



University of
Zurich^{UZH}



JACOBS
CENTER

Annual Report

Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development

2025

www.jacobscenter.uzh.ch



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“L’avenir, on ne le prévoit pas, on le prépare.”



Moritz Daum

Prof. Dr.

Director of the JCPYD

Professor of Developmental Psychology Department
of Psychology, UZH

“The future is not something to be predicted, it is something to be achieved,” wrote Antoine de Saint-Exupéry in his book “Terre des Hommes.” In our work at the Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development (JCPYD), we take this idea to heart: The future of children and young people is not simply predicted; it is actively shaped by research and dialogue.

In May 2025, the JCPYD published its revised Mission Statement. It is rooted in our core vision that “every child deserves the chance to thrive.” This vision also guides the work presented in this report. From peer relations to substance use, from longitudinal insights to real-world applications, our research embodies our commitment to turning evidence from frontier research into knowledge accessible to a broad audience.

Our research, involving a team of over 60 members, investigates what helps children and young people thrive. Rather than gathering isolated viewpoints, we integrate individual, social, and institutional perspectives. Our research examines the protective and risk factors influencing children and young people’s development, including individual differences, social connections, and parenting and education from multiple perspectives. By combining longitudinal data, interdisciplinary collaboration, and real-world translation, we uncover insights that are both scientifically rigorous and socially meaningful.

The 2025 Annual Report highlights the JCPYD’s diverse research activities. It focuses on two main themes: peer relations, which influence social and emotional development, and substance use, a significant public health issue. A third section emphasizes our methodological foundation: the essential role of longitudinal studies in understanding developmental trajectories over time.

The JCPYD is more than just a research center: It builds bridges between disciplines to understand development holistically, between generations to track how early experiences shape lifelong trajectories, and between science and society to ensure that our work doesn’t merely sit in journals but informs real-world change. In 2025, the Swiss EdLab began translating scientific evidence into practice. We also make complex research accessible through traditional media, social media, and public engagement initiatives. We turn data into dialogue and insights into opportunities. By bridging the gap between science and society, we transform evidence into action: empowering families, communities, and policymakers to create environments in which every child can thrive.

Greetings from the steering committee



Elisabeth Stark

Prof. Dr.
Vice President of Research at UZH
and Vice President of the Jacobs
Center Steering Committee

Scientists are, in a sense, addicted to new discoveries. Contrary to many serious addictions that are harmful to health, this one is not tied to a specific substance and carries few risks. The Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development is studying addictive behavior among young people and has reached an encouraging conclusion: Substance use has declined in recent years. However, drug use is constantly evolving, and the risk remains high. This makes it all the more encouraging that our scientists are keeping a close eye on current developments, such as those in social media.

As Vice President Research at the University of Zurich, I am delighted that we are able to conduct our youth research at the highest empirical level thanks to our collaboration with the Jacobs Foundation. A shining example is our longitudinal studies, which not only observe participants at specific points in time but also track their development over an extended period.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Jacobs Foundation for its unwavering support of our research. This long-standing collaboration is a great gift to our university. I look forward to seeing our quest for insights continue to yield new knowledge that will benefit society in the future.



Gelgia Fetz Fernandes

Global Lead Learning and Evidence,
Jacobs Foundation, and President
of the Jacobs Center Steering
Committee

An article in this report, “Beyond Snapshots: Understanding Development Over Time,” showcases a selection of the many activities at the Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development. I am highlighting this contribution because it reflects two elements that are of central importance to the Jacobs Foundation. First, research aimed at understanding how children develop and learn does not take place in isolation; it is driven by collaboration across disciplines and perspectives. This is illustrated in “Beyond Snapshots.” Moritz Daum, Nora Raschle, Michael Shanahan, and Doris Hanappi share insights from longitudinal research spanning psychology, neuroscience, sociology, and education policy.

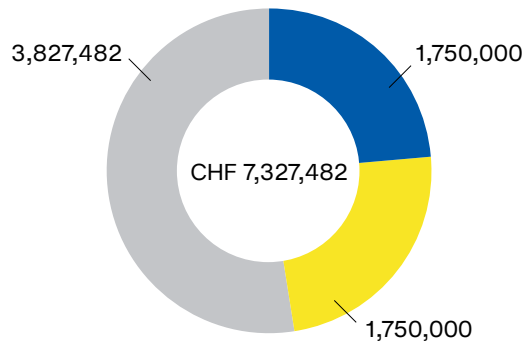
Second, research that seeks to understand how children reach their full potential – the guiding question of the Center’s work – extends beyond the analysis of group averages, isolated snapshots in time, or single environments. Instead, it advances scientific frontiers by examining how children differ and change over time, how they learn within diverse groups, and how development unfolds across contexts.

