



Leading education  
and social research  
Institute of Education  
University of London

# Communicating longitudinal and multidisciplinary research

**Meghan Rainsberry**  
Centre for Longitudinal Studies



# Content

1. Key impact and communications challenges facing the cohort studies
2. Three communications case studies
3. Key learning points

## A few caveats...

1. Assumption that good communications can lead to impact
2. Focus on pathways to impact post-analysis
3. Communications 'success' measured by reach and influence

# Challenges for longitudinal research

1. Long delivery times and delays
2. Multi-disciplinary nature of the studies and their findings
3. Capacity

Case study 1:

# **Persistent poverty and children's cognitive development**

# About the research

- Authors Andy Dickerson & Gurleen Popli, University of Sheffield
- Used MCS data from Waves 1-4
- First study to systematically examine impact of persistent poverty on cognitive development
- Key finding: Seven-year-olds who have lived in poverty since infancy perform substantially worse than those who have never been poor

# Communication/dissemination

- Working paper: *Persistent poverty and children's cognitive development: Evidence from the MCS*
- Press coverage: Guardian, Telegraph, Nursery World, New Statesman
- 2,000+ pageviews, top 5 most downloaded papers
- Presentation at Parenting UK conference

# Impact

- Used as part of the evidence base for the Department of Work & Pensions' *Measuring child poverty* consultation
- Consultation aims to create 'multidimensional measure of child poverty'
- Research used to support income as one dimension of poverty, focusing in particular on long-term effects of income poverty
- CLS written submission



# Key learning

- Working paper series offer a platform for delivering interim findings from long-term projects
- Even securing a relatively small impact can take a massive commitment of staff time
- Mix communications tools with formal mechanisms for greatest effect

## Case study 2:

# Reading for pleasure puts children ahead in the classroom

# About the research

- Used BCS70 data from Waves 2-4
- First study to examine the effect of reading for pleasure on cognitive development over time
- Key finding: Children who read for pleasure made more progress in maths, vocabulary and spelling between the ages of 10 and 16 than those who rarely read

# Communication/dissemination

- Working paper: *Social inequalities in cognitive scores: The roles of reading*
- Press coverage: BBC, Radio 4, Sky News Radio, Telegraph, Evening Standard, Al Jazeera, MSN News, Voice of Russia
- Direct enquiries from parents and teachers

# Web analytics

- Press release had 45,000 unique pageviews – more than 3.5 times the monthly average for the entire site
- Number of visitors new to the site jumped by 30%
- 96% of new visits were from reddit.com
- BBC article shared 6,000+ times, Telegraph article shared 3,000+ times

# Key learning

- Interest from radio and social media often associated with higher number of direct enquiries from members of the general public
- Social media can have a dramatic impact on reach, on its own and in conjunction with traditional media
- Capturing evidence of impact on this example is beyond the resources of a centre like CLS

Case study 3:

# **Obesity and overweight in middle age**

# About the research

- Initial findings from BCS70 age 42 survey
- 1970 cohort more likely to be obese at age 42 than the 1958 cohort were at the same age
- 30% of overweight men thought they were about the right weight, compared to 9% of overweight women



# Communication/dissemination

- Briefing paper series
- Press coverage: BBC, Times, Telegraph, Evening Standard, Daily Mail, many Welsh media outlets
- Seminar at Department of Health: audience 50% civil servants, including Permanent Secretary and her advisor

# Key learning

- Initial findings lay foundations for future interest in the research
- Break up multidisciplinary findings into targeted and digestible segments
- Take findings to your audience rather than expecting them to come to you

# Overcoming challenges for longitudinal research

1. Interim findings are crucial to long-term research projects.
2. Multi-disciplinary projects *must* budget for multiple dissemination strategies.
3. Communications and impact must be a shared responsibility.
4. Good communications are important to achieving impact but they are not the only pathway.