity they do).

Overall, this research shows that not having a job is likely to affect different groups of people in different ways, and it shows the direction future research needs to take. Understanding the links between unemployment and weight can help to identify those groups most at risk of becoming underweight or obese while they're unemployed. That way, policies to improve their health can be targeted more effectively.

KEY POINTS

We know that unemployment is linked to greater risk of ill health and mortality.

This research shows that jobseekers are more likely to be underweight than people who had never been unemployed. This was particularly true of longer-term jobseekers, men, and less affluent participants.

At the same time, jobseekers who don't smoke are also more likely to be obese.

Unemployment likely affects different groups' weight in different ways. More research in this area could identify those groups most at risk of becoming underweight or obese while they're unemployed.

> " Increased underweight and decreased overweight among jobseekers was more apparent for longer-term unemployed participants.

BMI AND UNEMPLOYMENT

BMI and unemployment chart. Y-axis (left): % Currently of formerly unemployed (0 to 25); Y-axis (right): % not unemployed during follow-up (0 to 100). X-axis: Body Mass Index (BMI), kg/m². Legend: currently unemployed, formerly unemployed, not during follow-up.

GEOGRAPHIC MOBILITY

MOVING HOME AND MENTAL HEALTH

SOMEWHERE OR ANYWHERE? LOCAL ROOTS AND THE BREXIT VOTE

WORK, EDUCATION, FAMILY? WHY DO PEOPLE MOVE LONG DISTANCES?

WHY, WHEN & WHERE PEOPLE MOVE

Andrew Carter
Chief Executive
Centre for Cities

COMMENTARY

Creating opportunities for people who move – and those who want to stay

Increasing attention has been given over the last decade to geographic mobility. Most of this has focused on migration levels, but less has aimed to understand why, when and where people move, and the implications this has for them and the places they leave or move to. The studies included in this year's publication begin to address this imbalance.

Where you live influences your social views. Neil Lee, Katy Morris and Thomas Kemeny's work makes an important contribution to the growing body of research, such as Andrés Rodriguez-Pose's, on the 'revenge of places left behind', and popularised by commentators such as David Goodhart as the 'somewheres' and the 'anywheres'. This work shows that place-based factors, such as economic performance and migration levels, in combination with individual characteristics (age, education, wealth), influence the opinions that people hold on issues such as Brexit.

Moving is about more than finding a job or a more affordable home: it's a highly personal decision with deep psychological underpinnings and social implications. As Michael Thomas shows, the factors influencing why people move from one place to another are varied and change depending on age, family and education. While job-related issues tend to be more important for younger, better educated individuals, family and lifestyle issues are more important for people in later life. Family factors also matter for the less well-off. These findings echo Centre for Cities' research on why and when people live where they do, with young people attaching greater value to jobs and leisure, while older people value space and public services more.

The importance of having choice and control over one's life decisions, including whether to move home or not, is highlighted by Sam Wilding, David Martin and Graham Moon's paper. They show that people with poor mental health are more likely to make undesired moves which further impact their mental health.

Commuting is also a factor that needs to be considered by both movers and stayers. It is often regarded as an intrinsically bad experience, something to be minimised. But Ben Clark, Kiron Chatterjee, Adam Martin and Adrian Davis counter this simplified view by focusing on the trade-offs that individuals are willing to make between the length of commuting and the material benefits they get. The researchers show that shorter commutes are likely to contribute to wellbeing only if people are able to maintain the material benefits of long-distance commuting. But they also note that long-term, long-distance commutes are linked to negative experiences in relation to life satisfaction.

The policy implications of these studies will differ between places and people – and between those who have choices and others who don't. Giving people 'control' over their life decisions, including where and when to move, should be a central guiding objective. In the first instance, this means making sure people have the education and skills they need to make those choices, with particular focus for those at the bottom end of the labour market.

