

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT ACROSS LIVES AND GENERATIONS

The Potential for Change

Edited by

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1 Introduction and Overview

P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale, Kathleen Kiernan,
and Ruth J. Friedman

How much change is possible over a lifetime and across generations? What is realistic in what we can do to promote healthy human development in our nations? These questions captivate societies. They motivate policy makers, teachers, community leaders, service providers, and advocates as well as researchers. These questions have also motivated our volume.

To answer these questions, one must first define human development. By human development, we mean the ways in which children grow to become healthy, educated, and productive members of societies and nations. Moreover, human development continues throughout adulthood and into old age as adults focus on these same goals as well as provide leadership, inspiration, care, training, and support for the next generation. As illustrated in this volume, we highlight three important dimensions of human development: human capital, partnership behavior, and psychological well-being.

We have chosen these dimensions because they represent widespread goals in society. How can individuals reach their full potential? Such a goal involves educational attainment and the development of earning power. It also involves the formation, maintenance, and growth of healthy, committed adult partnerships, usually marriage. A third part of this goal is the development of psychological health and the rearing of healthy children who ultimately become successful adult members of society themselves.

The purpose of this volume is also to examine the potential for change across generations and during the life course. We use a multidisciplinary approach to address the three key domains of human development. The volume reviews what is known about these domains in order to develop an integrative and multidisciplinary perspective on promoting positive change across the lifespan.

In the first section, “Human Capital,” authors summarize the economic and social opportunities in European and American households and examine the patterns of transmission of human capital across generations. This section also examines the specific problems of low human capital and social exclusion, as well as the potential for increasing human capital.

The second section, “Partnership Behavior,” summarizes the patterns of family structure in Europe and the United States and examines how partnership behavior influences children, youth, and families. In the third section, “Psychological Health and Development,” authors synthesize what we know about continuity in psychological health and address which environments promote healthy development and how developmental pathways can be changed.

In sum, this volume explores the ways in which both risk and health are each transferred within and between generations and examines what we know about changing the likelihood of risk. Each section and the integrative summary chapter also address how, as scientists, we can inform policy makers about the best practices for promoting well-being across the lifespan.

We have assembled a multidisciplinary group of authors to integrate and build upon the knowledge base of economics, demography, sociology, psychology, and psychiatry. In the social sciences, the question of continuity or change after difficult life circumstances is a potent lens used by different disciplines. Economists and sociologists often focus on poverty, social exclusion, and inequality. These fields examine how human capital can be promoted over time, specifically an individual’s ability to become educated and develop earning power. Demographers, psychologists, and sociologists focus on the formation of partnerships and the potential for growth or dissolution, examining how children and families are affected, while psychiatrists and psychologists examine psychological health and its implications for development of children, youth, and adults. The multidisciplinary approach of our volume allows us to capitalize on the different methodologies and foci used by these disciplines, creating a broader and, hopefully, more useful approach to addressing the potential for change and continuity during the life course and across generations.

The scope of this proposed volume is intentionally broad and far-reaching. This is because the goal of the volume – determining what we know about promoting positive change in human lives – requires the synthesis and integration of knowledge across a variety of fields. The volume is based upon a preeminent international conference organized by the editors and sponsored by the Jacobs Foundation in Zurich, Switzerland, in October 2001,

entitled “Well-Being and Dysfunction Across Generations: Change and Continuity.”

Organization of the Book

The book opens with an introductory chapter by Avshalom Caspi, a developmental and personality psychologist at the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College, London, and at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Caspi's chapter discusses the difficulties in disentangling the relative influence of social selection and social causation processes across the life course and across generations. This chapter lays the groundwork for the remainder of the volume by discussing the scientific logic of research programs designed to examine the relation between social circumstance and individual life chances, the challenges in interpreting causation, and the policy implications that can arise from basic science.

The first section, “Human Capital,” draws primarily on the fields of economics and demography to examine how human capital can be promoted over time. The chapters in this section address individuals' ability to become educated and develop earning power, particularly within contexts of poverty, inequality, and social exclusion (or low human capital). Brian Nolan and Bertrand Maitre, economists at the Economic and Social Research Institute in Dublin, present comparative data from the European Community Household Panel survey to provide a picture of socioeconomic disadvantage versus opportunity in Europe. Emphasis is placed on distinguishing common features versus major differences across the counties and pointing toward key factors affecting the situation and the opportunities facing different households. They also examine the links between persistent low income and human capital, and they use a dynamic perspective to shed light on the long-term processes that limit opportunities for the next generation.