The Jacobs Foundation is proud to support the Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development in strengthening a vibrant, multidisciplinary research community dedicated to improving children’s learning and development. Through this work, the Center contributes to generating the knowledge needed to enable educators and policymakers to better serve an increasingly diverse population of learners.

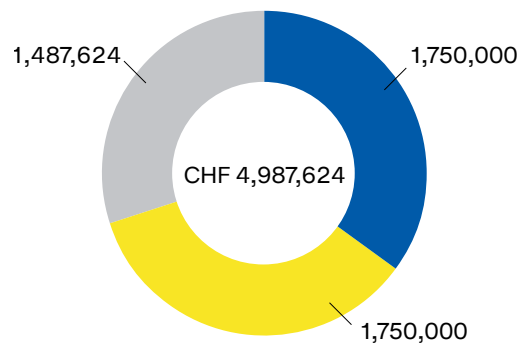
Key figures

The Jacobs Center is a joint venture between the University of Zurich and the Jacobs Foundation (JF). Total funding: CHF 70 million over 20 years, shared equally by UZH and JF. UZH and JF each contribute CHF 1.75 million annually. In 2025, the Jacobs Center acquired new third-party funding totaling CHF 3.8 million (ring diagram, 2025 compared to 2024).

Finances 2025 (in CHF)



Finances 2024 (in CHF)

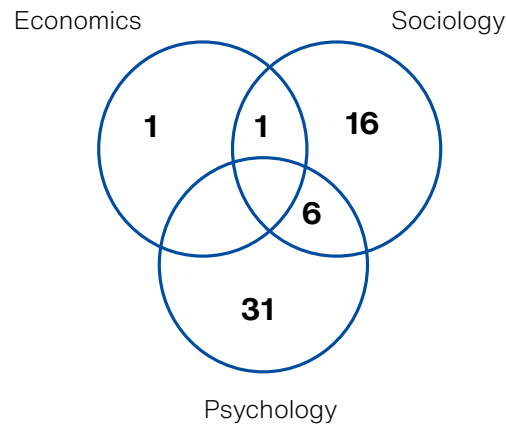


- University of Zurich
- Jacobs Foundation
- Third-party funds

Publications

55 scientific publications

7 including interdisciplinary publications



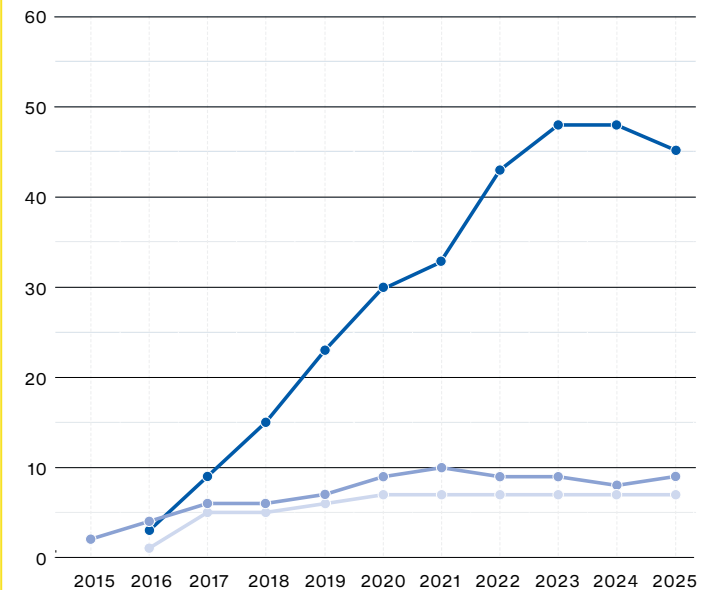
The Jacobs Center

60 highly motivated employees

45 academic staff
8 professors
7 administrative staff

We also work internationally and across disciplines with numerous professorships from different institutions.