It also means 'opening-up' places of opportunity for people who want to move to them. High house prices in certain parts of the UK are entrenching geographic immobility. This situation is made worse by policies such as Stamp Duty that increase the cost of moving home. Addressing this will require reforming the planning and tax systems to allow more homes to be built in and near to prosperous but expensive cities such as Bristol, London and Oxford. Building more homes in these places will prevent people currently living there from being priced out, enable more people to move there and shorten commutes.

But policy can't just focus on those looking to move or indeed expect that people will move – it is important to recognise that a significant proportion of Britons are willing to sacrifice economic opportunity to stay in the places they love and have attachments to. Fifty per cent of people live and work in the same broad area they were born in. This is understandable, and there is no use telling them to abandon their existing ties when the costs are so high. This is a critical, and often overlooked, dimension of our geographic divide.

This recognition that people are 'sticky', and that family reasons matter even for long-distance moves, means making sure – wherever they live – people should have access to quality public services. Secure housing, education, health and social care, and affordable transport underpin wellbeing and life satisfaction.

To give people more options about where they live and work, policy also has to support more economic counterweights to London. Addressing this will require significant long-term investment in the bigger cities outside the South East, with the aim of increasing employment and productivity. It also means devolving more powers and responsibilities over planning, innovation, transport, housing and skills to these cities so they can make the decisions that will improve their residents' lives.

The research included in this year's Insights is relevant and important for every place – town, city, and village – and every person – mover or stayer. The lesson for policy is that there are a number of reasons why people choose to move, stay or commute, and this will require a range of interventions to improve wellbeing and standards of living across the country. As ever these issues are complex, but only with a full understanding of them can we start to design interventions that make a difference.

MOVING HOME AND MENTAL HEALTH

SAM WILDING   UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON
DAVID MARTIN   UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON
GRAHAM MOON   UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

People with mental health needs are more likely to move home than the general population, but why? Is it different for people who want to move and those who don't? And what part do the areas people are moving to and from play in regional disparities in mental health?

New research using Understanding Society set out to answer these questions – and to see what the answers can tell us about targeting public services to help people with poor mental health. The researchers looked at data going back to 1991 by using not only Understanding Society, but also its predecessor, the British Household Panel Survey.

On the question of people's preferences, previous research shows that people who move are more likely to report mental health problems than those who don't. It has also suggested that moving home when we don't want to, and not moving if we do, are both linked to worsening mental health. However, because earlier research has tended to compare the health of recent movers to that of people who haven't moved, we can't be sure whether mental health affects the likelihood of migration, or migration affects mental health.

Poor mental health is likely to prevent people from taking the course of action they prefer: people who feel mentally unwell can have less time and energy to invest into moving home, and mental illness will often affect people's employment, and therefore their financial status. It may also have affected their level of education, and all of these are resources which people looking for a new home need to draw on.

This research found that there was a link between poor mental health and moving home if people didn't want to move. The researchers weren't examining the exact reasons for this, but suggest that people might be priced out of an area they want to stay in, moving to be nearer healthcare, or moving away from discrimination.

On this issue, the researchers concluded that charities and agencies working in mental health need to prioritise housing security, because people with poor mental health are at risk of having to move when they don't want to – which is likely to worsen their mental health further. Tackling this, then, could help to improve levels of mental health, and reduce the burden on the NHS. It's also important for people's human rights – housing is a factor in the 'adequate standard of living' described in Article 25 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

When it comes to the areas people move from and to, we know from earlier research that people with mental health needs are likely to move to deprived urban areas shortly before a period of severe mental ill health. This is usually put down to their mental ill health lowering their earning capacity or leading to unemployment, making it more difficult to live in a desirable area. We'd expect this to be exacerbated by rising rents and house prices.

But most research has looked at destinations – the places people move to – and we need to understand more about origins – the areas people are leaving – as well. And sometimes, the same neighbourhood might have different effects, depending on whether we look at it as a destination or as an origin. For example, we would expect to see people with poor mental health moving into deprived urban areas (destination), and for these same areas to have low rates of people leaving (origin).

