

MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester

Cross-national epidemiological assessments – opportunities and challenges

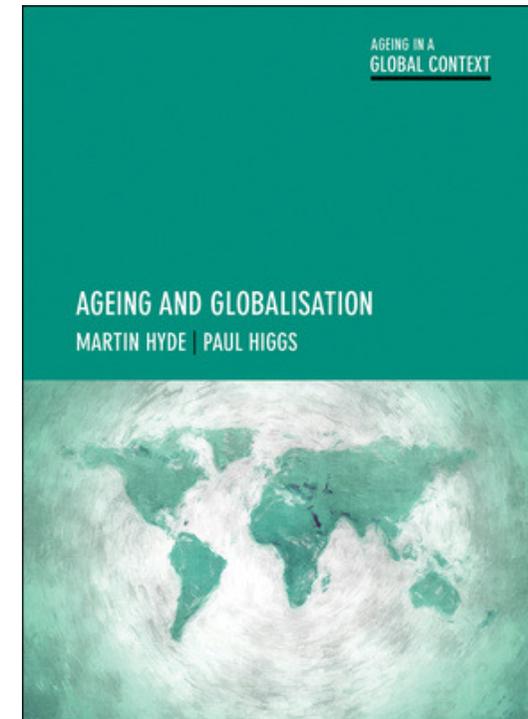
Dr Martin Hyde

Work, Ageing, Health and Employment Conference, Wuppertal 19-21 Sept 2016



Work, health and ageing as global issues

- So far at this conference we have seen many examples of cross-national approaches
- Use of cross-national datasets
 - SHARE
 - ESS
 - European Working Conditions
- Impact of globalization on lifecourse
- Impact of policy changes on retirement



Why do cross-national research?

- To see if phenomenon are universal or particular
- To compare the levels or rates of a given variable of interest, such as voting or well-being, between different countries
- To test whether the effects of certain factors on a given variable of interest, such as social class differences in health, are the same in different countries
- To identify those societal or macro level factors, such as welfare policies, that can impact on any given phenomenon or the relationship between phenomena
 - ‘Comparative research exploits variation in the attributes of macro-social units to understand the characteristics of, and relationships between, micro units nested within them’
 - Here countries act as ‘natural experiments’ as it is often difficult (impossible) to identify the impact of individual policies within a single country

The challenges of doing cross-national research

- Comparability...
- Are we measuring the same things in different contexts?
- Item comparability
 - Direct ‘word for word’ comparison between items in different surveys
- Conceptual comparability
 - Different (not directly comparable) items measure a similar concept in different studies
- Study/sample comparability
 - Are the samples the same in different contexts

Why is the issue of cross-national comparability important?

- False or misleading comparisons of populations based on different samples
 - Gender differences in health amongst a general population v those in an employed population
- False or misleading comparisons of populations based on different interpretations of questions
 - If health is interpreted differently in different countries
 - Not comparing like with like
- More fundamental philosophical issues about whether it is possible to do meaningful research

Clash of cultures

- A key issue is the concern that cultural differences mean that it is not possible/legitimate to compare across nations
- This has 2 (related) components
 1. That, because meaning is culturally bounded, it is not possible to translate items from one cultural context to another
 2. That respondents orient their responses to prevailing cultural norms which means that any difference is an artefact of these national 'response styles'

Emic and etic approaches

- It is possible to identify two broad approaches to cross-national research
- Derived from Pike's (1954) work on linguistics
- **Emic** approaches are concerned with particular/local/internal/subjective knowledge
- **Etic** approaches seek to identify universal/global/external/objective social phenomena

