

BSPS MEETINGS

BSPS CONFERENCE 2009

University of Sussex 9-11 September 2009

The 2009 BSPS will be held at the University of Sussex from Wednesday 9-Friday 11 September 2009. The venue is on the outskirts of Brighton, at Falmer, but is not the venue that hosted a previous BSPS Conference. Put the dates in your new diary now!

The call for papers will be issued in January.

There will also be special sessions at the Conference to mark the work of John Hajnal and John Blacker, both of whom, we are sad to advise, died recently. The Hajnal session is being organized by Mike Murphy and Tim Dyson (LSE), and the Blacker session by Basia Zaba (Center for Population Studies, LSHTM).

Advance notice of forthcoming day meeting in May 2009.

Health and mortality using record linkage data

Provisionally set for 14 May 2009 at LSE. Full details and pre-registration nearer the date.

NOTICES

BSPS membership subscriptions for 2009

Membership subscriptions for 2009 will be due at the beginning of January. An email will be sent out at that time with the renewal form, but this can also be accessed at the BSPS website at www.bsps.org.uk at any time. It would be much appreciated if members

could pay promptly, to avoid reminders having to be sent out. Alternatively, many members pay by standing order, thus removing the need to remember to write a cheque and post it. If you would like to switch to this method of payment, please email pic@lse.ac.uk, who will be happy to supply the relevant form.

BSPS Less Economically Developed Countries Initiative 2009

BSPS Less Economically Developed Countries Initiative. Call for proposals.

The BSPS Developing Countries Initiative has reserved £1,500 per annum for activities that encourage collaboration between population demographers in the UK and developing countries. This initiative sponsors an annual visit by a demographer from a LEDC, who gives a presentation at the BSPS Conference where they get the opportunity to meet and develop contacts with UK demographers. The overall aim is to encourage long-term collaboration and joint projects, and it is anticipated that contacts will already exist between the person to be funded, and a UK institution or UK demographers.

Previous awards have been made to visitors from Cuba and Brazil. In 2005, Sonia Catusus Cervera, from the University of Havana visited, and in 2006, Consuelo Martin, also from Cuba, visited. In both instances, they were also supported by the University of Manchester to visit that institution. In September 2007, a visit by Andre Caetano from the University of Minas Gerais (Belo Horizonte Brazil) was funded, to further work with colleagues at the London School of Economics and the University of Southampton. Seminars were held at the London School of Economics and the University of Southampton during the visit. In 2008, Niveen Abu R'Meileh from Birzeit University was the LEDC visitor.

Suggestions for the use of part or all of this fund for the year 2009 should be made by 20 January 2009, to pic@lse.ac.uk, for consideration by the BSPS Council at their next meeting. Suggestions would be best supported by a single typed sheet describing how the money might be budgeted and spent and in what ways this would encourage collaboration. Bids should also include a detailed timetable of the proposed activities, and should come from the UK-based sponsoring individual or institution only.

POPFEST 2009

Popfest 2009, the population studies conference for postgraduates organised by postgraduates, will be held at LSE. The organising committee is Dewi Ismajani Puradiredja, Sarah Mohaupt, Toom Pothisiri, Paul Mathews and Paul Bouanchaud. The conference will take place in July 2009 with specific dates and further details published in early 2009. The call for papers is expected to be issued in January 2009

News from the Centre for Longitudinal Study Information and User Support (CeLSIUS)

CeLSIUS, based in the Centre for Population Studies at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, is funded by the ESRC Census Programme to provide free advice, information and support to UK based academics, including students, who wish to use the ONS Longitudinal Study (LS). The LS is an important record linkage study which now includes information from four Censuses and from vital registration for an approximate 1% sample of the England and Wales population.

Their website at <http://www.celsius.lshtm.ac.uk> offers a range of resources including:

- Web based training modules on themes such as ethnicity, geography, household and families, socio-economic indicators, regression based analyses.
- A searchable data dictionary
- A searchable list of publications using the LS
- Downloadable tables from LS research studies
- A guide on how to access the LS including a step by step guide through the application process at <http://www.celsius.lshtm.ac.uk/how.html>

The latest edition of *CeLSIUS News* is now available at

<http://www.celsius.lshtm.ac.uk/documents/newsletter012.pdf> and includes a special feature on Mortality.