This research found that people with poor mental health are more likely to move than the general population – especially in areas where people with good mental health are unlikely to move. This may be because people with poor mental health need to move to cheaper areas, but it may also be that there are areas with high levels of 'churn' (lots of moves within the same neighbourhood).
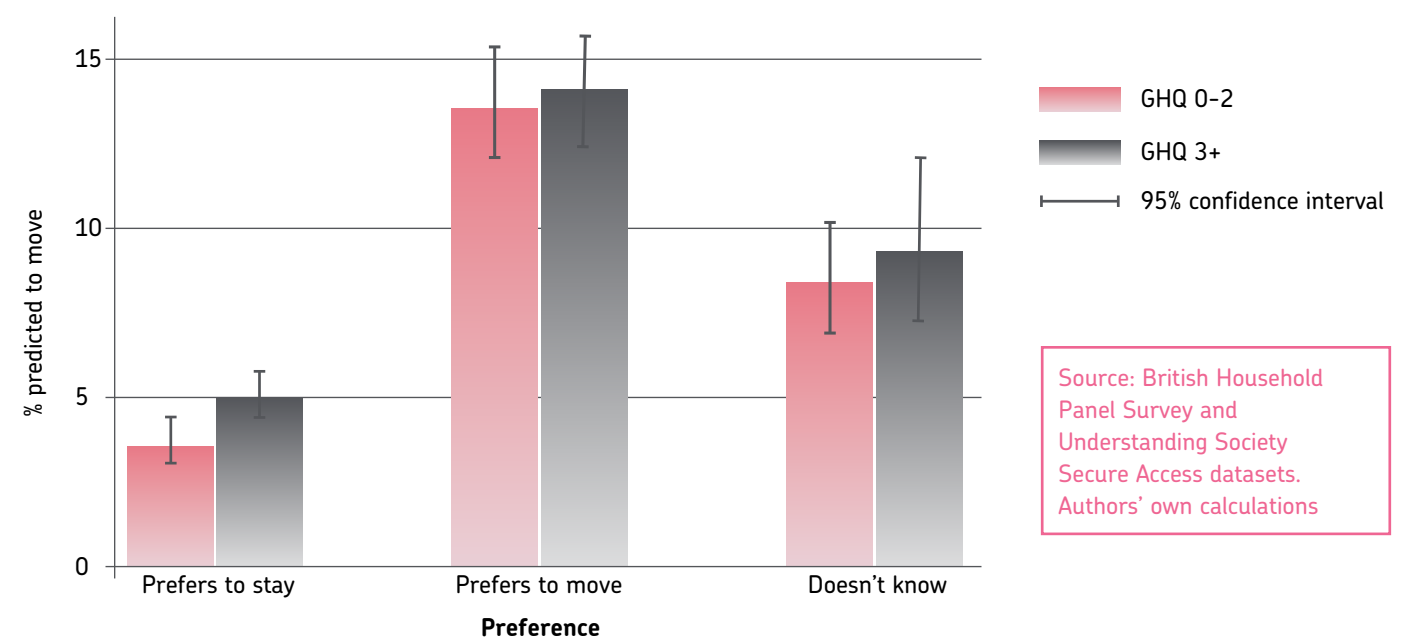
The research also appears to show that people with mental health problems are particularly likely to move to areas where there are low levels of migration – i.e. somewhere they are unlikely to move away from – and this has implications for the demand on mental health services, and therefore on where services might need to be targeted in the future.

KEY POINTS

People with poor mental health are more likely to move home than the general population.

Previous research has not looked in enough detail at whether people want to move.

Poor mental health is linked to moving home only among those who wanted to stay in their previous home – regardless of where they lived.

These findings can help us to understand better the geographies of mental health.

> " For agencies involved in supporting groups with mental health needs, enabling household security should become a priority, given the evidence that this group are at risk of making undesired moves.

