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Mosaic society

Complex changes in UK society bring with them policy challenges

Professor Ian Diamond, Chief Executive, Economic and Social Research Council, interviewed by Martin Ince

THE POPULATION OF BRITAIN is growing in numbers and increasing in complexity. The era of rapid population growth driven by childbearing has ceased. Instead, the slow growth we see today is mainly caused by increased longevity and migration. This means that the social makeup of the country is changing rapidly. Britain is becoming a 'mosaic society' in which complexity and diversity are the rule.

These changes bring with them social, economic and policy challenges which the UK cannot afford to get wrong.

One important effect at work is increased life expectancy. In recent years, UK life expectancy at birth has been growing at a rate of around a year every five years. For males in the UK, it is the fastest growth in longevity anywhere in the world. If it carries on, British males could become the world's longest-lived men a few years from now.

Today's older people face significant inequalities in health, which leads to pressures on social care services.

This trend is accompanied and amplified by changes at the opposite end of life. Here, the UK's childbearing has been at less than a replacement rate for 20 years, although there was an upturn in 2005. The result is that the 2001 census was the first in history to find more people aged over 65 than 16 or under.

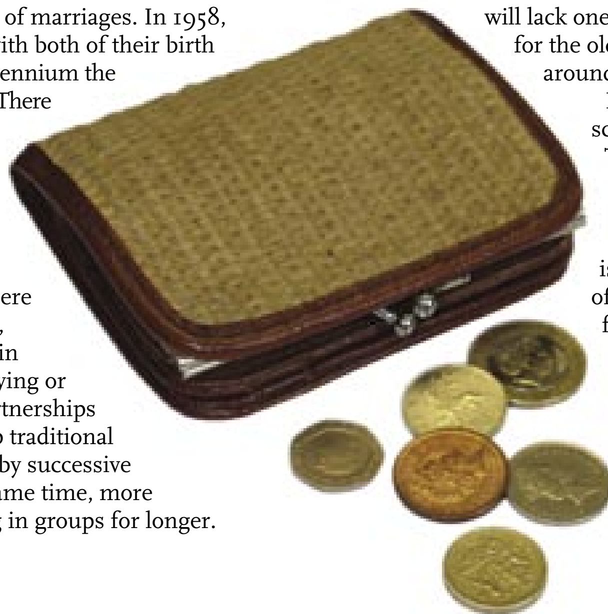
In addition, net immigration complicates the picture further and has caused a modest growth in the total UK population. So far, immigration is an area where research has illuminated policy choices far too little. We do not know enough about immigrants' motives and expectations, or about ➤

➤ their economic behaviour. We know that in some countries, many first-generation migrants send large remittances back to their country of origin, and that the sums remitted by the second generation tend to be much smaller. But to take our knowledge beyond this point will call for more research evidence.

These changes have been accompanied by significant changes in household structure. It is apparent that the UK of the future will include many fewer traditional nuclear families and more single-person, lone parent and complex households. This is a trend which the UK's house-builders have already acted on. But it is bound to drive further pressure for more housing and for new types of housing.

Among the causes of this expansion in single-person living is the increase in marital breakdown, which now affects 40 per cent of marriages. In 1958, 95 per cent of children lived with both of their birth parents. By the turn of the millennium the figure was down to 65 per cent. There are correspondingly more children living with one parent, or in more complex family settings.

In addition, the UK population has been affected by changes in life patterns. There is more international mobility, and people are staying longer in education. They are also marrying or getting involved in serious partnerships later, and their ability to set up traditional households has been affected by successive rises in house prices. At the same time, more people are cohabiting or living in groups for longer.



The 2001 census revealed that, for the first time in history, there are more people in the UK over 65 than under 16.

This means that the UK's demographic structure is becoming steadily richer and more varied. That complexity affects every aspect of a caring state.

