



DUNEDIN STUDY CONCEPT PAPER FORM

Provisional Paper Title: The developmental origins of social cohesion

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P.I. Sponsor: Richie Poulton

Today's Date: 10 March 2022

Objective of the study:

Social cohesion is essential for the effective functioning and wellbeing of society (Chan, To, & Chan, 2006; Fonseca, Lukosch, & Brazier, 2019). In lay terms, social cohesion can be described as members of a society feeling and acting in solidarity, or 'sticking together' to achieve a mutually beneficial goal. More formally, scholars have defined social cohesion as a product of the horizontal (among fellow citizens) and vertical (with government or other institutions) relationships between members of a society, which can be assessed through people's attitudes and behaviours that reflect those relationships. The concepts of sense of belonging, trust in fellow citizens, willingness to co-operate and help others, social participation, inclusion and recognition of diverse members, trust in public figures, trust and confidence in institutions, and political participation all reflect social cohesion (Chan et al., 2006; Spoonley, Peace, Butcher, & O'Neill, 2005).

Given the importance of social cohesion for a well-functioning and adaptable society, governance institutions around the world have made it a key policy goal, and aim to foster conditions that help to maintain and promote it (e.g., New Zealand Treasury, 2021; OECD, 2011a). To properly inform such work, it is important to empirically test the factors that might promote or inhibit social cohesion (Chan et al., 2006; Gluckman et al., 2021).

To date, research examining the factors that might influence social cohesion has focused predominantly on the cross-sectional associations between current socio-political conditions (e.g., environmental conditions, inequality, crime, economic insecurity, immigration) and adults' endorsement of socially cohesive attitudes and/or engagement in socially cohesive behaviours (e.g., Laurence, 2009; OECD, 2011b; Vergolini, 2011). However, proximal socio-political conditions may not fully account for variations in social cohesion. As we know from the Dunedin Study body of work, people's experiences and attributes in early life are important predictors of health and psychosocial outcomes in adulthood. It is therefore likely that early life factors also influence the perceptions, values, and behaviours that comprise socially cohesive attitudes and behaviour. Indeed, recent Dunedin Study research has identified several developmental antecedents of a specific socially cohesive behaviour in adulthood: COVID-19 vaccine acceptance (Moffitt et al., 2022, under review).

The purpose of the proposed study is to begin to explore the developmental origins of social cohesion, as indicated by people's socially cohesive attitudes and behaviours in adulthood. Specifically, we will examine the prospective links between early life attributes and experiences and indicators in adulthood of the horizontal aspect of social cohesion (e.g., volunteering in the community, charitable donations, social participation, and willingness to help people in their community). Note that at this stage we do not have sufficient data available to examine the developmental origins of the vertical aspect of social cohesion, but plan to do so in future studies.

By beginning to identify developmental origins of socially cohesive attitudes and behaviour, the proposed study will extend existing knowledge about the factors that might influence social cohesion beyond the proximal correlates (e.g., current socio-political conditions) typically studied.

Data analysis methods:

We will use univariate and multiple regression methods to examine the relationships between early life attributes and experiences and socially cohesive attitudes and behaviours at age 45.

Variables needed at which ages:

Early life variables:

- Sex
- Childhood social isolation (from age 5 to 11)
- Childhood self-control (from age 3 to 11)
- Childhood SES (from birth to age 15)
- Childhood IQ (from ages 7 to 13)

- Childhood mental health (diagnoses from age 11 to 15)
- Prospective ACEs (derived across childhood)
- Parent & peer attachment (age 15)
- Strengths questionnaire (caring, helpful, co-operative; age 15)
- Antisocial behaviour (self-reported delinquency; age 15)
- Positive and negative emotionality from the Multidimensional personality questionnaire (age 26)
- Education (age 26)

Social cohesion (horizontal) indicators at age 45:

- Volunteering engagement
- Charitable donations
- Family support ('My family can count on me to help with chores/ childcare/ emergency')
- Helping out in the community ('I help out in my neighbourhood or community')

Significance of the Study (for theory, research methods or clinical practice):

To our knowledge, the developmental origins of social cohesion have not previously been identified empirically. By beginning to do so, we aim to make a unique contribution to the existing literature, complement existing work focusing on identifying the proximal influences on social cohesion, and provide insight into policy settings that can be implemented early in the life course to help foster the development of healthy, reliable, resilient, communities that are best able to cope with rapid and unpredictable societal change.

The proposed study will also contribute to the development of the Dunedin Study itself by leading to the inclusion at phase 52 of questions tapping a wider range of horizontal indicators of social cohesion, and the addition of new questions that provide insight into the vertical component, such as trust in government and other institutions. By comprehensively measuring Study members' socially cohesive attitudes and behaviours over time, we will be able to provide new insight into factors across the life course that are likely to be important for promoting social cohesion.

References:

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DATA SECURITY AGREEMENT

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Please keep one copy for your records and return one to the PI Sponsor

Please initial your agreement: (customize as necessary)

Y	I am current on Human Subjects Training [CITI www.citiprogram.org] or equivalent.
Y	My project is covered by the Dunedin Study's ethics approval OR I have /will obtain ethical approval from my home institution (please specify).
Y	I will treat all data as "restricted" and store in a secure fashion. My computer or laptop is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encrypted (recommended programs are FileVault2 for Macs, and Bitlocker for Windows machines) • password-protected • configured to lock-out after 15 minutes of inactivity AND • has an antivirus client installed as well as being patched regularly.
Y	I will not "sync" the data to a mobile device.
Y	In the event that my laptop with data on it is lost, stolen or hacked, I will immediately contact my PI Sponsor or Study Director, Richie Poulton (richie.poulton@otago.ac.nz).
Y	I will not share the data with anyone, including my students or other collaborators not specifically listed on this concept paper.
Y	I will not post data online or submit the data file to a journal for them to post. <i>Some journals are now requesting the data file as part of the manuscript submission process. The Dunedin Study Members have not given informed consent for unrestricted open access, so we have a managed-access process. Speak to your PI Sponsor or Richie Poulton for strategies for achieving compliance with data-sharing policies of journals.</i>
Y	I will delete all data files from my computer after the project is complete. Collaborators and trainees may not take a data file away from the office. The data remains the property of the Study and cannot be used for further analyses without an approved concept paper for new analyses.

Signature: Hayley Guiney