PROBABILITY OF MIGRATION BY PREFERENCE AND MENTAL HEALTH

GHQ 0-2
GHQ 3+
95% confidence interval

Y-axis: % predicted to move
X-axis: Preference (Prefers to stay, Prefers to move, Doesn't know)

Source: British Household Panel Survey and Understanding Society Secure Access datasets. Authors' own calculations

SOMEWHERE OR ANYWHERE? LOCAL ROOTS AND THE BREXIT VOTE

NEIL LEE
LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS
KATY MORRIS
EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE
THOMAS KEMENY
QUEEN MARY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

People who live in the county where they were born were 7% more likely to vote Leave than people who had left their birthplace. That's one of the principal findings of new research which used Understanding Society to shed some light on the UK's vote to leave the EU.

One of the most popular arguments to explain Brexit suggests a division between two economically and culturally distinct groups: locally oriented, geographically rooted people who voted to Leave, and mobile, cosmopolitan internationalists who voted Remain.

Sociologists, political scientists and geographers have all been interested in mobility for some time, but this is the first time anyone has considered its impact on the Brexit vote. The idea of mobility, and people's sense of their place in the world, can help to inform the debate about populism, and how it is reshaping politics in the UK, the US and Europe.

'Localists' are rooted in the place where they live, feel strongly attached to their local area, and their identities are formed by their relationships to the people around them. 'Cosmopolitans' are partly defined by their mobility, which often stems from a move away from where they were born either to university, or for work.

In his 2016 book, *The Road to Somewhere*, the writer David Goodhart called them 'Somewheres' and 'Anywheres', and described the cosmopolitans as having 'portable "achieved identities"' which are internationally rather than locally focused.

This division between two types of people feeds into two other common explanations for populism: that it's a response to economic decline, and/or a backlash against immigration. Both are linked to globalisation, which saw some cities and regions thrive, while other areas declined. Previous research has found, for example, that people who felt that they had lost out as a result of globalisation were more likely to vote Leave – as did some whose previously homogenous communities became more diverse.

This research supports both these arguments – it found that immobility only mattered for people in areas which had seen economic decline or increased immigration. In other words, the referendum result might have been different if more of the British electorate had moved away from the place they were born in; if the places where 'immobile' people stayed had done better economically; or if the demographics in those places had seen less change.

What, then, could government do in response to these findings? One implication is that the housing market should be a focus for policy. Declining rates of mobility may help to explain the Brexit vote, and many groups in the UK can't move at the moment, because they are 'shut out' of economically thriving areas by high house prices. With regional inequalities widening, it could be that governments need to help people move to growing cities and regions.

That can't be the only answer, though. Plenty of people don't want to move, and an economic policy can't ignore the benefits of stable community, and people's social networks and attachment to where they live.

This research's finding that areas experiencing economic decline or demographic change were more likely to vote Leave also suggests a need to spread opportunity more widely across the UK. This could happen through regional development, as long as it's sensitive to the characteristics of each region, or through decentralisation of economic, financial and political power.

KEY POINTS

One popular explanation of the Brexit vote is the division between cosmopolitan internationalists and people with local roots.

People who live in the county where they were born were 7% more likely to vote Leave than people who had left their birthplace.

But, this immobility only mattered in areas which had seen economic decline or increased immigration.

Governments can do more to tackle immobility, and to spread the benefits of globalisation more widely.

It's important to remember, though, that immobility was only one factor in the vote. There were others – such as education level – which were more important. Also, this is only the beginning of research into the links between mobility, people's values, and populism – and there is more work to do if we are to fully understand the effects of globalisation. The researchers believe there should be more research specifically on people who are 'immobile'. Much of the existing research on economic geography concentrates on people who are mobile, but this ignores the majority of the population. Focusing more on the local could help us to understand how to spread the benefits of globalisation more widely.

> " This research's finding that areas experiencing economic decline or demographic change were more likely to vote Leave also suggests a need to spread opportunity more widely across the UK.