Personnel development



- Academic staff
- Professors
- Administrative staff

The Jacobs Center team

State as of 1 September 2025



01 Esmee Aalders	31 Sofie Künzle
02 Margit Averdijk	32 Lukas Lehmann
03 Ivan Barón	33 Miriam Löffler
04 Marco Bleiker	34 Michelle Loher
05 Ralf Blöchlinger	35 Zoe Looser
06 Ana Bràs Monteiro	36 Norine Moser
07 Tabea Braun	37 Yvonne Oberholzer
08 Marlis Buchmann	38 Flavia Pfister
09 David Bürgin	39 Benjamin Poilane
10 Lea Buzzi	40 Thomas Poppenwimmer
11 Ana Costa-Ramón	41 Nora Raschle
12 Agnese D'Angelo	42 Denis Ribeaud
13 Moritz Daum	43 Joana Rutkowska
14 Plamina Dimanova	44 Dennis Saikkonen
15 Raffaella Dimastrochicco	45 Valerie Sailly
16 Marta Dobrijevic	46 Sebastian Sauppe
17 Lukas Eggenberger	47 Sofia Scatolin
18 Manuel Eisner	48 Maria Schönholzer
19 Larissa Erchinger	49 Lilly Shanahan
20 Elena Federici	50 Michael Shanahan
21 Medea Fitzlaff	51 Maeike Slikkerveer
22 Ines Florin	52 Michaela Slotwinski
23 Anna Göldlin von Tiefenau	53 Emiliano Stolz
24 Mirjam Habegger	54 Sandro Stutz
25 Xenia Häfeli	55 Albert Thieme
26 Doris Hanappi	56 Carmen Villa
27 Hira Imeri	57 Valentina Vylobkova
28 Sara Kadesch	58 Lisa Wagner
29 Stefan Kappeler	59 Stephanie Wermelinger
30 Stephanie Kernich	60 Ulf Zöltz

Peer effects on children: What does evidence really show?

Parents often worry about their children's peer environments, especially when classmates have a reputation for poor academic performance or problematic behavior. But how much do these influences truly shape long-term outcomes such as education, career trajectories, or economic well-being? These questions are at the center of a discussion led by Jacobs Center researchers Prof. Manuel Eisner, Prof. Ana Costa-Ramón, and Prof. Ulf Zöllitz.



When asked whether parents' concerns about "wrong friends" are simply prejudice, Ana Costa-Ramón, Assistant Professor of Economics of Child and Youth Development at the Jacobs Center, notes that research consistently shows that disruptive peers can shape children's long-term outcomes. She explains that even the indirect effects of disruption, such as contact with classmates exposed to domestic violence, leave measurable marks on later behavior and earnings. While the exact size of these effects is difficult to isolate, she stresses that "the pattern is clear – peer environments matter in the long run."

Ulf Zöllitz, Associate Professor of Economics of Child and Youth Development at the Jacobs Center, adds that adolescence is a phase of heightened social sensitivity.

Young people, he explains, are exceptionally tuned into their peers, which is why peer characteristics influence not only academic outcomes but also personality development. He explains that peers play a significant role in shaping long-term outcomes such as educational achievement, college attendance, major choice, and even future earnings. But Zöllitz stresses that what truly matters is not only the absolute quality of one's peers but also the adolescent's relative position within the group. These "rank effects," he argues, help explain why peer influence can pull young people in different directions. An average student placed among weaker peers often gains confidence and performs better, whereas the same student surrounded by high achievers may feel discouraged and reduce effort.

In discussing the effects of delinquent peers specifically, Manuel Eisner, Wolfson Professor of Criminology at the University of Cambridge and founder of the long-running z-proso study at the Jacobs Center, explains that the long-standing question of whether adolescents simply seek out delinquent peers or are actively influenced by them now has a clear empirical answer: “There is a genuine causal effect.” Delinquent peers can do more than reflect a young person’s existing tendencies; they can amplify problematic behavior. Research on youth gangs shows that joining such groups increases both the likelihood of offending and the severity of the offenses. Eisner adds



that some adolescents are more easily influenced than others: Those who care deeply about peer admiration are more strongly affected, whereas more inwardly-oriented teens tend to resist group pressure. He also notes that the impact of peers shifts with age. Certain stages of adolescence make young people especially open to what their peers are doing. Evidence shows that moving disadvantaged children to better neighborhoods can help when they are young, but doing so during adolescence may backfire, particularly if the new environment makes them feel that they are at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Peer competition and social comparison

Competition is another important dimension of peer influence during adolescence. According to Manuel Eisner, competition often extends beyond school performance into less healthy areas, including risk-taking behaviors. However, he notes that competition does not replace cooperation; the two often exist side by side as part of everyday peer interactions.

