

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Are we there yet? Overview of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth

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This presentation opened the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth research forum entitled Are We There Yet? Youth Transitions in Australia held at the Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney, on 11 April 2013. It begins with the observation that youth longitudinal surveys have a long history in Australia, dating back to the Youth in Transition study which commenced with a cohort of young people born in 1961. The latest incarnation is the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) which has tracked cohorts of Year 9 students selected in 1995, 1998, 2003, 2006 and 2009. These young people are interviewed over a period of ten years, between the ages of 15 and 25 years.

I argue that the interest in youth transitions dates back to the 1970s when the oil price shocks increased the unemployment rate significantly. Young people leaving education are new entrants to the labour market and therefore inevitably were hit hard by the downturn in the labour market. While the overall unemployment rate has fluctuated, it has never returned to the levels of the 1960s and youth unemployment remains an issue. Hence the interest in youth transitions.

One would have thought that, with over 35 years of research, we would know everything there is to know about youth transitions. But over the past 35 years the labour market has changed fundamentally, with educational participation increasing dramatically and a paucity of 'good' jobs for those without Year 12 and, increasingly, post-school qualifications. The world facing 20-year-olds today is not the same as the world of the 1970s. Thus, understanding youth transitions is an ongoing issue and will continue to be so unless the world we live in stagnates. Researchers will not run out of topics.

In the presentation I also make an attempt to map the breadth of topics being researched and how they have changed over the past 25 years. A bonus is a long list of research papers that look at the longitudinal youth data.

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