



Testing the 'Risk Society' Hypothesis

A prominent theme in discussion of the possible transition to a risk society has been the claim that individualisation has been a defining characteristic of social developments in recent decades. This thesis has influenced the move in public policy making from directive to regulatory intervention.

Although qualitative research has explored the nature of individualisation using case studies and in-depth interviewing techniques, the individualisation thesis has yet to be empirically validated using quantitative methods and large-scale, longitudinal data. This project will pursue this opportunity.

The secondary analysis will compare the aspirations and relevant outcomes of 16-year olds interviewed in three cohort and panel studies 1974, 1986 and 1996 - the National Child Development Study, the Birth Cohort Study and the British Household Panel Survey. The research will focus on school leaving age, first jobs and marriage.

Additional analyses will use contextual (rather than opinion-based) data to explore the extent to which, from earlier to more recent cohorts, individuals have developed different social networks and distanced themselves, in the way they live their lives, from their parents.

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