



Seminar, 2nd term 2018-19

Life course research

Given by Juho Härkönen

Monday from 11:00-13:00

Register [online](#)

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Description

This course serves as an introduction to life course research. The life course approach has become increasingly popular in the social sciences, but also in neighboring fields such as psychology and epidemiology. It analyzes human lives and behaviours as longitudinal processes that unfold within social and institutional contexts and which are shaped by previous experiences—ranging all the way to the prenatal stage—and future plans and expectations. The life course approach has become the standard theoretical framework for analyzing longitudinal data and is used to answer questions relating, for example, to the development of socioeconomic status, health, psychological functioning, and political and social attitudes and behaviour; transitions to adulthood, old age, and other life stages; and the long-term effects of factors such as birth weight, childhood conditions, and (un)successful entry into the labour market.

This course introduces to key concepts and approaches of life course research, building particularly on social scientific research, but also drawing on medical and psychological life course (or life cycle) research.

Upon completion of the course, the student is expected to:

- Understand the general framework and key concepts of life course research
- Know some main research findings in the field
- Be able to relate the life course approach to other approaches and debates in the social sciences
- Apply the life course perspective to specific topics and research questions

Course content and examination

The course runs half time and consists of ten (approximately) weekly seminars, running over the second term. For each week, you are expected to read all the general readings plus one

text from the list of supplementary readings. You are expected to write a weekly response paper on these readings, as well as be prepared to discuss these readings in class.

Key resources

Mortimer, J.T. & Shanahan, M.J. (eds.). 2004 . *Handbook of the Life Course*. Springer. (Handbook I)

Shanahan, M.J., Mortimer, J.T. & Kirkpatrick-Johnson, M. (eds). 2017. *Handbook of the Life Course, Volume II*. Springer. (Handbook II)

Schedule

1. Introduction: the life course approach	Mo, 7 January 2019, 11:00-13:00, Seminar Room 2
2. Age, life stages and the life course	Mo, 14 January 2019, 11:00-13:00, Seminar Room 2
3. Transitions, trajectories, pathways	Mo, 21 January 2019, 11:00-13:00, Seminar Room 2
4. Life course as holistic process	We, 23 January 2019, 11:00-13:00, Seminar Room 2
5. Turning points, trigger events, sensitive periods	Thu, 7 February 2019, 11:00-13:00, Seminar Room 3
6. Relations between and across generations	Mo, 11 February 2019, 11:00-13:00, Seminar Room 2
7. Life courses, social contexts, and history	Mo, 18 February 2019, 11:00-13:00, Seminar Room 2
8. Cohorts and generations	Mo, 25 February 2019, 11:00-13:00, Seminar Room 2
9. The (un)structured life course	Mo, 4 March 2019, 11:00-13:00, Seminar Room 2
10. Life course research methods	Mo, 11 March 2019, 11:00-13:00, Seminar Room 2

1 Introduction: The life course approach

The first seminar introduces to the life course approach in social science. It covers a brief history of life course research, theoretical starting points, and key developments.

General readings

Diewald, M. & Mayer, K.U. 2009. Sociology of the life course and life span psychology: Converging or diverging pathways? *Advances in Life Course Research* 14: 5-14.

Elder, G.H., et al. The Emergence and Development of Life Course Theory. Ch 1 in *Handbook I*

Shanahan, M.J., Hofer, S.M, & Shanahan, L. Biological models of behavior and the life course. *Ch 27 in Handbook I*

Shanahan, M.J., Mortimer, J.T., & Kirkpatrick Johnson, M. Introduction. Pp. 1-26 in *Handbook II*.

Optional readings

Bernardi, L., Huinink, J., & Settersten, R.A. 2018. The life course cube: A tool for studying human lives. *Advances in Life Course Research*

Mayer, K.U. 2009. Advances in Life Course Research. *Annual Review of Sociology* 35: 493-513.

Kuh, D. et al. 2003. Life Course Epidemiology. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 57: 778-83.

2 Age, life stages, and the life course

Age is a basic structuring feature of life courses. Yet chronological age is often no more than a proxy for more sociological conceptions of life stages, and can mask individual variation in physiological, psychological, and social development as well as subjective age. This seminar discusses different conceptualizations of age as well aspects of variation in age at the individual and societal levels.