Birth dearth and its effects

These forces all have an effect on the vital social function of childbearing. Women are having fewer children, and having them later in life. But changes in the amount of childbearing in the UK, and in particular on the ages at which women give birth, have effects on the whole of society. Postponing childbirth means that in time, there will be more men and women of 50 with mothers in their 80s. Even more important is the increasing number of childless people. There are more childless women in their 40s. This means that in a few decades, there will be more childless women in their 80s. They will lack one of the principal pillars of support for the old, not only in our society but around the world.

It is inevitable that changes on this scale will present social challenges. They should be seen in the context of the continuing crisis of future pensions provision in the UK and elsewhere. Part of the problem is that few people know what sort of provision to make for their own futures. If people between 50 and 65 in England are asked to estimate their odds of living to be 75, they reliably underestimate their chance. So they may be likely to underestimate the amount of saving they should do for their old age.

We already know that the number of people not saving enough for their old age is growing. The future shortage of final salary pension schemes may make this problem more general. There is certainly an argument for pension saving to be compulsory. If it is not, inequalities in income grow and when they do, inequalities in health and other measures of life quality do, too.

We know that today's older people already face significant inequalities in health and wealth. There is every reason to suppose that this inequality will increase. This means pressure on services such as health, housing and social care. It also affects the education system and the workforce we need.

Our objective should be to provide social and health services which can keep people healthy, and capable of achieving what they want in life, until they die. As well as health and social care, this means making sure older people have services such as transport and mobility to fit their needs and help them to make the most of the abilities they have. There are significant research challenges in providing the evidence to achieve this.

Paying for longevity

However, we should recall that British longevity has been increasing since records began. We also know that British society will age over the next few decades. Although this ageing raises many challenges, it does not have to be a problem. But we do need to think how to pay for an older society, and how to ensure that the social machinery is in place to cope with it. A significant unknown is the economic environment in which these changes are taking place. The world economy is changing fast, in ways that create challenges not only for business but also for public services such as education.

We should provide social and health services which can keep people healthy, and capable of achieving what they want in life

We cannot know the UK's economic future. But it is highly likely that the UK will do less and less routine manufacturing. The UK is already turning into a country that needs more high-level skills for a knowledge economy. Its history in industries from banking to engineering suggests that it is well-placed to succeed in this new world. It also means that the UK is likely to be a magnet for skilled and qualified people. But it may, over time, become less friendly for people with lower skill levels. At the moment, there are jobs throughout the economy for people with comparatively poor skills. But continuing demand for such labour cannot be guaranteed if the economy turns down. This could mean problems for anyone who is only able to seek work by competing on price with others.

Britain has always been a country which has welcomed migrants. But despite knowing much about the characteristics of our migrant populations over time, we know relatively little about their motivations for migration to the UK, nor of their medium and long term goals. In addition, for the existing UK population, rapid economic change means that the education system of the past may not be perfectly suited to developing the workforce we need. Schools must continue to produce people with high-level skills. But they also have to instil the abilities people will need to manage their progress through a diverse and fast-changing world.

We know from the evidence that schools are often the best place to affect people's attitudes and behaviour. They are vital to minimising equalities of opportunity. Inequalities at school, in training and in early employment are especially damaging to children's life prospects. Ensuring a worthwhile educational future holds challenges for everyone. It is obvious that we need good teachers. But we also need children who arrive in school well-disposed to learn. Families must play a major role in this.

Of course, many of these issues are not ones that politicians can solve. And it is likely that some of today's problems will be eased by technical change. Advancing technology may help the ageing population by making it possible for people to live in their own homes for longer. It can also spread educational opportunity to all parts of society.

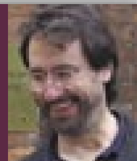
But there is also a wider role for technology, which is its contribution to economic growth. If the economy is larger, so are the resources available to care for people. As a research council, ESRC is very aware that science is a major contributor to UK economic success. ■

There have been significant changes in the structure of UK households in the past 50 years, with many children now living with a single parent.