Competition does not affect all adolescents in the same way. As Costa observes, competitive settings often place greater demands on girls, a pattern that cannot be fully explained by differences between single-sex and mixed-sex schools alone. Zölitiz agrees that girls may feel competitive pressure more intensely, while pointing out that moments of heightened stress, such as school transitions, are usually short-lived and not something to avoid entirely: “The solution is not to avoid all stressful situations.” Appearance-based comparison stands out as

especially sensitive. Drawing on z-proso findings, Eisner describes physical attractiveness as a very competitive field for adolescents, closely tied to poorer mental health among those who see themselves as less attractive. He also points out that school structures strongly influence adolescents’ social circles. In tracked systems, “the environment selects for you who you can associate with,” and z-proso data show that gaps in interpersonal trust widen between ages 15 and 24, especially for those coming from more disadvantaged school settings.

Growing up between peers and parents

Peer support holds a distinct place in adolescents’ lives, offering what Ulf Zölitiz describes as a “horizontal orientation” that shapes everyday norms around behavior, risk-taking, and engagement at school, while families provide a more stable and unconditional safety net in the background. Ana Costa emphasizes that it remains difficult to say whether peers or parents matter more overall, as the evidence is far from conclusive. Addressing this complexity, Manuel Eisner notes that long-term z-proso findings consistently highlight the importance of parental involvement, especially meaningful time spent together, over specific parenting techniques or reward and punishment strategies. However, Costa and Zölitiz point out that expectations for parental involvement have risen sharply in recent decades, raising questions about the “marginal value” of additional parental time and the risks of very intensive or “helicopter” parenting, which can limit adolescents’ independence. Eisner suggests thinking of the family as a stable, long-term scaffold that provides continuity and

support; peers play a more dynamic and increasingly influential role as children move through adolescence. As teens become more independent, friends often start to play a bigger role in their lives. Manuel Eisner and Ulf Zölitz both emphasize that supportive peer relationships can make a real difference during this period. Eisner identifies having trusted friends in adolescence as “hugely important,” pointing out that this is a key stage for developing identity, independence, and social networks. Zölitz agrees, noting that peers can act as an informal source of support when young people face stress at home, even if this role is not always easy to measure. Supportive friends who listen and show understanding can help adolescents cope with challenges such as illness in the family, financial strain, or conflict at home. Evidence from z-proso helps explain why these connections matter: When young adults reflect on their hopes for the future, they most often mention close social relationships rather than career or income. This suggests that peer connections are key social and emotional resources that may help protect well-being during times of stress. Supporting this interpretation, z-proso evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic shows that young people with stronger social connections coped better with lockdowns.

When peer influence turns risky

Peer groups play an important role in shaping bullying, risk-taking, and other delinquent behaviors, so a key question is how the group dynamics operate. Manuel Eisner notes that the influence of delinquent peers is well established, pointing to mechanisms such as imitation, peer-based reinforcement of what is considered cool, status competition within problematic groups, and simple exposure to situations in which misconduct becomes more likely.

Ana Costa is involved in work on the long-term impacts of the randomized KiVa anti-bullying intervention in Finnish schools. Linking trial data for around 15,000 pupils in grades 7–9 to administrative records in adulthood, the study shows that treated students are more likely to enroll in an academic high school, obtain a university degree, and earn higher wages by ages 27–29, regardless of gender or social role at baseline. The findings point to reduced classroom bullying, particularly among boys, as the main mechanism. Lower levels of criminal behavior among boys in adulthood suggest effects that extend beyond the intervention period.

Ulf Zölitz observes that the idea of deliberately engineering peer groups to reduce bullying is appealing, but currently difficult to achieve in practice. Eisner emphasizes that peer dynamics are also shaped by broader social and economic contexts; alternative pathways to status can make delinquent groups appealing. He further notes the importance of adults beyond the family: Evidence from z-proso shows that feeling supported by a teacher can have long-lasting

positive effects on behavior, confidence, and educational skills. Both Zölitz and Eisner stress that affective responses depend on the quality of support available in schools rather than class composition alone.

