



2<sup>nd</sup> term seminar 2020-2021

## Advanced topics in life course research

Given by Juho Härkönen & Fabrizio Bernardi

Register [online](#)

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### Description

The life course perspective has rapidly become a popular analytical framework in the social sciences as well as neighboring disciplines, such as criminology and epidemiology. The essence of the life course approach is a focus on temporal aspects of human life courses, on topics such as human development, relationship between life stages, transitions, long-term effects of early life adversity, and the cumulative effects of disadvantage on health and aging.

This seminar on life course research combines some core substantive topics in life course research with considerations of analytical approaches to studying them. The seminar takes place in five sessions of two classes each (one in the morning and one in the afternoon). The five sessions will be two weeks apart. After the introductory session, we focus more deeply on four specific topics of life course research. In the morning class of each session, we discuss the substantive literature on the topic. In the afternoon, we discuss analytical choices (data, research designs, model specification issues) for analyzing these questions. You are expected to come prepared to each session and do the required readings. For four of the sessions (II to V), you should write a response paper, due on the Monday before class. Starting with sessions II participants will be required to make a presentation for the afternoon section.

### ***Response papers (length: about one page)***

Starting with class II, when you don't present, you are asked to prepare brief comments (about 1 page) on the readings indicated with an \* as well as one or more of the readings indicated with a #. In the response paper you can make critical remarks on the articles (what you don't find convincing) and/or suggest ideas for replication and extension and/or discuss how ideas presented in the reading might inform your own research. Please see the instructions for each week for more details.

These comments should be posted on the course folder by 14:00 of the Monday preceding the Wednesday class. A selection of these comments will be discussed in class.

### **Presentation**

Starting with class II, there will be participants' presentations. The presentations will be more than a simple summary of the selected readings. You should work in a group and prepare a thorough presentation for one of the afternoon sessions that deals with *research designs* for analyzing the questions covered during that week on a topic of your choice. [In some occasions the presenters will be asked to look for some preliminary (limited) evidence, to read additional texts and summarize and present their view on some open questions.] The groups for each presentation will be formed in the first week's meeting.

### **Key readings** (both are available as e-books in the EUI library)

Most of the other readings are also available electronically and the rest will be deposited on the course site.

Mortimer, Jeylan T., & Shanahan, Michael J. (eds.). 2003. *Handbook of the Life Course*. Springer. => *HANDBOOK I*

Shanahan, Michael J., Mortimer, Jeylan T., & Kirkpatrick Johnson, Monica (eds.). 2016. *Handbook of the Life Course, Volume II*. Springer. => *HANDBOOK II*

## **Contents**

### **I Introduction: the life course approach**

Wednesday, 13 January  
11-13 and 15-17

This introductory session to the seminar takes the form of a lecture as well as discussion of some central concepts and ideas presented in life course research. The main focus is on life course research as done in sociology, but research from other disciplines, such as psychology, epidemiology, and evolutionary science will also be covered.

*Before the first session, read the \*. Be prepared to discuss the key paradigms of life course research and how they can inform understanding of sociological phenomena.*

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

\* Fasang, A. E. & Mayer, K. U. 2020. Lifecourse and social inequality. Pp. 22-39 in Falkingham, J., Evandrou, M., & Vlachatoni, A. (eds.) *Handbook on Demographic Change and the Life Course*. Edward Elgar.

\* 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.

*Some additional readings for those interested*

Bernardi, Laura, Huinink, Johannes, & Settersten, Richard A. 2019. The life course cube: A tool for studying lives. *Advances in Life Course Research* 41: 100258.

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.

Mace, R. 2000. Evolutionary ecology of human life history. *Animal Behaviour* 59(1): 1-10.

Mayer, K. U. 2009. New directions in life course research. *Annual Review of Sociology* 35: 413-33.

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

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

## **II Holistic analysis of the life course**

Wednesday, 27 January  
11-13 and 15-17

Scholars commonly consider the life course through a holistic lens. The life course is seen as more than its components, as forming a more or less coherent holistic entity. What are the pros and cons of such an approach and how to analyze the life course holistically?