In addition to the web site, more information and news is available by joining the free e-discussion list at

www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/l-support.html, by contacting CeLSIUS at celsius@lshtm.ac.uk or by phone on 020 7299 4634.

International conference **Together or Separate : Spatial Concentration and Immigrant Incorporation in the United States, Great Britain and France**

January 15-16, 2009 at the University of Paris 8, Saint-Denis (Amphi X), Paris

Read

more : http://www.geopolitique.net/article.php3?id_article=261

The conference will focus on the political, social and economic effects of immigrant spatial concentration in France, Great Britain and the United States. The underlying hypothesis is that the spatial concentration of immigrants affects the rate and level of the political and socio-economic incorporation, which in turn has political consequences. All three countries have recently experienced tensions and debates about immigration and national identity. The aim of the conference will be to assess the relevant findings from existing research, identify questions that need to be explored further and discuss cross-national research designs that could potentially answer these questions. The conference is part of a bigger project lead by the University of Paris 8 to create an international multidisciplinary network of scholars who collaborate on quantitative and qualitative studies on these issues.

CALLING ALL RESEARCHERS!

Can you spare 15 minutes to answer an online survey? The survey is investigating some of the obstacles you face as a researcher when accessing licensed information resources, and how you overcome these obstacles. The survey is part of a study, commissioned by the Research Information Network (www.rin.ac.uk), to understand the nature and scale of limitations and barriers encountered by

researchers when seeking to access such resources. The survey is hoping to reach as many researchers as possible, across a range of disciplines. Your input will provide vital insight to these issues and how they may be resolved going forwards. You can access the survey from 11 January here:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=7Gm90P1n3aSL087xHwvITw_3d_3d, or email lburns@outsellinc.com.

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

Applications are invited for places on three summer schools to be run in summer 2009, supported by the Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences programme of the European Science Foundation. These summer schools are the first in a series of twelve and will provide opportunities for junior researchers to undertake high-level training in the latest developments in quantitative methods. They will also enable researchers to interact and share ideas and expertise based upon recent research. The three summer schools in 2009 are as follows:

- Introduction to event history analysis with a special focus on cross-national comparisons
18 - 26 August 2009, Paris, France

- Social Network Analysis using Pajek
29 June - 10 July, Ljubljana, Slovenia

- Projection methods for ethnicity and immigration status
2 - 9 July 2009, Leeds, UK

Applications to participate in these events are invited from well-qualified junior scholars, who are researching quantitative methods or using quantitative methods in research in the social sciences and who are seeking to extend and broaden their skills.

Twenty-five junior scholars will be selected to participate in each Summer School. Selection will be primarily on the basis of merit, subject to consideration of balance with respect to country and discipline.

The accommodation and meal costs at the Summer schools will be covered, but applicants need to pay for their own travel costs. Only in exceptional cases of hardship, will contributions be made to travel costs. Successful applicants will be expected to attend for the entire duration of the summer school.

Eligibility: Applicants should be completing, or have recently completed, doctoral work in a relevant field of study and should be from one of the eighteen

participating European countries listed on the website below.

Application Procedure: Applications should consist of a short CV together with a covering letter of no more than 500 words in English.

The letter should include an explanation of how the applicant's research plans relate both to the QMSS 2 programme and, specifically, to any of the Summer Schools. The applicant needs to select which summer school is their first choice and whether they wish to be considered for 2nd or 3rd choice if first choice is not available. A recommendation letter by a PhD supervisor or other established scholar is also required.

Applications should be sent by e-mail by 31 January 2009 to the Programme Coordinator, Ruth Durrell, Cathie Marsh Centre for Census and Survey Research, School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester, Humanities Bridgeford Street, Manchester M13 9PL UK, e-mail ruth.durrell@manchester.ac.uk. All applicants will be informed about the outcome through e-mail by April 2009.