New ethnic communities

FROM MULTICULTURALISM TO SUPER-DIVERSITY

PROFESSOR STEVEN VERTOVEC, Director, Centre on Migration, Policy and Society



MULTICULTURALISM, IMMIGRATION, social cohesion, segregation and extremism are at the top of the public agenda. A new Commission on Integration and Cohesion, launched by cabinet minister Ruth Kelly, and due to report in July, is re-examining the value of multiculturalism and especially whether it has encouraged separateness.

The Commission must recognise that the longstanding British multicultural model no longer fits the country's population profile. We are now living in a condition of super-diversity. Compared with only a decade ago, there is now a far greater variety of groups and individuals, from more places around the world.

For the past 30 years, the British multicultural model has provided political recognition through consultation with community leaders, support for associations and activities, and public service provision. These have been delivered to ethnic minorities in the context of their cultural values and practices.

But despite its successes, several commentators have blamed multiculturalism for everything from urban riots and socio-economic disparities among ethnic minorities to a breakdown in national social cohesion and the rise of home-grown terrorism.

The Commission will help clarify whether multiculturalism is the problem or the solution. But we must appreciate that the conditions in which multiculturalism was created in the 1970s and 1980s, to meet the needs of large, well-defined Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities of fellow citizens, have been transformed by a sea change in the composition of British society. Since the early 1990s, Britain has experienced a rise in net immigration, which grew from about zero in 1992 to a peak of about 150,000 by 2002. This peak has been overtaken since 2004 as EU accession state nationals have arrived from Eastern Europe. Earlier flows mainly brought people to Britain from a few Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean and South Asia.

Immigrants in the 1990s and the new century have come from a far broader range of countries than previously

But immigrants in the 1990s and the new century have come from a far broader range of countries, especially non-Commonwealth and non-EU. Each has its own age and gender structure, languages and religions. The people involved connect with their countries of origin in different ways and have their own channels of migration and legal statuses. In 2004, an estimated 223,000 more people migrated to the UK than emigrated abroad.

Alongside the UK's well-established African-Caribbean and Asian communities, there are relatively new, small, scattered groups of Romanians, Ghanaians, mainland Chinese, Colombians, Afghans, Japanese, Kurds, Zimbabweans, Iraqis and numerous others. London has received the largest share of new immigrants. There are now over 40 national or ethnic groups with over 10,000 people each in the capital, and some 300 languages.

These new immigrant groups are highly diverse. Some are mostly women, such as Slovakians and Filipinos. Others are mostly men, such as Algerians and Albanians. Some are mostly single people, others have families. Some are particularly made up of young people in their 20s, others have a fuller range of ages. Immigrants today range from the highest-flying skilled professionals to those with little education and training. Many hope to remain in Britain and become new citizens, while others plan to stay for only a relatively short period. Most of the 600,000 or so new Eastern European immigrants are unlikely to settle permanently in the UK. A large proportion may already have returned to their homes. Others are developing patterns of back-and-forth movement.

Over the past decade, another important trend has been a proliferation of up to 80 migration categories and immigrant legal statuses. These include nationals from the 15 pre-2004 EU states, EU accession state nationals, non-EEA work permit holders, workers on special schemes in agriculture, hotels and restaurants, highly skilled immigrants, entrepreneurs, working holidaymakers, au pairs, religious instructors, students, spouses and family members, asylum-seekers, people granted leave to remain, refugees and undocumented persons.

People falling within one or another of these categories are subject to its rules, periods of permitted stay, and restrictions governing 'recourse to public funds' such as social housing or benefits. A new points-based immigration system is currently being rolled out by the government, but it is not clear how this system – which is largely about migration categories – will affect statuses and restrictions surrounding rights, entitlements and benefits.

