

Editorial

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This issue sees the LLCS journal passing the 2,000 mark for readership. Citations of journal articles have also been steadily increasing with more than 20 citations of an article now commonplace – a good reflection of the impact the journal is having on longitudinal and life course studies literature.

A steady flow of papers across the scientific areas the journal covers is the lifeblood on which its continuing success depends. And a key source for that is the Society for Longitudinal and Life Course Studies (SLLS) annual conference.

This year's highly successful Dublin conference in October continued the trend of expansion with 330 people participating and just over 300 papers and posters presented. Next year's conference, scheduled for October 8-12 in Bamberg, Germany is likely to continue the upward trend as will the following year's event, likely to be in Copenhagen. Conference presentations are the first step towards publication, which we obviously hope will increasingly be in LLCS.

A large part of a journal's reputation is the rigour and quality of the review process through which the published papers have progressed. LLCS has benefitted from the high standards set by our excellent panel of reviewers. This is a good opportunity to thank them for the quality of the inputs they bring to this time-consuming and demanding task.

This issue continues the trend of high-quality papers with the main emphasis this time on an area that has dropped a little in submissions recently – health and the life course. The issue starts with three excellent papers concerned in various ways with the foundations of health risk factors in childhood. The first uses US Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) data to analyse the effects of childhood disadvantage on chronic disease outcomes in mid-life. The second uses diary data to investigate the longitudinal trends in time-of-day energy and macronutrient intake at ages 10 and 13 in the Bristol-based ALSPAC study. The final paper of the trio is devoted to bidirectional relationships between child body mass and height through ages three, five and seven in the UK-wide Millennium Cohort Study.

The issue moves next to methodology, with the presentation of a new imputation method for missing data, as applied in the Australian Longitudinal Study of Youth. The mode then shifts again in a *Study Profile* of the highly productive Swiss Household Panel study established in 1991. We then return to health through our new journal section, *Comment and Debate*.

Attention turns this time to the origins of health inequalities. The case is made, and elaborated upon by expert commentators, for attributing such phenomena to adverse social conditions in development. These impact on, and become 'embodied' in, the biological systems through which health is maintained – 'allostatic load'. In summary, *how the social becomes the biological*.

Taken together these papers demonstrate the great value of longitudinal data in understanding life course processes and outcomes, addressing problems and pointing to solutions that could not be identified in any other way. As argued in the recently published *Handbook of the Life Course Volume 2** the insights gained from interdisciplinary population-wide longitudinal studies underwrite the substantial post-millennial public investment in them. Further back, in the prescient words of Howard Newby, ex-UK Economic and Social Research Council director: "As we move increasingly towards scientific collaboration – not least in the social sciences – large scale longitudinal cohort studies will come to represent the social science equivalent of the large scale facilities and laboratories enjoyed by our colleagues in the natural sciences." Longitudinal and life course study may not have reached the stage of the Hadron Collider quite yet but working towards the model it offers for the future institutionalisation of life course science could not be more pressing.

Finally, I would like to extend our sincere thanks to former LLCS Health Sciences editor and founding Section Editor Mike Wadsworth, who copy edited the *Allostatic Load* debate published in this issue.

*Shanahan, M., Mortimer, J.T. & Johnson, M. K., Springer (Eds), New York, 1916; ** Preface to Bynner, J (Ed) *The use of longitudinal cohort studies in the policy process*, Anglo German Foundation & ESRC, 1993.