Further information about the programme is available via the ESF website

<http://www.esf.org/index.php?id=4858>

or the QMSS 2 website

<http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/qmss/index.shtml>

OTHER MEETINGS

Exploiting Existing Data for Health Research

An international Conference to be held 17-19 September 2009 at the University of St. Andrews. Training workshop 12-16 September 2009 at the University of St. Andrews.

Abstracts for the Conference are invited by Monday 1 June 2009, on the following five themes:

The value of record linkage in health research

Record linkage for health care improvement

Longitudinal record linkage

The methodological challenges of record linkage

Confidentiality, disclosure and ethical issues.

Abstracts should be submitted to ship@st-andrews.ac.uk, to whom further enquiries may also be addressed.

Further Conference information:

<https://onlineshop.st-andrews.ac.uk/events/eventdetails.asp?eventid=37>

Further training workshop information:
<https://onlineshop.st-andrews.ac.uk/events/eventdetails.asp?eventid=36>

REPORTS OF MEETINGS

IUSSP seminar on Trade-offs in Female Life Histories: Raising New Questions in an Integrative Framework

Bristol, United Kingdom, 23-25 July 2008

Organized by the IUSSP Scientific Panel on Evolutionary Perspectives in Demography in collaboration with the **University of Bristol**

with financial support from the British Academy, the British Society for Population Studies and the Galton Institute

The goal of this seminar was to bring together researchers from a variety of disciplines to explore female life history. Evolutionary biologists have developed life history theory to identify the trade-offs individuals must make in allocating resources between growth, reproduction and the maintenance of body condition. Demographers, anthropologists and other human scientists have increasingly focused on these trade-offs, in an attempt to understand the patterning of fertility, mortality, growth and aging across human populations. This 2nd meeting of the IUSSP Evolutionary Perspectives on Demography Panel brought together 36 participants from the fields of demography, anthropology, physiology and biology to explore this issue.

Four plenary talks and 25 short presentations were given at the seminar, grouped into 7 sessions. These themes represented both key stages in female life history (age at first birth; birth intervals and pregnancy; parental investment; and grandmotherhood) and the applications of such life history analyses (to the demographic transition; and theoretical models of life history). The 29 papers were very broad ranging, encompassing empirical research across the developed and developing world, and including the use of historical datasets; theoretical work on the mathematical modelling of life history traits; comparative work on primate life histories; conceptual and review papers synthesising previous work on life histories to generate new hypotheses; and the implications of such research for policy. A key theme to emerge from the seminar was the

importance of getting the methodology right in explaining life history trade-offs. In particular, the difficulty of understanding variation in life history trade-offs given the problem of heterogeneity between women was much discussed. Here a dialogue between disciplines such as demography and evolutionary biology is important in furthering the field, since both can bring their expertise to bear on this complex issue. The importance of an integrated understanding of female life history for making policy decisions was also highlighted: without an in-depth understanding of *why* female life histories vary, it is extremely difficult to develop effective policy which aims to improve women's lives. These wide ranging papers will be published in a special issue of the *American Journal of Human Biology* next year, in order to provide an integrative framework for future research in this area.

The meeting was held at the University of Bristol, 23-25 July 2008. The organisers were Mhairi Gibson (local host) and Rebecca Sear, with help from the IUSSP Panel on Evolutionary Perspectives on Demography, particularly Monique Borgerhoff-Mulder and Ulrich Mueller. As well as the generous financial and administrative support offered by the IUSSP, this meeting received financial sponsorship from the British Academy, the British Society for Population Studies and the Galton Institute, and administrative support from BIRTHA (Bristol Institute for Research in the Humanities and Arts)

The first plenary of the workshop, given by Professor Kristen Hawkes from the University of Utah, set the tone for the workshop by exploring in detail the problem of how heterogeneity between women can obscure life history trade-offs. If women differ in their genetic endowment or in their access to resources, then life history trade-offs will be occurring across the surface of numerous different curves. This will make it difficult to observe trade-offs at the population level. This plenary highlighted the importance of using appropriate methodology to try and account for this problem, which in turn highlighted the necessity for interdisciplinary work in this area. Demographers are also concerned with the problem of heterogeneity and have been working to produce solutions in recent years. Anthropologists and evolutionary biologists must engage with and help to further these methodological advances, in order to advance their own research into life history theory.