Furthermore, the members of a single ethnic or national group can appear in several immigration categories. Somalis in Britain include British citizens, reunited family members, asylum-seekers, refugees, people granted refugee elsewhere in the EU but who have subsequently moved here, and people who have irregular status due to overstaying a particular visa. Because their status affects individuals' ability to participate in society, this makes the multicultural axiom of dealing with defined 'communities' unviable.

The Commission on Integration and Cohesion must engage the reality of super-diversity in socio-economic conditions, legal status, access to public resources and opportunities for political participation.

The greatest challenge is how national and local institutions and policies can cope with this complexity when providing public services, ensuring the democratic representation of differing interests, and fostering a common sense of participation – even among those who are here temporarily. ■

EMPLOYMENT: RACE DISADVANTAGE?

How minority ethnic groups gain improved access to the labour market

BRITAIN IS BECOMING increasingly multi-ethnic. The proportion of minority ethnic group members grew from three per cent in 1951 to eight per cent in 2001. The social and economic conditions of these minority ethnic groups, and their integration into the wider society, affect their own wellbeing and the future prosperity of the country as a whole.

Systematic research on ethnic disadvantage did not emerge until the 1990s, with the release of the 1991 census. Its publication prompted a huge research programme on ethnic relations. Yet that research produced only limited snapshot pictures. It did not explore the economic fortunes of the minority ethnic groups during the period in which the vast majority came to settle in the country.

Data from the General Household Survey and the Labour Force Survey now allows us to fill this gap. Dr Yaojun Li and Professor Anthony Heath of the Understanding Population Trends and Processes Network looked at nine ethnic groups: white British, white Irish, white other, black Caribbean, black African, Indian, Pakistani/Bangladeshi, Chinese and other. Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are grouped together because much research shows that they share similar experiences in a variety of socio-economic situations. The 'other' group comprises people of mixed ethnicity and from a wide range of other origins.

The minority ethnic groups arrived at different times. Around three quarters of white Irish came before 1971, as did half of the white other group, one third of the black Caribbean group and a quarter of Indian group. Nearly 60 per cent of black Caribbeans and just over one half of Pakistanis/Bangladeshis were born in Britain, as were some 40 per cent of black Africans and Indians, and nearly 30 per cent of the Chinese.

People of minority ethnic groups also came at different ages, which can be expected to have a substantial impact on their labour market experiences. People coming at a young age attend schools in Britain and have similar social and cultural capital to those of the same ethnicity born here, and to the white British. In view of this, the research team grouped people born in Britain or coming here by the age of 16 as second generation and those coming after 17 as first generation.

The research into the employment status of minority ethnic groups shows unmistakably that British whites are most likely to be employed and least likely to be unemployed. Also noteworthy is the fact that there are much greater differences between the minority ethnic groups than between them and the white British. A third feature that emerges is that these differences became more prominent from the early 1980s onwards. When the researchers examine the employment situation of the second generation, it emerges that the black African and Pakistani/Bangladeshi groups were least likely to be found in the labour market in each year of the past two decades. It might be said that many of the people from those groups were young and did not have sufficient experience to gain access to the labour market. Yet members of their first generation, particularly those of Pakistani/Bangladeshi origins, were only half as likely as the white British to find themselves in gainful employment. Further analysis shows that Pakistani/Bangladeshi men had a similar poor employment profile to that of the black African men, and only 20 per cent of women from this group were in the labour market throughout the period covered.

So the real issue is how the black and the Pakistani/Bangladeshi groups, especially women in the latter group, can gain improved access to the labour market. This should be the focus for government policy, and also for employers and wider society. ■

AT A GLANCE

Black African and Pakistani/Bangladeshi men and women are least likely to have jobs, and the contrast with white British is becoming more marked.

Friendship ties and geographical mobility

A LARGE NUMBER of people from Eastern Europe have arrived in Britain in recent years, most of them to find work. But it seems that moving around to find work is not something the native British population is inclined to do.

