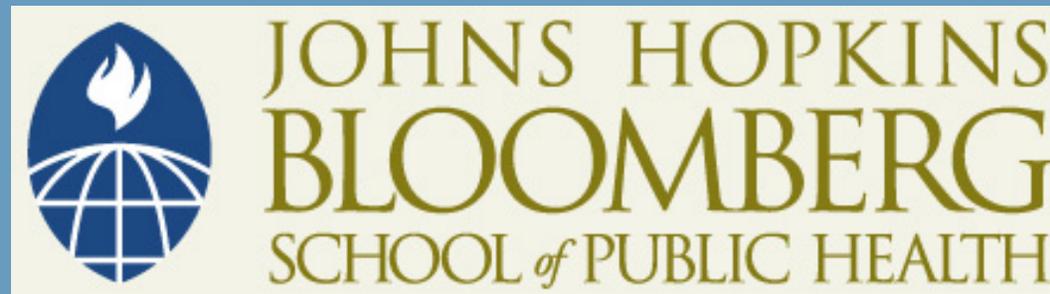


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# The Life Course, Human Development, and Health

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## Section A

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What Is a Life Course Perspective on Health?

# A Life Course Perspective

- Conceptualizes health as the reflection of an underlying developmental trajectory
- Trajectory is multidimensional
  - Biological, psychological, behavioral, and social aspects
- What “health” means varies by position on this developmental trajectory (i.e., by age)

# Developmental Trajectories

- Some aspects are “hard wired”
- Most aspects are highly plastic
- Specific trajectory reflects transactions between an individual and the contexts in which he or she is embedded

# Analysis from a Life Course Perspective

- Examines underlying *developmental trajectories*
- Distinguishes key *contextual influences*
- Identifies biological, psychological, behavioral, and social *processes* linking contexts and health

# A Theoretical Orientation

- “Establishes a common field of inquiry by defining a framework that guides research in terms of problem identification and formulation, variable selection and rationales, and strategies of research design and analysis” (Elder and Shanahan, 2006)
- Helps one to make causal connections and should lead to theories
- A powerful approach for explanation, identifying points of intervention, and designing policy

## Specific Applications ...

- Hayman and Hughes. (2006). Progress in Prevention: Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease a Life Course Ecological Perspective.
- Kuh and New Dynamics of Ageing Preparatory Network. (2007). A Life Course Approach to Healthy Aging, Frailty, and Capability.
- Lu and Halfon. (2003). Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Birth Outcomes: A Life Course Perspective.
- Northridge and Lamster. (2004). A Life Course Approach to Preventing and Treating Oral Disease.
- Symonds. (2009). Nutrition and Its Contribution to Obesity and Diabetes: A Life-Course Approach to Disease Prevention?
- Walco. (2004). Toward an Integrated Model of Pain over the Life Course.
- Whalley, Dick, and McNeill. (2006). A Life-Course Approach to the Aetiology of Late-Onset Dementias.

## General Applications ...

- Alwin and Wray. (2005). A Life-Span Developmental Perspective on Social Status and Health.
- Ben-Shlomo and Kuh. (2002). A Life Course Approach to Chronic Disease Epidemiology: Conceptual Models, Empirical Challenges and Interdisciplinary Perspectives.
- Halfon and Hochstein. (2002). Life Course Health Development: An Integrated Framework for Developing Health, Policy, and Research.
- Hertzman. (1999). The Biological Embedding of Early Experience and Its Effects on Health in Adulthood.
- Singer and Ryff. (1999). Hierarchies of Life Histories and Associated Health Risks.

# Origins: Epidemiology

- Focus on long-term origins of disease and/or the natural history of disease, especially chronic conditions
- Not new within epidemiology, just more prominent
- Three strands of research led to renewed emphasis
  - British cohort studies
  - Fetal origins
  - Health inequalities research

# Origins: Social Science

- Focus on individual lives, social pathways
  - Life course as a concept
- Established by Glen Elder
  - *Children of the Great Depression* (1974)
- Research examines how historical time, place, and social institutions shape lives
  - Transitions, trajectories, turning points
- Principal health outcome mental health; less emphasis on biology and more on social determinants

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# Clarifying Terms

- Life span: length of time species is capable of living or length of an individual's life
- Life cycle: regular and predictable series of life stages or species reproductive cycle
- Life course: age-graded developmental trajectories shaped by contexts

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