General readings

Settersten, R.A. Age structuring and the rhythm of the life course. Ch 4 in *Handbook I*.

Mortimer, J.T. & Moen, P. The changing social construction of age and the life course. Pp. 111-130 in *Handbook II*

Elder, G.H. (1975). Age differentiation and the life course. *Annual Review of Sociology* 1:165-190.

Additional readings (pick 1)

Arnett, J.J. 2000. Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens to the early twenties. *American Psychologist* 55: 469-80.

Geronimus, A.T. 1996. Black/white differences in the relationship of maternal age to birthweight: A population-based test of the weathering hypothesis. *Social Science and Medicine*, 42:589-97.

Hagestad, G.O. & Uhlenberg, P. 2005. The social separation of old and young: A source of ageism. *Journal of Social Issues* 61: 343-60.

Rubin, D.C. & Berntsen, D. 2006. People over forty feel 20% younger than their age: Subjective age across the lifespan. *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review* 13: 776-80.

Vaupel, J.W. 2010. The biodemography of human aging. *Nature* 464: 536-42.

3 Transitions, trajectories, and pathways

Life courses unfold as people move from specific statuses, roles, and life stages to new ones. The timing and sequencing of these transitions constitute life course trajectories. Life course trajectories are often governed by social structures and norms, which transform them into more or less standardized pathways.

General readings

Elder, G.H. 1985. Life Course Dynamics: Transitions and trajectories. Ch

Pallas, A.M. Educational transitions, trajectories, and pathways. Ch 8 in *Handbook I*.

Buchmann, M. & Kriesi, I. 2011. Transition to adulthood in Europe. *Annual Review of Sociology* 37: 481-503.

Additional readings (pick 1)

Brzinsky-Fay, C. 2007. Lost in transition? Labour market entry sequences of school-leavers in Europe. *European Sociological Review* 23(4):409-422.

Billari, F.C., Liefbroer, A.C. & Philipov, D. 2006. The postponement of childbearing in Europe: Driving forces and implications. *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research* 4: 1-17.

Jasso, G. Migration, human development, and the life course. Ch 16 in *Handbook I*.

Moen, P. Midcourse: Navigating retirement and new life stage. Ch 13 in *Handbook I*.

4 Life course as holistic process

The “long life” starts from birth (or conception) and ends in death. A core tenet of life course research is that lives are preferably analyzed as holistic entities rather than just discrete events and life stages. The way lives unfold depends on experiences through the life course as well as agency and choices.

General readings

Alwin, D., Thomas, J.R., & Wray, L.A. Cognitive development and the life course: growth, stability and decline. Pp. 451-88 in *Handbook II*.

Dannefer, D. 2003. Cumulative advantage/disadvantage and the life course: Cross-fertilizing age and social science theory. *Journals of Gerontology B – Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* 67(4): S327-S337.

Hitlin, S. & Won Kwon, J. Agency across the life course. Pp. 431-50, in *Handbook II*.

Additional readings (pick 1)

Bardo, A. 2017. A life course model for a domains-of-life approach to happiness: Evidence from the United States. *Advances in Life Course Research* 33: 11-22.

McLeod, J.D. & Almazan, E.P., Connections between childhood and adulthood, Chapter 18 in *Handbook I*.

Thomson, E., Winkler-Dworak, M., & Kennedy, S. 2013. The standard family life course: An assessment of variability in life course pathways. Pp. 35-52 in Evans, A. & Baxter, J. (eds). *Negotiating the Life Course*. Springer.

Delpierre, C. et al. 2016. The origins of health inequalities: The case for allostatic load. *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies* 7: 79-103.

5 Turning points, trigger events, and sensitive periods

Much life course research is concerned with events that can change the course of development over the life course. These include childhood poverty, first arrest, family formation and dissolution, and unemployment. Life course researchers have also become increasingly interested in “sensitive” or “critical” periods, that is, life stages in which the effects of these events can be particularly strong.

General readings

Abbott, Andrew. 1997. On the concept of turning point. *Comparative Social Research* 16:85–106.

