EUROPEAN POPULATION CONFERENCE 2020: EXTENDED ABSTRACT

THE UP-SERIES GENERATION IN THE ONS LONGITUDINAL STUDY

Introduction and background

This paper describes the Office for National Statistics Longitudinal Study (LS), whose participants are representative of the wider population of England and Wales. It presents recent research using the LS that was inspired by the Up-Series of documentaries. This research examined whether the participants of the Up-Series were representative of the British population in 1964, and the extent to which the socio-demographic lifecourses of the two samples corresponded.

Data and methods

The ONS LS

The ONS LS covers England and Wales and is built around samples drawn from the decennial census. Its initial sample was drawn from the 1971 Census on the basis of birthday, with all of those individuals who were born on one of four undisclosed birthdays per year being included. This has resulted in a 1% dynamic sample of all people born on any of the four birth dates, who usually live in England and Wales, have completed a census form and have joined the study through the addition of new births and immigrants with one of the four birth dates. It is representative of the whole population of England and Wales, including individuals living in communal establishments.[1] The LS now includes data for over 1.1 million sample members, which has been collected over the 40 years of the study.[2]

The Up-series

The Up-Series is a series of documentary films following 14 participants, who have been interviewed and filmed every seven years, resulting in a septennial series of nine documentaries. The most recent episode was broadcast in 2019, when the participants were 63 years old. The children were selected from the extremes of the social distribution of Britain in 1964, with five selected from high class households in childhood, seven from working class/ disadvantaged households in childhood, and only two from middle class households. Taking the Jesuit motto *"Give me a child until he is seven and I will give you the man"*, the series made the explicit assumption that each child's social class would pre-determine their future.

Sample

529,901 LS members returned the 1971 census, and 15,393 were born in 1956 or 1957 (7 years old in 1964). 493 of these were excluded because they were not living in England and Wales in 1964,

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[1] Nicola Shelton, Chris E Marshall, Rachel Stuchbury, Emily Grundy, Adam Dennett, Jo Tomlinson, Oliver Duke-Williams, Wei Xun, Cohort Profile: the Office for National Statistics Longitudinal Study (The LS), *International Journal of Epidemiology*, Volume 48, Issue 2, April 2019, Pages 383–384g, https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyy243

[2] Dibben, C; Shuttleworth, I; Duke-Williams, O; Shelton, N; (2017) 9. Longitudinal studies in the United Kingdom. In: Stillwell, J, (ed.) The Routledge Handbook of Census Resources, Methods and Applications Unlocking the UK 2011 Census**.** Routledge

leaving a study sample of 14,900 LS members. This LS sample was compared with the 14 participants of the Up-Series.

Analysis
Descriptive analysis was undertaken to compare the childhood and lifecourse socio-demographic data of the LS sample with that of the portrayals of the 14 Up-series participants. The following variables were examined: gender, and education, the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NSSEC), household tenure and marital status (all at age 56).

In the LS, childhood social class was measured by the parental Registrar General's Social Classification (RGSC): I: Professional; II: Intermediate; IIINM: Skilled non-manual; IIIM: Skilled manual; IV: Partly skilled; V: Unskilled; Not working. For this analysis RGSC I and II were used to represent a high childhood social class; RGSC IINM was used to represent a middle childhood social class; RGSC IIIM, IV and V were used to represent a working childhood social class.

Findings
How do the original Up-Series participants compare with their comparable age cohort in the LS?
A comparison of the Up-Series participants with the LS sample for these analyses (n=14,900) showed that on all but one of the socio-demographic variables that were examined, the Up-Series participants were largely representative of the same cohort that was living in England and Wales in 1964 (figure 1). The one factor on which the Up-Series participants were not representative was gender, with only four (29%) being women.

Comparison of the socio-economic and demographic pathways of the LS with those of the Up-Series
Table 1 shows the adult socio-demographic outcomes of the LS sample by childhood social class (high, middle, working, non-employed). Those LS members who grew up in a high social class household had more advantageous life courses than those who grew up in working class/ disadvantaged households. Compared to LS members who were raised in a middle class, working class or non-employed household, those raised in a high social class were more likely to have a degree+ qualification. Turning to the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NSSEC), compared to LS members from a working-class background, those who were in a high childhood social class were more likely to be in a Professional or Managerial occupation and were less likely to be employed in a Lower supervisory, Semi-routine or Routine occupation. Although tenure also exhibited a social gradient, it was less stark than was seen for education or NSSEC.