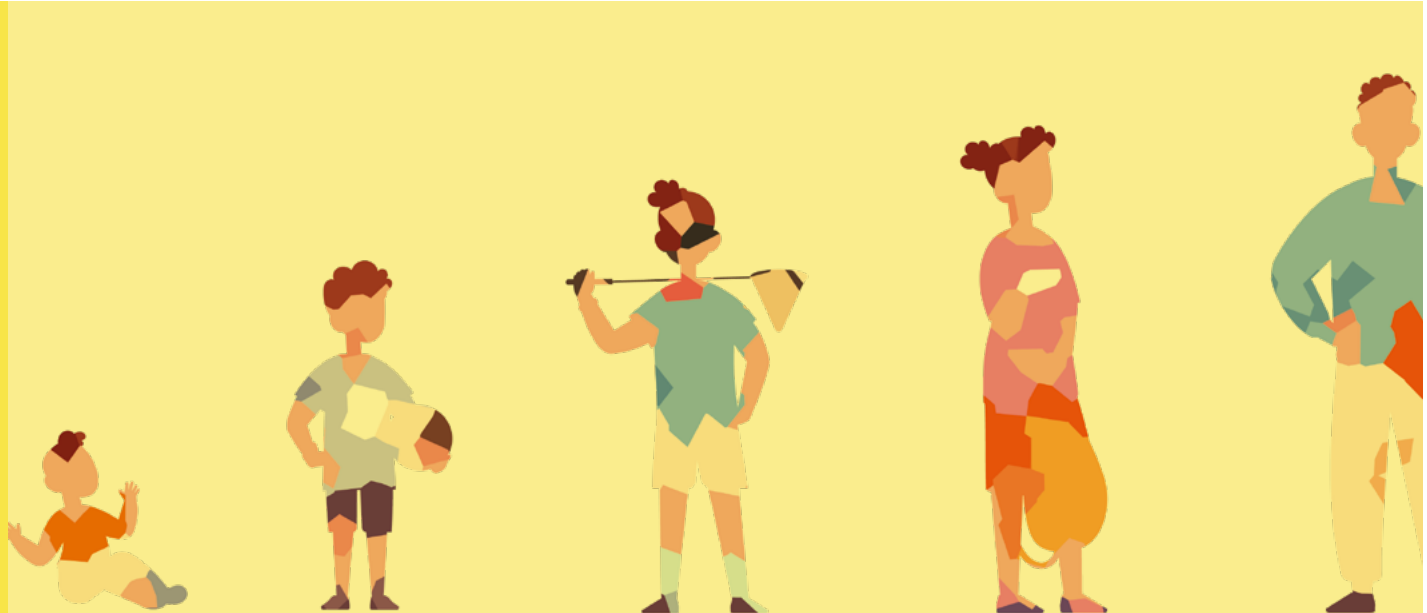
Peers in social context

The discussion of peer influence benefits from broader perspectives. Ulf Zölitz points to developmental psychology as especially useful for understanding how peer relationships shape behavior and to neuroscience for insights into why social approval and comparison become so powerful in adolescence. Manuel Eisner stresses that peer influence must be seen within wider social and historical contexts; it is shaped by political, technological, and cultural changes that affect how families, schools, and peers interact across generations. Ana Costa notes that this makes peer research an inherently cross-cutting field that already draws productively on multiple disciplines.

Taken together, the discussion underscores that peer influence is an important but flexible force in young people’s lives. Peer relationships can introduce risks, but they can also provide support, motivation, and a sense of belonging. What peers ultimately mean for young people depends on the environments they grow up in and how families, schools, and communities shape the spaces in which those relationships develop.

Beyond snapshots: Understanding development over time

Why do some early life experiences seem to shape people for decades, while others appear to fade over time? Why does the same life event have a major impact on one child but little effect on another? In order to understand which factors have a profound influence on development, researchers from different disciplines follow the same individuals over many years. Moritz Daum, Nora Raschle, Michael Shanahan, and Doris Hanappi share insights from longitudinal research across psychology, neuroscience, sociology, and education policy.



Why snapshots are not enough

Understanding development requires looking beyond single moments in time. Many studies compare children of different ages at a single point: an approach known as “cross-sectional research.” While this can often reveal differences between age groups, it provides only a limited picture of *how* individual development takes place.