So why this reluctance to relocate, when it might offer the prospect of higher pay and a better lifestyle? According to a study, one factor is that we simply don't like leaving our friends. In research at the Institute for Social and Economic Research, Dr Michèle Belot and Professor John Ermisch found that social ties can have a strong negative effect on mobility. From an economic point of view, people being prepared to move to the most productive areas and more rewarding jobs should be a good thing. It should lead to others moving in to replace them and a levelling out of income differentials. But, says Dr Belot: "Even when there are big differences in employment and income, people here do not seem to find that moving to work somewhere else is worthwhile."

The British Household Panel Survey includes questions about the location and frequency of contacts with people's three closest friends. She says: "We used this information to measure the intensity of people's social networks and their effect on the probability of moving further than 20 miles. Our estimates show that an additional close friend living nearby reduces the probability of moving by about two percentage points."

The research shows that people in the UK have a socially valuable attachment to friends and relations. However, politicians point out that immigrants often find work while many locals do not. Reluctance to relocate may be an issue that future policy needs to address. ■

CHANGING FAMILY LIFE

EIGHT OUT OF TEN people live in what official statistics define as a family household. Yet the same statistics show that this type of living arrangement is in decline. Marital breakdown and the rising number of births outside marriage are producing more single-parent families, and most of the single parents are lone mothers. This change has huge implications, especially a dramatic increase in demand for single accommodation. Early findings from a study of children born in Britain in 2000 present a picture of both stability and change.

The British Household Panel Survey began in 1991, with regular surveys of around 5,500 representative households and over 10,000 individuals drawn from 250 areas of Britain. Since expanded by 1,500 households in each of Scotland and Wales, and 2,000 in Northern Ireland, it tells us about trends in families, employment, income and wealth, housing, health and more. Now researchers are also analysing data from the Millennium Cohort Study, which collects detailed information on 19,000 children born at the beginning of the 21st century, and the families bringing them up.

Early findings by Lisa Calderwood, at the Centre for Longitudinal Studies show that by the age of three, just over a quarter of people were joined by a younger brother or sister.

Around six per cent of families interviewed were now without one of two parents who had been with them when the millennium child was nine months old, while three per cent had a new step-parent. But Lisa Calderwood also found signs of stabilisation in family life. "Well over half of the 'new' parents were the child's natural father, who had not been living at home when the earlier interviews took place." And where natural fathers were not living with the child, two-thirds were said to be in some sort of contact.

She added: "The proportion of couples who were legally married had gone up, and the vast majority of the families still had two natural parents. In 2006, most children were living with both of their natural parents at age three – down slightly from 85.8 per cent to 82 per cent from 2001-2. Typically, the child's natural parents were also married to one another – around six in 10 families at both stages."

This figure may be lower than it was 100 years ago, but it shows that people are still attracted to formal recognition for their relationships, especially those that involve children. ■

AT A GLANCE

Although many people still live in what is defined as a family household, marital breakdown is producing more single-parent families. However, post-millennium research reveals encouraging signs of stabilisation in family life for many young children.

SOCIAL CLASS STILL MATTERS

"What? Bank managers, working class? Stupid boy!"

SO MIGHT CAPTAIN MAINWARING have reacted to such an extraordinary suggestion. The formidable bank manager and Home Guard commander in *Dad's Army* would turn in his Walmington-on-Sea grave at the results of a survey carried out last year. It revealed that 29 per cent of bank managers described themselves as working class. But are you sure of your own class?

According to Dr Eric Harrison, only two things are certain about class in Britain today. One is that from time to time, we hear that it no longer matters. The second is that it will continue to be debated and discussed. He points out a paradox. While there is a perception that social class is less important than it used to be, inequality based on class continues. And individuals often struggle to place themselves in the 'correct' category.

Dr Harrison reckons that more often than not, the confusion arises because people use the term class in different ways. He says that class is a sociological concept, and is only useful if we put some flesh on the bones that the idea encapsulates. His view is that class is a characteristic not of people, but where they are within the division of labour. To do this he distinguishes between a person's 'work situation' and their 'market situation'.