After this opening, the workshop continued with a further three plenary talks and seven sessions of proffered papers. Four of the seven workshop sessions concerned key stages in female life history:

age at first birth, pregnancy and birth intervals, parental investment and grandmotherhood. One session focussed exclusively on a particularly important life history trade-off, that between investment in reproduction and investment in somatic maintenance. The remaining two sessions concerned the applications of such life history analyses: how such work can shed light on the demographic transition, and how such research can be used to generate overarching models of female life history.

The second plenary of the workshop began the debate over whether fertility is traded off against longevity. Professor Emily Grundy, from the Centre for Population Studies at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, presented data from England & Wales, Norway and the US to show that the relationship between investment in reproduction and later life outcomes can differ even in industrialised countries with similarly low mortality and fertility rates. This plenary was neatly complemented by a paper which presented very similar analyses of historical data from Quebec and Utah. Alain Gagnon, of the University of Western Ontario, began by remarking that the Quebecois data has been used in three previous studies to show a positive relationship between fertility and longevity, a negative relationship, and no relationship at all. Again, this illustrates the importance of getting methodology right when analysing the tricky issue of life history trade-offs. Grazyna Jasienska, from Jagiellonian University, drew this session to a close by highlighting gaps in the existing literature on this relationship in the hope that focussing attention on such lacunae will stimulate research which closes these gaps.

The third plenary, by Professor Gillian Bentley of the University of Durham, was a first-rate demonstration of integrative research. Gillian brought together demography, evolutionary biology and physiology in her research on the effects of developmental environment on female reproductive physiology. She and her group have used the natural experiment of migration to investigate the influence of developmental environment on female reproductive hormones, by comparing such hormones in Bangladeshi migrants from Sylhet to the UK, with women still resident in Sylhet and UK women. This physiological theme was picked up in the session in birth intervals and pregnancy, with papers by Virginia Vizthum, of the University of Indiana, and Claudia Vallengia, of the University of Pennsylvania, investigating the hormonal correlates of pregnancy loss and the resumption of post-partum fecundity respectively. Both papers involved small-scale studies of non-Western populations (a Bolivian agropastoralist community and an indigenous Argentinean population), in dramatic

contrast to the large scale datasets used by Grundy and Gagnon, demonstrating the diversity of evidence brought to bear on female life histories during the workshop.

Perhaps the most diverse session, however, in terms of empirical evidence was the session on parents and parental investment. In this four-paper session, Katherine Hinde, from UCLA, demonstrated sex-biased parental investment in rhesus macaques. David Lawson, from University College London, followed this with his analysis of the trade-off between wealth and family size in the large-scale, longitudinal UK database ALSPAC (Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children). Eshetu Gurmu's paper (from the University of Addis Ababa) switched focus to the developing world, with his study of marital dissolution in Addis Ababa. Finally, Kai Pierre Willfuehr, from Giessen University, ended the session with his analysis of another historical dataset, this time from northern Germany. All studies highlighted the need to take context, particularly, though by no means exclusively, access to resources, into account when analysing parental investment decisions.

The final plenary, by Professor Beverly Strassmann of the University of Michigan, was a wide-ranging plenary which showcased Professor Strassmann's long-term anthropological research project among the Dogon in Mali. A number of different trade-offs were considered during this plenary, which also highlighted that women do not make life history decisions in isolation, but in the context of a partnership. Such partnerships may be characterised by sexual conflict. Conflict between partners may be particularly pronounced in this highly polygynous society, and much of Professor Strassmann's research has focuses on the implications of polygyny for women's life history strategies.