Wadsworth, M.E.J. & Kuh, D. 2016. Epidemiological perspectives on the life course. In *Handbook II*.

DiPrete, T.A. 2002. Life course risks, mobility regimes, and mobility consequences: A comparison of Sweden, Germany, and the United States. *American Journal of Sociology* 108: 267-308.

Additional readings (pick 1)

Gregg, P. & Tominey, E. 2005. The wage scar of male youth unemployment. *Labour Economics* 12: 487-509.

Härkönen, J., Kaymakcalan, H., Mäki, P. & Taanila, A. (2012). Prenatal health, educational attainment, and intergenerational inequality. *Demography* 49:525-552.

Kalil, A. et al. (2016). Early childhood poverty, in *Handbook II*.

Luhmann, M., Hofmann, W., Eid, M., & Lucas, R. E. 2012. Subjective well-being and adaptation to life events: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102(3), 592–615.

Sampson, R. J. & Laub, J. H. 2005. A life course view of the development of crime. *ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 602(1), 12-45.

6 Linked lives: Relations within and across generations

One of the consequences of population aging is that generations increasingly overlap; at the same time, postponed fertility means that the age gap between generations has grown, and this combined with decreasing fertility has led to “long” rather than “wide” generations. The relationship and obligations within and between generations has been a classic question in social science and anthropology with varying theories of variation in them over time and across countries.

General readings

Bengtson, V.L. 2001. Beyond the nuclear family: The increasing importance of multigenerational bonds. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63: 1-16.

Putney, N.M. & Bengtson, V.L. Intergenerational relations in changing times. Ch 7 in *Handbook I*

Ruggles, S. 2009. Reconsidering the Northwest European family system: Living arrangements of the aged in comparative historical perspective. *Population and Development Review* 35: 249-73.

Additional readings (pick 1)

Albertini, M., Kohli, M. & Vogel, C. 2007. Intergenerational transfers of time and money in European families: Common patterns – different regimes? *Journal of European Social Policy* 17: 319-334.

Blossfeld, H-P. & Drobnic, S. 2001. Theoretical Perspectives on Couples' Careers. Pp 16-50 in *Careers of Couples in Contemporary Societies: From Male Breadwinner to Dual Earner Families*, edited by H-P Blossfeld and S. Drobnic. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dinas, E. 2014. Why does the apple fall far from the tree? How early political socialization prompts parent-child dissimilarity. *British Journal of Political Science* 44: 827-52.

Leopold, T. & Skopek, J. 2015. The demography of grandparenthood: An international profile. *Social Forces* 94: 801-32.

Vargha, L., Gal, R.I., & Crosby-Nagy, M.O. 2017. Household production and consumption over the life cycle. *Demographic Research* 36: 905-44.

7 Life courses, social contexts, and history

How do macro-level forces such wars, societal upheavals, and welfare state and labour market institutions shape life courses? Life courses are embedded in social structures that create structured pathways and turning points and incentivize certain life trajectories over others. These social structures can thus shape inequalities over the life course.

General readings

Mayer, K.U. 2004. Whose Lives? How History, Societies, and Institutions Define and Shape Life Courses. *Research in Human Development* 1: 161-187.

Mayer, K. U. 2005. Life Courses and Life Chances in a Comparative Perspective. In S. Svallfors (Ed.), *Analyzing Inequality: Life Chances and Social Mobility in Comparative Perspective* (pp. 17-55). Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

Leisering, L. Government and the life course. Ch 10 in *Handbook I*

Additional readings (pick 1)

Allmendinger, J. 1989. Educational systems and labour market outcomes. *European Sociological Review* 5: 231-50.

Neyer, G. & Andersson, G. 2008. Consequences of family policy on childbearing behaviors: effects or artifacts? *Population and Development Review* 34: 699-724.

Stuckler, D. et al. 2009. The public health effects of economic crises and alternative policy responses in Europe. *The Lancet* 374: 315-23.

Van de Werfhorst, H.G. & Mijs, J.J.B. 2010. Achievement inequality and the institutional structure of educational systems: A comparative perspective. *Annual Review of Sociology* 36: 407-28.