'Work situation' refers to how much autonomy workers have when it comes to organising their work and time-keeping. 'Market situation' is about how hard their abilities, experience and knowledge make them to replace, and therefore make them valuable commodities in the labour market. The combination of work and market situation has come to be known as 'employment relations' and it is this that determines class. Ideally, researchers would like to place individuals in classes on the basis of individual employment relations.

But social surveys rarely include detailed measures that allow this to be done. Instead, as previous research has revealed a great deal about typical employment relations for occupations, that's how their class is decided.

AT A GLANCE

In a recent survey 29 per cent of bank managers described themselves as 'working class'. The decline in 'blue collar' industries has led to more opportunities in professional work but many hold on to the notion of being working class.

Take those bank managers, for instance. "We know that they have certain autonomy, decent promotion prospects, and a degree of specific knowledge about their work," says Dr Harrison. "We assume that any differences between individuals in this group are outweighed by the similarity in their employment relations." This approach has become the basis not just of academic research, but for official statistics in the UK as a whole.

Following an ESRC review of government social classifications, led by Professor David Rose, the 2001 census introduced the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC). Dr Harrison says that it is "a user-friendly class scheme with a sound sociological basis".

But this is only half the story. Social scientists face problems rarely encountered by their cousins in natural science. Unlike the physical world, the social world frequently 'talks back' to those researching it. Individuals who are being classified have their own experiences and ideas about class, its structure, and their place within it. This might undermine the legitimacy of social classifications. But Dr Harrison points out that on this definition, class is a question of measurement. Class is employment relations – not income; not education; not inherited wealth; not one's manner of speaking; nor the type of leisure pursuits one enjoys. "All these things are clearly of interest to sociologists, but for this very reason we need to keep them apart if we want to explore the relationship between these characteristics and class position." He adds that there is a tendency for us to confuse class with status.

Within a broadly similar class group, individuals adopt strategies to signal that they are of greater worth, or at least distinct from others. A common way is to buy what the economist Fred Hirsch called 'positional goods', whose value stems not solely from their use, but also from their scarcity and the message they send out to others. "These can be part of a broader 'lifestyle package' which can be hugely influential in shaping someone's self-identity and the broader identity given to them by society as a whole," says Dr Harrison.

In addition, we have to factor in social mobility. Many people have risen from working class backgrounds into the ranks of the middle classes in the past three decades, as 'blue-collar' industries have declined and new opportunities arose in managerial and professional work. But despite this social change, the influence of upbringing on shaping people's social identity is so strong that, like those bank managers, many do not let go of the notion that they are working-class. It's not hard to see why class remains controversial when there is so much at stake for people's identity.

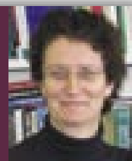
That said, one reason that class remains in the news is its remarkable predictive power. Tellingly, in certain parts of Glasgow, where life expectancy is lower than in rural India, it can be used to predict both chances in life and chances of death. This means that class will continue to exist as a shorthand for people's cultural values and expectations as well as their economic standing and life prospects. ■

Illustration Rachel Goslin

Living longer

MORE TIME TO WORK, REST AND PLAY?

PROFESSOR JANE FALKINGHAM, Director, Simulating Social Policy in an Aging Society Research Group



THE POPULATION OF BRITAIN has been ageing for the last century. In 1901 around five per cent of the population were aged 65 and over. By 2001 the figure had exceeded 16 per cent, and it could reach 25 per cent in 2041. The number of people aged 65 and over has recently exceeded the number aged 16 or less for the first time ever.

Births, baby booms and baby busts

Population ageing is primarily due to reduced fertility. There has been a downward trend in the annual number of births in England and Wales over the last century, but there have also been several peaks, notably following the end of the two World Wars when returning soldiers were reunited with their families. From the end of the 1950s to the mid-1960s, there was a period of sustained higher fertility, followed by an increasingly dramatic fall in births to a low in 1977.