Perhaps two key themes dominated the workshop, one methodological, one with both empirical and theoretical implications. Already discussed is the emergence of a consensus that researchers across disciplines must unite to develop rigorous methodology to analyse life history trade-offs. This issue was discussed at several points during the workshop in the context of moving forward our understanding of female life history trade-offs by appropriately controlling for heterogeneity between women. Ruth Mace's (University College London) paper, on contraceptive uptake in the Gambia, emphasised how interactions between demographers and anthropologists have already improved the methods for investigating life history trade-offs. Anthropologists are now increasingly making use of

statistical methods such as event history analysis, which can incorporate time varying covariates. Such techniques are vitally important for interpreting the dynamic processes that occur during the life course.

The other theme that emerged was the importance of kin in female life histories. A number of empirical papers demonstrated the key importance of relatives in female life history, including Donna Leonetti's (University of Washington) analysis of first births in two Indian communities, Monique Borgerhoff Mulder's (UC Davis) paper on contraceptive use in rural Tanzania, Brooke Scelza's (UCLA) paper on grandmaternal investment in Martu Aborigines, Australia and David Coall's (University of Basel) paper on grandparental investment in modern Switzerland. Papers by Meredith Reiches (Harvard University), Jonathan Wells (Institute of Child Health, University College London) and Lesley Newson (University of Exeter) all explored the theoretical implications of the importance of kin. Reiches's paper considered how female life history trade-offs would be better understood in the context of 'pooled energy budgets', that is the energy budgets of not just the woman herself but all her relatives, including her partner, who may be contributing to her reproductive effort. Wells's paper discussed the importance of kin in the context of genomic imprinting, and how this may have influenced the evolution of female reproductive behaviour. Lesley Newson brought the influence of kin to bear on the puzzle of the demographic transition, and suggested that part of the explanation for low fertility in industrialised societies is a lack of kin support, given the evidence that kin provide both encouragement and practical support for raising children.

Much of the research presented at the workshop has important policy implications, touched upon by the presenters. For example, Alejandra Nunez-de-la-Mora's paper on the trade-off between immune defence and reproduction highlighted the need to take a holistic approach to development, since a reduction in disease prevalence may inadvertently lead to an increase in fecundity. One paper focussed exclusively on the implications of such life history research for policy-makers. Sarah Johns, from the University of Kent at Canterbury, demonstrated how an integrative understanding of female life history trade-offs can be used to inform policy surrounding teenage motherhood, a subject of some concern to the UK government, as well as a number of other industrialised countries. She suggested that teenage motherhood is a rational strategy in the context of social marginalisation and low life expectancies. Therefore policies targeted solely at improving adolescent's knowledge of contraception are unlikely

to result in substantial decreases in the instance of teenage pregnancy, without also tackling social inequality and poverty.

Rebecca Sear & Paul Mathews (LSE)

Report on the XVII International AIDS Conference 3-8 August 2008, Mexico City.

Since 1985, the International AIDS Conference has become a major forum in the world to present important new scientific research and to discuss the major challenges facing the global response to HIV/AIDS. The XVII International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2008) in Mexico City was the first such conference to be held in Latin America. At the opening ceremony on 3 August at the Auditorio Nacional a variety of international speakers, dignitaries and artists welcomed the delegates, including the President of Mexico, Felipe Calderon; UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon; the World Health Organisation's Director General Margaret Chan; and UNAIDS Executive Director, Peter Piot - among many others. The conference theme, *Universal Action Now*, emphasised the need for continued urgency in the worldwide response to HIV/AIDS, and for action on the part of all stakeholders.

The conference was notable for the diversity and scope of its programme. Based on my own research interests and those relevant to my work with the HIV Epidemiology and Biostatistics Research Group at UCL, the following is but a selection of some of the key issues that were presented and debated at the Conference.

State of the Epidemic

Data from the UNAIDS 2008 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic, released immediately prior to the conference indicates that over the past 25 years, almost 60 million people have been infected with HIV, and nearly 25 million people have died of AIDS (UNAIDS, 2008). In 2007, about 33 million people were living with HIV/AIDS and 2.5 million people were newly infected (UNAIDS, 2007). HIV/AIDS has become the leading cause of mortality worldwide and the main cause of death in sub-Saharan Africa. Women and girls continue to be disproportionately affected in sub-Saharan Africa, although the ratio of males to females living with HIV globally has remained stable at 50 per cent since 2001. While most sub-Saharan countries are reporting reductions in new infections, HIV incidence among some injection drug using (IDU), men who have sex with men (MSM) and sex worker populations have increased (UNAIDS, 2008). Discussions focused on the