Turning to the Up-Series participants, three of the children might be considered to have diverged from what would have been expected given their childhood social class (high, middle or working), but the remaining 11 conformed with what was expected. Of the five children from a high childhood social class (four men, one woman), all the men went on to university and gained degree or higher qualification. They attained jobs in a more advantaged NSSEC (Professional or Managerial) and

owned their homes (usually more than one) at the time of the documentary at age 56. Although the woman did not go onto university or have a job, this was enabled by her advantaged adult social circumstances. She was able to remain at home to raise a family, and has probably followed the socio-economic pathway of much of her cohort who were raised in a high social class home.

Three of the seven children from a working class/ disadvantaged background (four men and three women) could be considered to have diverged from what was expected. One, who grew up on a farm in Yorkshire and started his education in a one-room village school, went onto university, gained a higher degree (PhD), and became a university professor. The other two (women) largely remained on their expected educational path, leaving school at 16. While one initially had a semi-skilled occupation, by age 56 she was the manager in a university department. The other became a librarian, a skilled occupation, but is currently unemployed due to the financial cuts to local services in the late 1980s and 1990s. The four remaining participants who had a working-class/ disadvantaged background largely followed their expected pathways. They left school by age 16 and went onto work in semi-routine/ routine occupations or be unemployed. One, who went on to become a self-employed black cab driver in London, could be considered to have gained a highly skilled occupation given the training required.

Two children were from a middle class (two boys), and although both went to university, only one of them completed their degree. The other diverged from what would have been expected given his middle class upbringing. He dropped out of university worked intermittently on construction sites in London and was homeless. He left London in his 20s, and throughout mid-adulthood was unemployed and lived in social housing. However, in his 40s he became a councillor on his local council, was a Parliamentary candidate in 2015 and 2017 general elections and has completed a university degree.

Conclusions

The Up Series set out to examine the assumption that a child's social class would pre-determine their future. What does this descriptive analysis of a similar cohort in the LS tell us? Although the Up-Series participants were largely representative of the wider cohort of seven-year-olds living in England and Wales in 1964, the portrayal of their lives gives the impression that social mobility was rare, childhood circumstances did largely determine the "men" they became. In contrast, the descriptive analysis of a comparable cohort in the LS suggests that this is more nuanced, and social mobility was more common. Gender and the expansion of women's employment was one of the reasons for this, as was restructuring of the labour force, with the loss of manual jobs and expansion of opportunities for employment in skilled non-manual jobs providing greater opportunities for working class children.

Figure 1: Childhood socio-demographic profiles of the Up-Series participants and LS members

Gender

Childhood social class

Tenure (childhood)