These baby booms have changed society. The 1940s peak was equivalent to one extra class in every primary school in the country, leading to prefabricated huts on school playgrounds and later to teen culture and the swinging 60s. It is the ageing of the 1960s baby boom, comprising nearly eight million people, and the subsequent 1970s baby bust, that have given rise to concerns over a so-called 'demographic time bomb'.

More older people, living longer

In 1908, when Lloyd George introduced the first state pension, payable at age 70, average life expectancy at birth was around 50. Few people survived to receive their five shillings. But of those born in 1961, over four in every five can expect to survive into old age.

Over the past two decades there has been an average increase in life expectancies for men at 65 of 1.7 months per year, and for women of 1.2 months. A woman born in 1946 retiring at the age of 60 in Britain today can expect to live a further 26.8 years, while a man from the same birth cohort retiring five years later at age 65 might live for an additional 20.1 years.

It is no coincidence that the 2006 pensions bill includes proposals to progressively raise the state pension age to 68 over time from 2024 onwards to reflect this increasing longevity. This is when the peak birth cohorts of the late 1950s and early 1960s begin to retire.

But while statutory retirement ages are set to rise, whether people will work longer remains an open question. In a typical OECD country at the start of the 21st century it is estimated that a man might spend only half his life in employment. Successive generations of British men are entering the labour market later and leaving earlier, and having lower overall participation rates at any given age .

Living longer, healthier and wealthier?

Future health in later life will depend on the lifestyles of the baby boomers. Here there is a mixed picture. According to the Health Survey for England, the proportion of men who smoke has declined from 28 per cent in 1993 to 22 per cent in 2004, and from 26 to 23 per cent for women. But over the same period the proportion of working age adults who are obese (Body Mass Index over 30) has risen from 13 per cent of men and 16 per cent of women in 1993, to 24 per cent of both sexes in 2004.

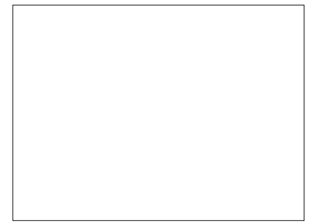
Nor is it clear that all the 1960s baby boomers will be better off in retirement than their parents. Changes in the pension system mean that economic wellbeing in later life will be ever more closely tied to working life. Those with chequered work histories and no housing wealth may find themselves facing an insecure retirement.

The 1960s baby boomers are one of the most unequal generations of the post-war period. They entered the labour market in the early 1980s at the start of both the stock market boom and mass unemployment. Our research shows that at the age of 40, 33 per cent of those born between 1961 and 1965 had no private pension, 18 per cent had no housing wealth and 10 per cent had neither, around half a million people.

The over-50s currently hold 80 per cent of the nation's wealth. The power of the grey pound is already evident in TV adverts, and Twiggy is a Marks and Spencer icon. However, not everyone is expected to be healthier and wealthier in the future. Life expectancy at the age of 65 for a man who has worked in a professional occupation is a full five years higher than for a man who did unskilled manual work. These inequalities look set to continue for the foreseeable future.

So there is more to the overall picture than ageing. The financial and lifestyle differences that mark out people from one another in youth and middle age will continue to be reflected in their chance of becoming old and the experience they have if they do, so policy for ageing cannot just be about the old. ■

Visualising Identities and Social Action:



Lives in Britain Today

9 - 13 March 2007 12-6pm

What happened when a leading photographer was embedded with seven social science research teams investigating identity issues in contemporary UK?

This exhibition collects together images and stories from this unique collaboration between photographer Chris Clunn and research projects in the ESRC Identities and Social Action Programme.

Private view:
Monday 12 March 6-8pm

The Brick Lane Gallery
196 Brick Lane London E1 6SA