WORK, EDUCATION, FAMILY? WHY DO PEOPLE MOVE LONG DISTANCES?

MICHAEL THOMAS
UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN

Research into population movement usually distinguishes between 'residential mobility' (moving a short distance, within the same neighbourhood or town) and 'internal migration' (moving a longer distance – i.e. from one part of the country to another, or one town or city to another). Based on this distinction, we have tended to think of shorter moves as being related to family or housing matters, and longer distance migration as being typically motivated by a change of job, or education.

New research using geographical data, however, suggests that the picture is far more nuanced. It is true that the further people move, the more likely they are to cite employment or education as a motive, but employment still only accounts for about 30% of moves over 40km. Family accounts for 25% of moves over 40km, and remains close to that level even at distances of over 100km.

Academics and politicians are interested in long-distance migration because it affects both the size and mix of local populations, and can influence how well local and regional housing and labour markets function. Until now, because migration research has tended to focus on links to the job market and regional economics, the assumption linking most long-distance moves to employment has gone largely untested. If we assume that migration is largely economically motivated, we run the risk of underestimating other factors – and this affects not just our understanding of what drives migration, but also many of the policies based on that understanding (such as strategies for regional development or urban renewal).

This doesn't mean that employment and occupation aren't crucial. Employment-led migration is still the most common form of migration in Britain, with the youngest and most educated in the population, as well as students and the unemployed, having the highest propensity to migrate for reasons related to the labour market. In fact, whatever their motivation, younger and more educated people are always the most likely to migrate. People who live furthest away from urban centres – the most dynamic labour markets – are also more likely to move for work than people who already live in those areas. Given that employment-related motives represent only 30% of moves over 40km, though, we need to pay attention to other, less studied factors.

People who mention 'family' as a reason for moving are much more likely to be in the middle or later stages of life. Meanwhile, those with children are much less likely to give purely economic reasons for moving. They're also less likely to want to move – but when they do, they are disproportionately likely to cite family as a motive.

Over half of the migrants who report family as their reason for moving specifically say they wanted to live closer to family and/or friends – but there may be many other 'sub-motives', depending on the stage of life people are at. Families with children might move to be nearer the support offered by grandparents, for example. Separated people may move to be nearer other family members. An 'empty nest' may see people want to downsize, and in later life, frailty, illness and widowhood can prompt people to move nearer to their children. We know, too, that lower incomes are associated with living closer to family, and a lower propensity to move away, in order to keep care costs down.

Overall, far fewer people said they moved for housing (10%) or area related (13%) reasons. People who own their homes, people moving out of cities, and people around retirement age are most likely to be motivated by area-related factors. Retirees, in particular, are likely to move to rural and coastal places – if they have the resources.

There is still very little research into the role of family in internal migration, and there is much more to discover about why, when,

KEY POINTS

We tend to think that moving short distances is mostly due to housing or family matters, and moving longer distances is down to employment and educational concerns.