need for better HIV surveillance and other strategic health information on these key populations, both in generalised and concentrated epidemics. For example Dr G P Garnett (UK) proposed the use of theoretical frameworks, such as the proximate determinants (Gregson/Boerma & Weir, 2005) or social epidemiology framework (Poundstone et al, 2004) which take social and structural determinants of health outcomes into account, to develop a greater understanding of the risks of HIV acquisition, and hence HIV incidence.

Vaccine research and viral reservoirs

An efficacious HIV vaccine will not be available in the foreseeable future. Research such as that presented by R Siliciano et al (USA) showed that while highly active anti-retroviral treatment (HAART) can stop viral replication of HIV, it cannot eradicate it from the body because of the persistence of HIV in reservoirs in resting CD4 T-cells (white blood cells). These latent reservoirs allow the ongoing production of the virus during HAART. The field of HIV vaccine research is currently in a phase of critical re-evaluation after the failure of the Merck vaccine trials (STEP and Phambili clinical trials) and the early termination of the PAVE 100 trials. Simply put, a much better understanding of the viral and molecular determinants of HIV transmission and pathogenesis appears to be necessary in order to improve the prospects of generating an effective AIDS vaccine.

Clinical treatment and care

While effective antiretroviral therapies are available, questions about the appropriate time to initiate antiretroviral therapy (ART) and what drugs to start on remain central to people living with HIV and their clinicians (i.e. Anton Pozniak, UK). There is growing evidence from recent trials that suggests that earlier ART intervention may protect against not only AIDS-defining illnesses but also non-AIDS cancers and heart, liver or kidney diseases. These findings may result in changes in recommendations regarding ART initiation and in WHO treatment guidelines. If that happens, the number of people who need treatment can be expected to increase substantially.

In terms of clinical management, an important theme was the need to develop and implement inexpensive, quality-assured diagnostic and monitoring tools for use in resource-limited settings. For example, there have been complications in assessing the presence of drug resistant HIV antiretroviral strains in resource-constrained countries where, in the absence of viral load monitoring, changes in ART are driven only by signs of clinical failure (i.e. Dr Pillay).

Prevention research

In terms of prevention research, one major theme was the possibility of using oral and topical anti-retroviral HIV drugs not only as post-infection therapy but also as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) (i.e. Dr M Cohen, USA). Should the prophylactic use of antiretroviral drugs both to block infection and to reduce infectiousness in HIV-positive individuals prove effective, issues related to drug toxicity, long-term adherence, drug resistance and distribution will have to be considered before scale up (N S Padian et al and from personal communication with Prof A N Phillips, UK).

Yet, it was emphasised repeatedly that there is no “technical fix” and that we cannot “treat our way out of the epidemic” (J Sepulveda, Mexico/USA). While a high number of treated individuals (or less infectious individuals) could reduce HIV transmission at a population level, the fact remains that for every two persons starting anti-retroviral therapy there are five new infections.

Thus, in light of recent setbacks in terms of a vaccine and with oral and vaginal antiretrovirals as a preventative measure still being assessed, HIV experts, such as M H Merson (USA) et al, during a special session by the Lancet, called for a reinvigorated commitment to prevention research and accelerated implementation of proven prevention strategies.

Since there is no “magic bullet” against HIV/AIDS, the new buzzword seems to have become “combination prevention strategies” in which biomedical interventions, such as male condom use, ARTs and male circumcision, should be integrated with other modes of prevention, such as behavioural strategies to affect health behavioural change, and structural approaches that seek to change the context that contributes to vulnerability to and risk of HIV, such as poverty, violence, stigmatisation and discrimination. This way the prevention of HIV transmission could occur on multiple levels and increase the effectiveness of existing prevention strategies (i.e. Prof T Coates, USA; P Piot, UNAIDS).