Morning session

*Read \* and two of the # texts. In your response paper, a) discuss Billari's view of the "two cultures" (you can also consult Mayer (2009) from Week I), and b) whether and how a holistic perspective can inform research of the topics covered in #.*

\* 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

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

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

# 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.

# Brzinsky-Fay, C. 2007. Lost in transition? Labour market entry sequences of school-leavers in Europe. *European Sociological Review* 23(4): 409-22.

# Karhula, A., Erola, J., Raab, M., & Fasang, A. 2019. Destination as process: Sibling similarity in early socioeconomic trajectories. *Advances in Life Course Research* 40: 85-98.

# Manzoni, A., Härkönen, J., & Mayer, K. U. 2014. Moving on? A growth-curve analysis of occupational attainment and career progression patterns in West Germany. *Social Forces* 92(4): 1285-1312.

Afternoon session

*Presenters: Discuss the logic of holistic analysis using continuous (growth curve analysis) and discrete (sequence analysis) variables, building on the literature listed below as well as other texts if necessary. Discuss the promises and pitfalls for holistic analysis for substantive research questions.*

\* Cornwell, B. 2015. *Social Sequence Analysis: Methods and Applications*. Cornell University Press (esp. Chs. 1-3).

\* Macmillan, R. 2016. The logic and practice of growth curve analysis: Modeling strategies for life course dynamics. Pp. 541-69 in *Handbook II*

# Piccaretta, R. & Studer, M. 2018. Holistic analysis of the life course: Methodological challenges and new perspectives. *Advances in Life Course Research* 41: 100251.

# Aisenbrey, S. & Fasang, A. E. 2010. New life for old ideas: The “second wave” of sequence analysis bringing the “course” back into the life course. *Sociological Methods and Research* 38(3): 420-62.

### **III Timing effects: sensitive and critical periods**

Wednesday, 10 February  
11-13 and 15-17

“Timing matters” is a key tenet in life course research: the effects of various exposures can depend on when in the life course they are experienced. This session deals with research that analyzes timing related effects, such as disadvantage in early childhood and unemployment at labor market entry.

Morning session

Read \* and one of #. In your response paper, discuss the general idea of life course sensitive effects and how they appear for different outcomes. What are the strengths and weaknesses of hypotheses of life course sensitive effects?

\* Ben-Shlomo, Y. & Kuh, D. 2002. A life course approach to chronic disease epidemiology: Conceptual models, empirical challenges and interdisciplinary perspectives. *International Journal of Epidemiology* 31: 285-93.

\* Kuh, D., Ben-Shlomo, Y., Lynch, J., Hallqvist, J., & Power, C. 2003. Life course epidemiology. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 57(10), 778.

\* Heckman, J. J. 2007. The economics, technology and neuroscience of human capability formation. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 104(33): 13250-55.

# Emmenegger, P., Marx, P. & Schraff, D. 2016. Off to a bad start: Unemployment and political interest during early adulthood. *The Journal of Politics* 79(1): 315-28.

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

# Sigle-Rushton, W., Lyngstad, T.H., Andersen, P. E., & Kravdal, O. 2014. Proceed with caution? Parents' union dissolution and children's educational achievement. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 76(1): 161-74.

# Willis, M., Staudinger, U. M., Factor-Litvak, P., & Calvo, E. 2019. Stress and salivary telomere length in the second half of life: A comparison of life course models. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 39: 34-41.

#### Afternoon session

*Presenters: Please discuss the logic of testing timing effects on later outcomes, building on the proposed and other literature (both methodological and substantive). As you will see, much of the literature is technical. By all means, dwell into the technicalities, but what is more important is the "logic" behind the models.*

\* Mishra, G. et al. 2009. A structured approach to modelling the effects of binary exposure variables over the life course. *International Journal of Epidemiology* 38: 528-37.

\* Madathil, S. et al. 2018. A Bayesian approach to investigate life course hypotheses involving continuous exposure. *International Journal of Epidemiology* 47(5): 1623-35.