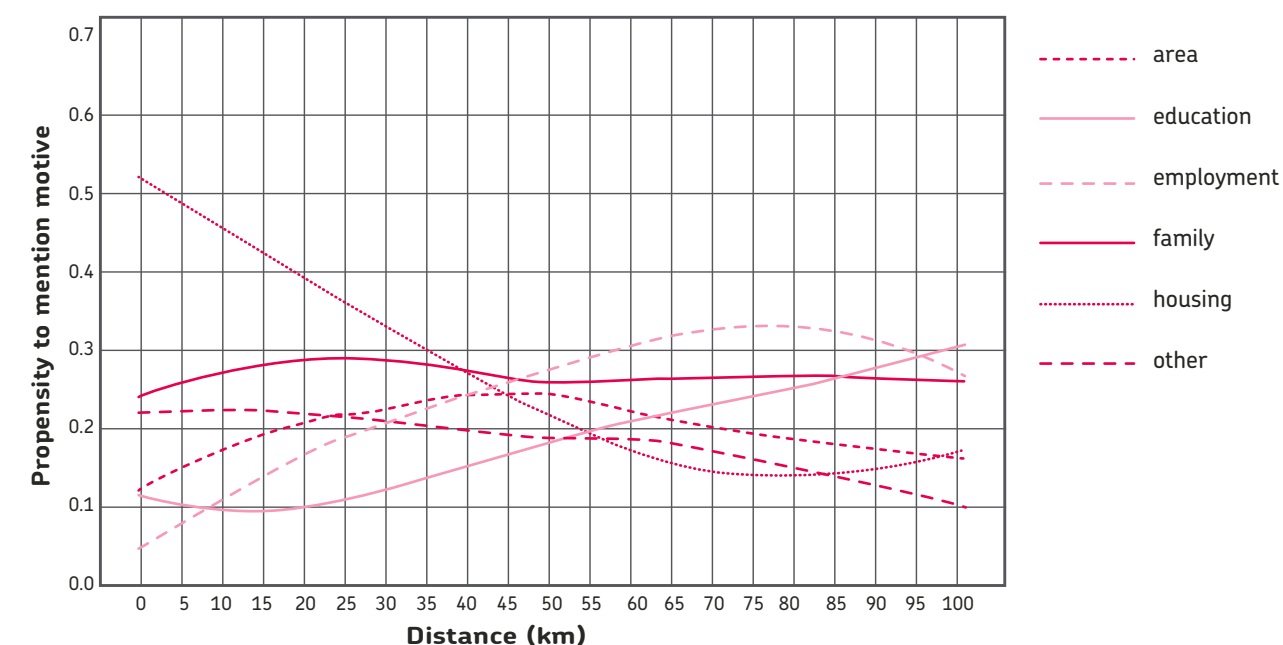In fact, moving for work accounts for only about 30% of migrations over 40km.

Family accounts for around 25% of migrations – even at distances over 100km.

Moving for work and education is most common among the young and well educated.

Family is a big motive for people in mid and later life, especially among groups such as parents with children, and the less well-off.

and where people migrate. This has implications for policy, because an ageing population, a shrinking welfare state, and the increasing importance of family in providing social care are all likely to make family a growing concern when choosing where to live. More research into family migration and other non-economic motives should therefore prove useful.

> " Where internal migration is typically assumed to be motivated by employment and educational opportunities, and more local-scale residential mobility by housing and family considerations, the results of this analysis suggest the reality is far more nuanced.

EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, AND FAMILY:
Revealing the motives behind internal migration in Great Britain

POLICY FELLOWSHIPS

Building capabilities and connections for impact

Raj Patel
Impact Fellow, Understanding Society

The UK has decades of experience of translating medical science or engineering research into innovation. The same can't be said of generating policy impact from social science. Researchers often feel they are thrown in at the deep end when it comes to mobilising their findings.

Our 2018–19 Policy Fellowships were designed to address this. We chose three who would use Understanding Society data to ask about screen time and children's mental health, low voting turnout among young people in the UK, and persistent health inequalities across generations.

CHILDREN IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Professor Andrew Przybylski at the Oxford Internet Institute summarised his research in an Observer opinion piece in July 2019 with the headline: *'We're told that too much screen time hurts our kids. Where's the evidence?'*

In the face of reports of online addictions and reduced attention spans, he wrote: *"Instead of speculating about technology effects, we need to test how social media and life satisfaction influence each other and to do so over time."*

The results, published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), found that *"social media effects are nuanced, small at best, reciprocal over time, gender specific, and contingent on analytic methods."* The findings influenced a report from the Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) of England, Wales, and Scotland, which proposed questions to ask about screens and social media in the home, and emphasised the importance of staying tuned into what children are viewing.

He also called for social media companies to share their data with researchers to improve our evidence and understanding – a view echoed by CMO for England, Professor Dame Sally Davies, and former chair of the Science and Technology Select Committee, Sir Norman Lamb.