Education
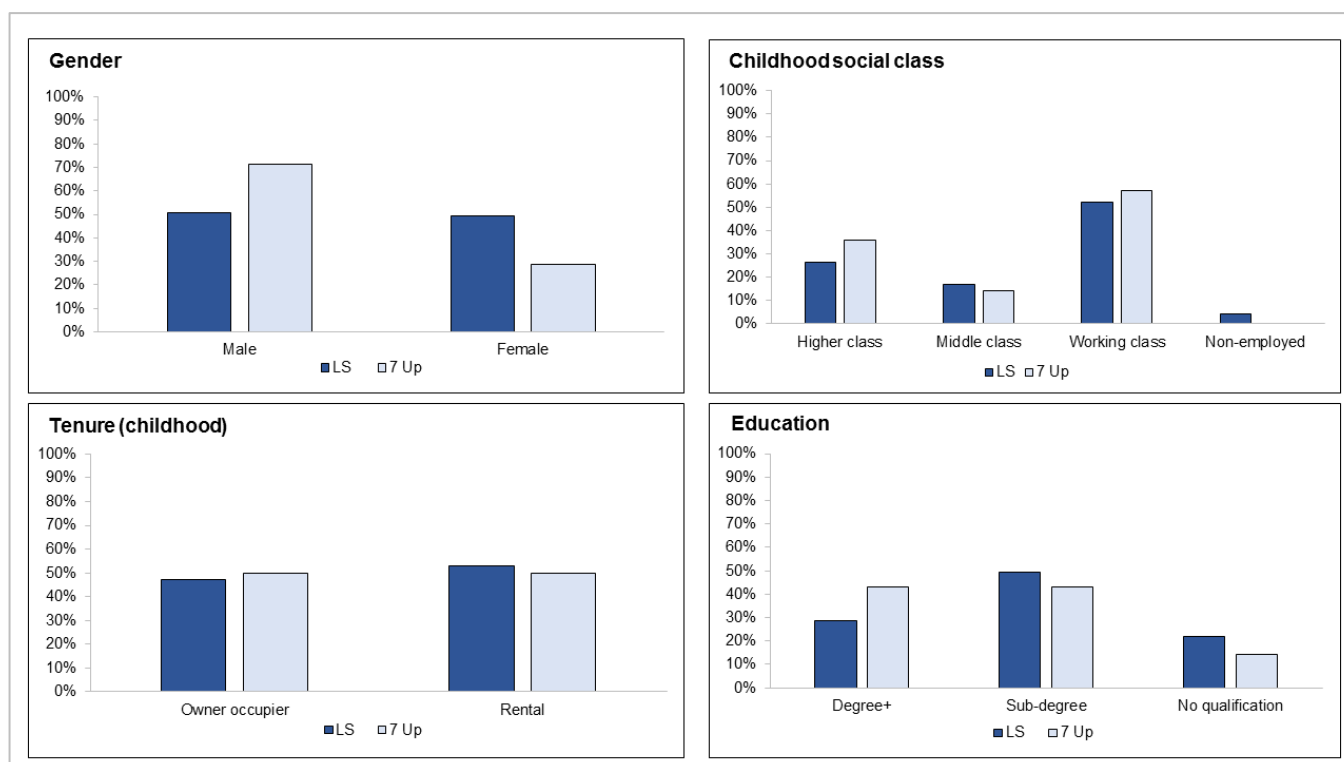
Table 1: Adult socio-demographic outcomes by childhood social class (LS sample).

	Childhood social class								TOTAL
	High		Middle		Working		Non-employed		
Education (age 55)	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Sub-degree	1565	19.67%	1277	16.05%	4761	59.85%	352	4.42%	7955
Degree level+	1392	43.81%	637	20.05%	1071	33.71%	77	2.42%	3177
Total	*2957*	*26.56%*	*1914*	*17.19%*	*5832*	*52.39%*	*429*	*3.85%*	*11132*
NSSEC (age 55)									
Higher Prof/ manag.	588	45.37%	264	20.37%	412	31.79%	32	2.47%	1296
Lower Prof/ manag.	906	34.34%	501	18.99%	1153	43.71%	78	2.96%	2638
Intermediate	405	17.29%	1080	46.09%	803	34.27%	55	2.35%	2343
Own account workers	401	29.68%	247	18.28%	666	49.30%	37	2.74%	1351
Lower supervisory	138	17.14%	121	15.03%	508	63.11%	38	4.72%	805
Semi-routine	293	17.46%	236	14.06%	1054	62.81%	95	5.66%	1678
Routine	159	11.55%	158	11.47%	994	72.19%	66	4.79%	1377
Not working	67	17.22%	52	13.37%	242	62.21%	28	7.20%	389
Total	*2957*	*24.90%*	*2659*	*22.39%*	*5832*	*49.10%*	*429*	*3.61%*	*11877*
Tenure (age 55)									
Owner occupier	2577	29.11%	1612	18.21%	4393	49.62%	272	3.07%	8854
Rent	367	16.43%	295	13.21%	1418	63.47%	154	6.89%	2234
Total	*2944*	*26.55%*	*1907*	*17.20%*	*5811*	*52.41%*	*426*	*3.84%*	*11088*
Marital status									
Single	341	26.31%	210	16.20%	684	52.78%	61	4.71%	1296
Married/ remarried	2010	27.64%	1263	17.37%	3742	51.46%	257	3.53%	7272
Divorced/ separated	553	24.09%	398	17.33%	1247	54.31%	98	4.27%	2296
Widowed	57	20.96%	43	15.81%	159	58.46%	13	4.78%	272
Total	*2961*	*26.59%*	*1914*	*17.19%*	*5832*	*52.37%*	*429*	*3.85%*	*11136*