# Potente, C. et al. Forthcoming. The early life course of body weight and gene expression signatures for disease. *International Journal of Epidemiology*

## IV Cumulative (dis)advantage

Wednesday, 24 February  
11-13 and 15-17

Cumulative (dis)advantage has become a pet concept among life course researchers and beyond. What does it mean and how can we analyze it?

Morning session

*Read \* and one of the #. In your response paper, discuss a) the different meanings of cumulative advantage/disadvantage/inequality and b) consider which type of cumulative process # analyzes.*

\* DiPrete, T. A. & Eirich, G. M. 2006. Cumulative advantage as a mechanism for inequality: A review of theoretical and empirical development. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 32: 271-97.

\* Ferraro, K. F., & Schippee, T. P. 2009. Aging and cumulative inequality: How does inequality get under the skin? *The Gerontologist*, 49(3): 333-43.

\*Merton, R. K. 1968. The Matthew Effect in Science. *Science* 159 (3810): 56-63.

# Aradhya, S., Grotti, R., & Härkönen, J. 2020. Unemployment persistence among second generation immigrants. Submitted manuscript, 16 December 2020.

# Bol, T., de Vaan, M., & van de Rijt, A. 2018. The Matthew Effect in science funding. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111(19): 4887-90.

# Goisis, A., & Sigle-Rushton, W. 2016. Childbearing postponement and child well-being: A complex and varied relationship? *Demography*, 51(6): 1821-41.

# Willson, A. E., Shuey, K. M., & Elder, G. H., Jr. 2007. Cumulative advantage processes as mechanisms of inequality in life course health. *American Journal of Sociology*, 112(6): 1886-1942.

Afternoon session

*Presenters: Please discuss the logic of analyzing a cumulative disadvantage process, building on the proposed (esp. Allison et al. and DiPrete & Eirich) and other literature (both methodological and substantive). As you will see, much of the literature is technical. By all means, dwell into the technicalities, but what is more important is the “logic” behind the models.*

\* Allison, P. D., Long, J. S. & Krauze, T. A. 1982. Cumulative advantage and inequality in science. *American Sociological Review*, 47(5): 615-25.

## V The life course and social change

Wednesday, 10 March  
11-13 and 15-17

How can the life course approach be used to analyzing social change? In this session we look into these questions with various examples, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Read \* and one of #. Discuss how the life course approach can inform analyses of social change. What are the key questions to pay attention to? Are there weaknesses of these approaches?*

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

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

# Breen, R. & Jonsson, J. O. 2007. Explaining change in social fluidity: Educational equalization and educational expansion in twentieth-century Sweden. *American Journal of Sociology* 112(6): 1775-1810.

# Comolli, C. L. & Bernardi, F. 2015. The Causal Effect of the Great Recession on Childlessness of White American Women. *IZA Journal of Labor Economics* 4(1):21. doi: 10.1186/s40172-015-0037-1.

# Pavalko, E. K., & Elder, G. H., Jr. 1990. World War II and divorce: A life course perspective. *American Journal of Sociology* 95(5): 1213-34.

# Settersten, R. A., Bernardi, L., Härkönen, J., et al. 2020. Understanding the effects of Covid-19 through a life course lens. *Advances in Life Course Research* 45: 100360.

# Zhou, X. & Hou, L. 1999. Children of the cultural revolution: The state and life course in the People's Republic of China. *American Sociological Review* 64(1): 12-36.

Afternoon session

*Presenters: Please discuss age-period-cohort models for analyzing social change, and the weaknesses and possible strengths with different techniques. Also, think about how age, period and cohort can be used to design a life course study of Covid-19 effects on an outcome of your choice.*

\* Glenn, N. D. 2003. Distinguishing age, period and cohort effects. Ch. 21 in *Handbook I*

\* Fosse, E. & Winship, C. 2019. Analyzing age-period-cohort data: A review and critique. *Annual Review of Sociology* 45:467-92.