Moritz Daum is a Professor of Developmental Psychology and the Director of the Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development. He illustrates the shortcomings of this approach by quoting Developmental Psychologist Karen Adolph: “Cross-sectional studies leave researchers with a gallery of before-and-after snapshots, studio portraits of newborns, and fossilized milestones, but

little understanding of the process of development itself.” To move beyond these snapshots, researchers rely on longitudinal studies that follow the same individuals over many years. Through repeated observations of the same people, they trace developmental trajectories and detect how early experiences can impact the later life of individuals. As Nora Raschle, Professor of Developmental Neuroscience, states, “If you study development, you have to study change over time.”

Michael Shanahan, Professor of Sociology, adds another important dimension. Understanding development requires looking not only at changes within individuals. “It’s not just people who are developing,” he explains, “they are developing in a possibly changing environment.”

Historical events, as well as changes within social institutions, can influence these developmental pathways, he notes. “The way schools are structured and the different ages at which transitions occur are all very important.”

Small influences, long-term effects

Development is often associated with major life events such as parental divorce, moving to a new city, or serious illness. Longitudinal studies reveal that development is shaped not only by these dramatic life events but also by smaller influences that accumulate over time.

Even though major events can have a significant impact on children, their effects tend to be overestimated.

Shanahan questions the idea that major life events determine developmental outcomes. “The extreme impact of major events is a bit of a myth,” he explains. “It’s what people are bringing to these situations.” People differ in how they respond to difficult experiences. As Shanahan notes, “some people are just better positioned to handle events – for example, those who have a higher cognitive capacity or self-control, or are better educated and wealthier.” Hanappi, who

leads the Swiss EdLab at the Jacobs Center, illustrates this with the example of parental divorce. “Some children cope more easily with their parents’ divorce,” she explains. Others, however, may struggle more. These differences among children often depend on previous events and conditions. “If they have experienced chronic stress within their parental relationship, for example,” she observes, “it becomes more difficult for them to cope later on.”

Another aspect of development that is often overlooked concerns transitions that fail to occur. “Sometimes the most important transitions are the ones that don’t happen,” Hanappi explains. In life course research, these so-called “non-transitions” can shape developmental trajectories just as strongly as major life transitions. “Examples include never entering high school, never entering the labor market, or never forming a partnership,” she says. Such developments are difficult to measure because they often remain invisible for a long time. With longitudinal data, however, researchers have what Hanappi describes as “the privilege of waiting.” By following individuals over extended periods, they can observe whether such transitions eventually occur. In some cases, what initially appears to be a non-transition may turn out to be one that happens with a delay. Additionally, the indirect impact of non-transitions on other areas in life only becomes visible much later. Daum refers to what researchers sometimes call “sleepier effects,” situations in which early experiences appear to have little immediate impact but influence development years later.



Longitudinal studies can also reveal patterns that are invisible in shorter studies. Daum points to one of his current research projects on children born slightly preterm as an example. Although premature birth is often associated with developmental risks, long-term observations show surprisingly small differences in communicative development later in life. One possible explanation, he suggests, is that children born slightly earlier are also exposed earlier to communicative input from their environment – from parents, siblings, and their environment. This earlier exposure may partly compensate for initial disadvantages.

Studying a changing world

Longitudinal studies are particularly important when new social phenomena emerge. Digital technologies, for example, raise many questions about how media use might shape development across the lifespan. Yet answering these questions in real time is not always easy. As Raschle explains, researchers often face a simple limitation: The necessary data may not yet exist. “If we say that longitudinal research takes a lifespan, and we want to understand the impact of media across that lifespan,” she notes, “we simply haven’t studied it yet.” Many digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence, are relatively new, making long-term observations essential for understanding their potential influence on development.

Despite the scientific value of longitudinal studies, conducting them is often difficult in practice. Following individuals over many years requires sustained cooperation from participants, institutions, and families. One major challenge is that participants do not remain in studies forever. Raschle points out that dropout is rarely random. “Nothing happens at random,” she explains. Over time, certain groups are more likely to leave studies than others, which can make it harder to interpret the results. Longitudinal studies therefore face obstacles. Besides the risk that participants may drop out over time, access to research fields can be restricted by institutional gatekeepers, particularly in educational settings in which researchers depend on the cooperation of schools and administrators.



At the Jacobs Center, researchers address these challenges in several ways. Dropouts, for example, are not treated simply as missing data but as potentially informative, because understanding which groups leave studies and why can offer important insights into social inequalities and developmental trajectories. Researchers at the Jacobs Center also build close collaborations with schools, institutions, and participating families to create the trust necessary for conducting long-term longitudinal research.