SOCIAL ACTION AS A ROUTE TO THE BALLOT BOX

Dr Stuart Fox, at the Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD), wanted to assess whether volunteering during adolescence was positively related to turning out to vote as an adult.

Stuart says the decline in youth voting is concentrated among those from poorer backgrounds, and that *"people who get into the habit of voting during young adulthood are likely to keep voting for the rest of their lives, while those who get into a habit of not voting are likely to be lifelong abstainers. This will lead to politicians and democratic institutions being increasingly influenced by older, middle-class and educated citizens."*

Stuart worked with the Welsh and Scottish Governments and national youth and voluntary organisations. He found that youth volunteering does have a substantial impact on young people's interest in politics – but only if they are unlikely to develop that interest at home. So, youth volunteering schemes need to focus on disengaged households – and people from these homes are the least likely to want to volunteer. The results show a clear need to encourage young people from poorer and politically disengaged backgrounds to take part in civic society.

PROMOTING HEALTH IN DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

Dr Heather Brown, from Newcastle's Institute of Health & Society, investigated the intergenerational persistence of inequalities in health and income. *"More young people in the north of England are following their parents into an adult life of low wages and poor health than in the rest of England,"* she writes. *"This has consequences, for their future prospects, for future generations, and for economic growth and health spending."*

She found that intergenerational health is more highly correlated than intergenerational wages, possibly due to universal health care – therefore policies on income mobility may not necessarily impact on health mobility and vice versa.

Heather held workshops to identify policy ideas with figures such as the Vice President of the Association for Directors of Public Health and the Shadow Secretary of State for Public Health. *"Even with limited resources,"* she says, *"local authorities can use local planning laws to reduce the number of fast food outlets in particular neighbourhoods, or require developers to think about green space when building new homes. What's vital in the future is that any new policy, on any subject, should take into account the implications for people's health."*

Overall, the results of our Fellowships were very encouraging. We plan to share our Fellows' work widely and use the experience of this first round to inform where we go from here.

WORKING TOGETHER TO INFORM POLICY AND SOCIAL INNOVATION

The Policy and Partnerships Unit facilitates longitudinal research and knowledge sharing through briefings, events and publications. We develop productive collaborations and build up long-term partnerships with government, third sector organisations, think tanks and business. We can help your organisation to carry out longitudinal research, shape new thinking and inform policy.

Get in touch via
policyunit@understandingsociety.ac.uk
or find out more at
understandingsociety.ac.uk/research/policy

Contributors

Andrew Carter, Centre for Cities
Tarani Chandola, University of Manchester
William A.V. Clark, University of California
Rory Coulter, University College London
Amanda Hughes, University of Bristol
Thomas Kemeny, Queen Mary, University of London
Meena Kumari, University of Essex
Neil Lee, London School of Economics
Yaojun Li, Xi'an Jiaotong University & University of Manchester
Adeeba Malik, QED Foundation
David Martin, University of Southampton
Nicole Martin, University of Manchester
Jonathan Mellon, University of Manchester
Katy Morris, European University Institute
Graham Moon, University of Southampton
Alita Nandi, University of Essex
Pankaj C. Patel, Villanova University
Lucinda Platt, London School of Economics
Michael Thomas, University of Groningen
Trenton A. Williams, Indiana University
Sam Wilding, University of Southampton
Marcus T. Wolfe, University of Oklahoma
Nan Zhang, University of Manchester

Editorial team

Michaela Benzeval, Director, Understanding Society
Magda Borkowska, Senior Research Officer, Understanding Society
Chris Coates, Impact and Projects Manager, Understanding Society
Rebecca Parsons, Communications Manager, Understanding Society
Raj Patel, Impact Fellow, Understanding Society
Alina Pelikh, Senior Research Officer, Understanding Society

Design

Creative Joy – creativejoy.co.uk

Photographs

Anthony Cullen - anthonycullen.com
University of Essex – Essex.ac.uk

Acknowledgements