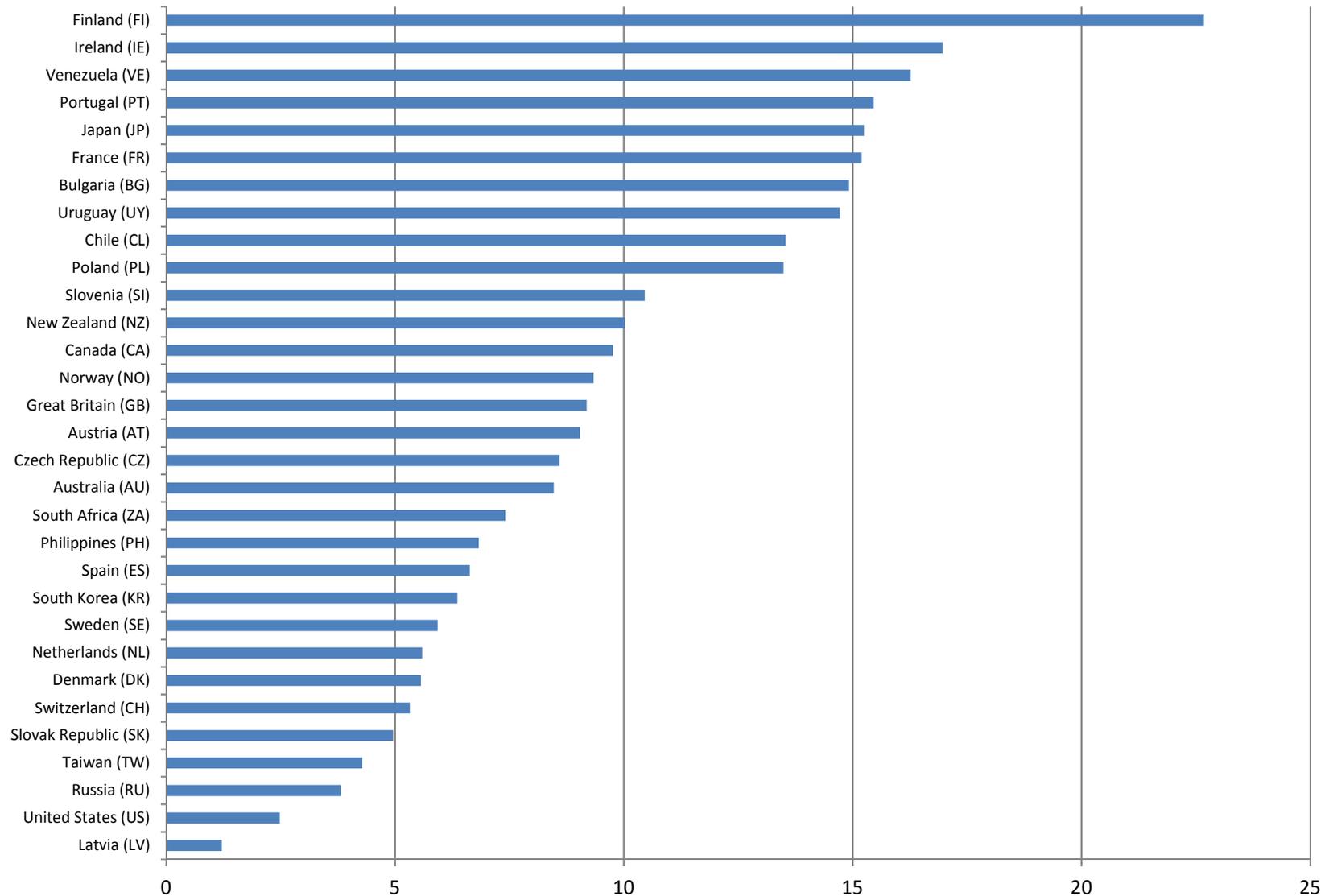
Cross-national or cross-cultural research

- Cross-national research
 - The nation-state "is one where the great majority are conscious of a common identity and share the same culture"
 - The nation-state is an area where the cultural boundaries match up with the political boundaries.
 - Nations can contain many cultures
- Cross-cultural research
 - "[Culture] is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society."
 - Cultures can contain many nations
- Concerns exist about the conceptual and methodological slippage between cross-national and cross-cultural research

A national fetish

- Risk of fetishizing national cultures as homogenous entities
 - Methodological nationalism
- Nations are ‘imagined communities’ that can contain multiple cultures
- Nation(alism) is not even the most important source of identity for most people

Percentage who say nationality is the most important aspect of their identity



A multitude of approaches

- Anchoring vignettes
 - It seems plausible that they are equally prone to different cultural interpretations.
- Structural equation modelling
 - Cannot use SEM with single item measures, e.g. self rated health
- Anthropometric measures
 - Response styles/cultural practices
 - National ‘walking styles’
- Digital devices
 - Possible that there are national ‘technology’ cultures that mediate the use of these devices
 - For example the cultural acceptability of using mobile phones whilst eating with other people

Is this really a problem?

- The overwhelming evidence from studies that examine the effects of inter- and intra-national factors appears to be that national level factors have marginal effects
- Theoretical plausibility
 - Back to Black
 - If a finding is repeatedly found – across nations – then we have to question whether this the product of methodological artefact

From emic to derived etic

- If only emic viewpoint accepted, then no research could occur
- Berry therefore says
 - Start with emic in own culture
 - Move to imposed etic
 - Learn about other culture
 - Compare own emic and other emic
 - Decide whether comparison possible
 - Where possible look for universals, and so DERIVE an etic

Moving forward...

- We have 3 interesting presentations that will explore different dimensions of these challenges and opportunities:
 1. Dr Jurgen Bauknecht and colleagues will look at the impact of HR policies on extending working lives across Europe using SHARE data
 2. Greet Vermeylen will draw on the EWCS to look at the impact of policies and working conditions on sustainable working lives in Europe
 3. Dr Sophie Psihoda will use the SHARELife data to explore the distribution and forms of different retirement pathways in 13 European countries from 1990 until 2008.