8 Cohorts and generations

Cohorts and generations are often seen as a vehicle for social change: young cohorts—with their new ideas and behaviours—replace older cohorts. Cohorts usually refer to birth cohorts—people born more or less in the same year—but can also be based on other experiences that occur around the same time (such as school graduation, entry into the labour market during a recession, or marriage). Sometimes, cohorts develop a common identity, in which case they can be referred to as generations. Cohorts also create a social milieu for its members and others in society.

General readings

Alwin, D.F. & McCammon, R.J. Generations, Cohorts, and Social Change. Ch 2 in *Handbook I*

Elder, G.H. & George, L.K. Age, cohorts, and the life course. Pp. 59-86 in *Handbook II*.

Mannheim, K. 1952 [1928]. The problem of generations. Pp. 276-322 in *Essays on the sociology of knowledge*, edited by P. Kecskemeti. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Additional readings (pick 1)

Bloom, D.E., Canning, D. & Sevilla, J. 2003. *The Demographic Dividend*. Chs 1 & 2. Rand.

Chauvel, L. & Schröder, M. 2014. Generational inequalities and welfare regimes. *Social Forces* 92: 1259-83.

Lutz, W. 2013. Demographic metabolism: A predictive theory of socioeconomic change. *Population and Development Review* 38: 283-301.

Pampel, F.C. & Peters, H.E. 1995. The Easterlin effect. *Annual Review of Sociology* 21: 163-94.

Rumbaut, R.G. 2006. Age, life stages, and generational cohorts: Decomposing the immigrant first and second generations in the United States. *International Migration Review* 38: 1160-1205.

9 The (un)structured life course

The life course is structured, and consists of age-specific roles, behaviours and expectations. Social norms and institutional structures govern their sequence and timing of life course transitions and trajectories. Researchers have increasingly asked whether societies have transitioned from structured and predictable life course to destandardized, individualized, and unpredictable life courses.

General readings

Macmillan, R. 2005. The structure of the life course: Classic issues and current controversies. *Advances in Life Course Research* 9: 3-24.

Kohli, M. 2007. The institutionalization of the life course: Looking back to look Ahead. *Research in Human Development* 4(3-4): 253-271.

Beck, U. & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002). *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences*. London: Sage. Pp. xx-20 (Preface and Ch 1).

Additional readings (pick 1)

Brückner, H. & Mayer, K.U. (2005). De-Standardization of the Life Course: What Might it Mean? And If It Means Anything, Whether It Actually Took Place? *Advances in Life Course Research*, 9: 27-53.

Held, T. (1985). Institutionalization and deinstitutionalization of the life course. *Human Development* 29(3): 157-162.

Heinz, W. From work trajectories to negotiated careers, Ch 9 in *Handbook I*.

Van Winkle, Z. & Fasang, A. 2017. Complexity in employment life courses in Europe in the twentieth century: Large cross-national differences but little change across birth cohorts. *Social Forces* 96: 1-30.

10 Methods for life course research

Empirical life course research builds on a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods for the analysis of longitudinal data. Different methods have their respective strengths for analyzing specific questions. A dividing line goes between holistic methods that consider complete trajectories and pathways, and “analytic” methods that analyze the causes and consequences of separate events and transitions.

General readings

Billari, F.C. 2005. Life course analysis: two (complementary) cultures? Some reflections with examples from the analysis of the transition to adulthood. *Advances in Life Course Research* 10: 261-81

Hermanowicz, J.C. Longitudinal qualitative research. Pp. 491-514 in *Handbook II*.

Wu, L. Event history models for life course analysis, Ch 22 in *Handbook I*

Additional readings (pick 1)

Moore, R. & Brand, J. Causality in life course studies. Pp. 515-540 in *Handbook II*.

Fasang, A. & Aisenbrey, S. 2010. New life for old ideas: The “second wave” of life course research bringing the “course” back into the life course. *Sociological Methods and Research* 38: 420-62.

Macmillan, R. & Furstenberg, F. The logic and practice of growth curve analysis. Pp. 541-570 in *Handbook II*.

Piccaretta, R. & Studer, M. 2018. Holistic analysis of the life course: Methodological challenges and new perspectives. *Advances in Life Course Research*