John Hobcraft, a demographer in the Department of Social Policy and associate of the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion at the London School of Economics and Political Science, examines evidence from the National Child Development Study and other studies to identify the key factors and pathways over the life course that lead to adult social exclusion. The difficulties and importance of understanding and incorporating gene-environment influences within this research are also discussed.

Greg Duncan, an economist in the School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University, and faculty fellow with the Institute for Policy Research, and Katherine Magnuson, assistant professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, examine human

capital investments and interventions at various points in the lifespan, distinguishing between the possibilities for enhanced learning through such programs and the economic efficiency of these programs. Particular emphasis is placed on the timing of effective social investments and interventions – childhood, adolescence, or adulthood – for enhancing human capital across the lifespan and across generations.

The second section, “Partnership Behavior,” draws on the fields of demography, sociology, and psychology to address the formation of partnerships and the implications for family health. The section examines the potential for growth or dissolution as well as patterns over the generations and how children and youth are affected. Kathleen Kiernan, a demographer at the London School of Economics and Political Science and co-director of the Center for the Analysis of Social Exclusion, presents an overview of international trends in cohabitation, marriage, and divorce and then examines the partnership and parenthood behavior of children in Western European nations and the United States who experienced parental separation during childhood. Analyses of international trends come mainly from the UN Fertility and Family Surveys. In addition, British cohort data are used to examine childhood factors that might explain why the partnership and parenthood behavior of men and women who experience parental separation differ from their peers without this experience.

E. Mavis Hetherington, an emerita developmental psychologist at the University of Virginia, and Anne Mitchell Elmore, a graduate student in the Department of Psychology at the University of Virginia, examine the factors within and outside the family that may modify the influence of divorce and repartnering on the well-being and adjustment of children and adults. In addition to addressing coping patterns and changes in adjustment over time, the intergenerational transmission of relationship instability is examined, with a consideration of the contribution of attitudes toward divorce and remarriage, personality characteristics, partner selection, as well as interpersonal and problem-solving skills in intimate relationships.

Kurt Hahlweg, a clinical psychologist at the Technische Universität Braunschweig, presents data on the determinants of marital distress and the effectiveness of preventive interventions to reduce relationship problems. The benefits of universal preventive interventions – those that target an entire population – and selective preventive interventions – those that target risk groups, are discussed as potential approaches to promoting healthy development in our nations.

The third and final section of this volume, “Psychological Health and Development,” draws on the fields of psychology and psychiatry to examine

the implications of psychological health for the development of children, youth, and adults. This section explores how much change in psychological health is possible during the life course and over generations with particular focus on the likelihood of psychopathology in the context of adverse environments or in families with a genetic history of psychological problems. Sir Michael Rutter, a psychiatrist and founding director of the Social, Genetic and Developmental Psychiatry Research Centre in London, draws together intergenerational and within individual trends in psychopathology. In addition, he summarizes some of the key findings on genetic, biological, and experiential influences that bring about change and continuity in psychopathology.

Michel Duyme, a psychologist who is Director of Research at the *Laboratoire de Biostatistique, Epidémiologie, et Recherche Clinique*, University of Montpellier, and Louis Arseneault, King's College, London, and Annick-Camille Dumaret, *Centre de Recherche Médecine, Sciences, Santé et Société* in Paris, examine the potential for change after escaping difficult early life circumstances. Duyme and colleagues present and discuss data regarding the continuity and stability of IQs of children who were severely deprived in early childhood and then adopted later in life. The chapter also addresses the relative effects of environment and genetics as well as the effects of socioeconomic status on children's intellectual development.

Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, a developmental psychologist at Columbia University, presents theoretical perspectives on early development, examining continuity and change as they relate to what is known about prevention and intervention. She also pays particular attention to the elements and characteristics of effective interventions. In addition, the chapter highlights theoretically derived processes that have not been considered in intervention programs but are possible foci for future programs.

In the book's summary chapter, P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale, a developmental psychologist in the School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University, and a faculty fellow with the Institute for Policy Research, and Elizabeth Votruba-Drzal, an advanced graduate student in Northwestern University's Program in Human Development and Social Policy, pull together the lessons learned from the various chapters, highlighting how this research from multiple disciplines provides a more informed understanding of continuity and discontinuity across lives and generations. In addition, they consider new directions for interventions that may enhance human development and provide opportunities for change.