For example, the legal status and stigma attached to sex work, coupled with the violence and harassment faced by sex workers from law enforcement officers, compromises effective responses to HIV in this key population. Brazil demonstrated how social and structural issues can be addressed by implementing several initiatives including decriminalising sex work and promoting HIV prevention education and self-esteem among sex workers through the “No shame girl, you’re a professional” media campaign.

Innovative theories and methodologies in social science research

Within the multi-disciplinary perspectives in the social, behavioural and economic sciences, determinants of the epidemic, such as poverty, sexual behaviour, drug use, gender relations and globalisation; and the relationships between HIV/AIDS and issues such as war, violence and security, migration, intergenerational issues, labour and trade relations, and social movements, were examined. Further, the need for research theories and methodologies to continue to move beyond the epidemiological realm, to include social and structural determinants of HIV/AIDS, alongside the behavioural and biological factors, was identified as being critical to the development of more effective HIV/AIDS intervention programmes.

During a session on innovative theories and methodologies in social research examples of such work were presented, including visual ethnography concerned with cultural representations of illness and suffering (D Grace, Canada); the re-thinking of existing epistemological frameworks and extending them to include anti-oppressive, non-euro-centric epistemologies (C Logie et al, Canada); and, the inclusion of socio-cultural contexts of HIV transmission (Y Sun, China), new study populations (e.g. seafarers in Brazilian ports) (D E I Lucero-Prisno, UK), new spaces (e.g. casual sex in internet cafes in Peru) (V Villacorta, Peru), and new research actors (e.g. community researchers in Nigeria) (J Ocholi, Nigeria).

Recently emerged research methods/strategies, such as the social network-based Respondent-Driven-Sampling (RDS) strategy, have to be continuously re-evaluated, and improved upon, to maximise utility. For example, RDS has increasingly been used with varying degrees of success and rigour to conduct bio-behavioural HIV surveys among injecting drug users, men who have sex with men and sex workers. A session in which international RDS studies were reviewed and assessed, showed that major limitations include that RDS is not suitable for the sampling of non-networked hard-to-reach or hidden populations, such as the often criminally controlled female sex worker (FSW) populations. Further, the risk of introducing bias into the sample cannot be fully eliminated due to the likelihood of inaccurate measurements of participants' social network sizes, and there remain important analytical limitations to RDS, such as its software's inability to conduct multivariate analyses (G W Rutherford et al, USA). In terms of implementation there remain doubts as to the appropriateness of incentives being used. For example, A Lutnick et al (USA) who used RDS for her study on the working conditions and HIV/STIs among

FSWs in San Francisco said that from her experience reimbursements that may be an incentive for a streetwalker may not be one for a high class call girl. From our personal communication it also became evident that her team had difficulties in drawing a large sample ($n > 250$). Dr Pandu Riono (Indonesia) mentioned to me that by using RDS to sample IDUs as part of the Indonesian Behavioural Surveillance Surveys (IBSS), it appeared that they had inadvertently helped to create new networks among IDUs for drug-related risk behaviour.

In sum, in the continued absence of a vaccine, treatment for HIV infection and a combination of behavioural, structural and biomedical prevention paradigms and peer-involved approaches adapted and prioritised to specific contexts, represent the most promising response to the AIDS pandemic. Research needs to continue to move beyond the epidemiological realm, to provide for reliable context-specific evidence-based approaches to better inform the appropriate selection of available interventions.

The Conference drew to a close on 8 August 2008. With more than 24 000 participants from over 190 countries, AIDS 2008 was the second largest in the history of the International AIDS Conference. The host of the International AIDS Conference in 2010 will be Vienna, Austria.

Compiled from writer's own notes and informal communication with other delegates and the following references:

¹ UNAIDS. UNAIDS report on the global AIDS epidemic 2008. Geneva: Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2008 (in press).

² UNAIDS, WHO. AIDS epidemic update: December 2007. Geneva: Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS, World Health Organisation, 2007.

³ The Lancet. HIV Prevention. Special Edition. August 2008.

⁴ International AIDS Society. Newsletter. November 2008.

All abstracts presented at the conference are available online at: www.aids2008.org

Dewi Ismajani Puradiredja (LSE)
