HE and “Emerging Adulthood”

- Approximately 90% of HE students in the UK are between the ages of 18 and 28, and about 82% are between the ages of 18 and 25

- These students are in a developmental period that is widely referred to as ‘emerging adulthood’ (Arnett, 2000)

Features of emerging adulthood:
- Ambiguous adult status; in a ‘maturity gap’ between biological, legal and social maturity
- Highly exploratory, non-committal
- Normatively, the most transition-heavy period of the lifespan in terms of relationship, residence and jobs, hence highly unstable
- Intricately related to demographic changes over past fifty years; rise in cohabitation, rise in availability of contraception, delaying of marriage
A peak period of vulnerability?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifespan Peaks of...</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality trait change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug dependence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol dependence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal convictions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schizophrenia diagnosis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bipolar diagnosis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stone et al. (2010)
Roberts et al. (2006)
McManus et al. (2007)
McManus et al. (2007)
Moffitt (1993)
Mertinkagas et al. (2007)

This highly unstable developmental period is the context for most who are in university

The human lifespan
An undergraduate degree: A test of transition tolerance?

Residential transitions  More residential transitions?

ARRIVAL

Year 1 (Sept to May)  Year 2 (Sept to May)  Year 3 (Sept to May)  EXIT

Settling in: the whole first year is transitional (risk of dropout high throughout)

9 months non-transitional?

Students start to apply for jobs and prepare for life after university at the beginning of the year

...Plus relationship transitions, job transitions, friendship transitions

The transition in to university

- Leaving parental home for the first time may lead to homesickness, but transition distress is not just a product of that
  
  – Hughes and Smail (2014): Administered CORE-GP measure of mental health to 350 new students, 63 per cent were found to be experiencing clinical levels of distress
  
  – No statistical difference in the level of distress experienced between those commuting from home and those who had moved away from home
• Evidence that students who arrive at university lack skills required to succeed, including resilience, time management, relationship skills and budgeting
• Entering an ‘alien’ social environment
• Radical change to friendship networks
• Cyberbullying and ostracism common

Wellbeing in the transition out of university: A longitudinal study

Sample: 184 University of Greenwich graduates from undergraduate programmes, across science, law, computing, social sciences, humanities, health and social care, psychology

Longitudinal design:
• PHASE 1 (1 month after leaving)
• PHASE 2 (6 months after)
• PHASE 3 (12 months after)

Measures: Psychological Wellbeing (Ryff scales), Depression, Crisis, Demographics, Employment status, residential status
Depression

• With CESD-10 depression questionnaire, score of 10 or more is indicative of mild depression

• Using this cut-off point...
  – PHASE 1 – 39% showing signs of depression
  – PHASE 2 – 40% showing signs of depression
  – PHASE 3 – 38% showing signs of depression

• No significance in change in depression scores over time, for the sample as a whole

Phase 3: Living with parents, depression and wellbeing

• Depression
  – With parents (10.5), not with parents (7.4), sig p<0.001

• Self-acceptance
  – With parents (4.3), not with parents (4.8), sig p<0.001

• Purpose in life
  – With parents (4.4), not with parents (4.7), sig p<0.01

• Autonomy
  – With parents (4.3), not with parents (4.6), sig p<0.01

• Satisfaction with career progress
  – Parents (9.4), not with parents (10.7), sig p<0.01

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-25827061
Crisis question

• At Phase 3, one year after leaving
• Retrospective crisis question

– “A crisis is a time in your life during which your emotions were more negative and unstable than normal, and you experienced changes and transitions that challenged your capacity to cope with stress, making you feel at times overwhelmed. During a crisis people often question things, including their goals, values and sense of identity. Typically crises last six months or more. Do you feel that you have been through a crisis since leaving university?”

Findings: Post-university crisis

• 33% of the sample reported in the final phase of the study that they had experienced a major personal crisis in the preceding year

• Compared with the rest of the sample, crisis group were found to show at Phase 1, Phase 2 and Phase 3.
  – a lower level of ‘environmental mastery’
  – higher levels of depressive symptoms

• Crisis was not predicted by achievement in degree

• Personality traits: decreases in Conscientiousness and increases in Neuroticism were more pronounced in the crisis group.
References


Radio show about quarter-life crisis in UK graduates

http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01pz599