At the Jacobs Center, this work is reflected in several ongoing longitudinal projects, including **z-proso** www.jacobscenter.uzh.ch/de/research/zproso, **COCON** www.jacobscenter.uzh.ch/de/research/cocon, **LEAPS** www.leaps-zh.ch, **SMILIES** www.psychologie.uzh.ch/de/bereiche/dev/devkj/studies/smilies, **Pebbles** www.pebbles-app.ch, and **CHOICES** choices-project.org, all aimed at achieving a better understanding of developmental processes across childhood and adolescence.

Reference

Adolph, K. E., Robinson, S. R., Young, J. W., & Gill-Alvarez, F. (2008). What is the shape of developmental change? *Psychological Review*, 115(3), 527–543. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.115.3.527>

Youth substance use: Current trends and prevention paths

The use of alcohol and nicotine products and the non-medical use of prescription medications and other psychoactive substances have concerned scientists for decades because of their well-documented negative effects on development, especially when initiated in adolescence. Jacobs Center researchers Prof. Lilly Shanahan, Assistant Prof. Carmen Villa, and PhD candidate Michelle Loher discuss emerging youth substance use trends and how to stay ahead of an increasingly dynamic substance marketplace.



Shifting landscapes: What the data show

Adolescent substance use has never been static; it evolves with culture, policy, and the environments in which young people grow up. Prof. Lilly Shanahan, Associate Professor of Clinical Developmental Psychology at the JCPYD, emphasizes that the frequency of substance use among today's youth depends on the country, the substance, and the age group evaluated. Regular monitoring is therefore important. For example, the Zurich Youth Survey, led by Dr. Denis Ribeaud, reveals that the use of some substances, such as cigarettes and alcohol, has decreased somewhat since the late 1990s. Yet even as some risks recede, others emerge. Vaping, non-medical use of prescription stimulants, and polysubstance consumption have grown more prevalent

among young people. Shanahan and her collaborator Prof. Boris Quednow, together with a team from the UZH Institute of Forensic Medicine, have explored these trends further. In the context of the Zurich Project on Social Development from Childhood to Adulthood (z-proso), she and her collaborators employ non-invasive hair analysis. The technique captures objective biomarkers of substance exposure, offering a window into patterns that surveys dependent on self-report can miss.

Prof. Carmen Villa is an economist whose research examines how public policies (from housing to education to alcohol regulation) shape youth trajectories. In a recent paper, she examined the effects of increasing the minimum legal drinking age from 16 to 18, a policy adopted

across many European countries, although not in all cantons of Switzerland. She found that stricter alcohol regulation improved academic performance and mental health. Prof. Villa agrees with Prof. Shanahan that there has been a steady decline in alcohol use over the last 20 years, but she highlights a shift toward highly addictive digital behaviors. As she puts it, “There is some substitution from social interactions around addictive substances to interactions on social media, which is by design very addictive.” She recommends that regulations treat social media as a substance going forward.

Michelle Loher adds that long-term and short-term patterns can look quite different: In the US, the pandemic led to a notable decline in youth initiation of nicotine, cannabis, and alcohol use, with levels not yet fully returning to pre-pandemic figures. As a doctoral researcher at the Jacobs Center’s Risk & Resilience Lab, she examines developmental aspects of substance use and mixed-substance use among adolescents and young adults.

Shanahan notes that substance use can follow fashions, and such trends are often amplified by social media platforms that glamorize vaping or other substance use while downplaying the risks. Social media has also transformed the drug market. Dealers can recruit young customers online and deliver products to their homes or a convenient meeting point, dramatically lowering the barrier to access. Data from z-proso and wastewater analyses from cities including Zurich and St. Gallen document a notable rise in cocaine use among Swiss young adults in recent years.

The scientists also touch on the ongoing cannabis legalization debates. Shanahan explains that since the first U.S. states began legalizing recreational cannabis use, the rates of use among adults have risen to historically high levels, “from about 28% to 43%.” In places where cannabis is legal, increases in psychosis and schizophrenia are emerging among vulnerable groups. Shanahan stresses that any legalization debate must grapple with youth protection. Many adolescents begin experimenting well before any legal age threshold, and brain development continues into the mid-twenties.

Why adolescents are especially vulnerable

Curiosity, peer dynamics, stress, boredom, family behavior, the broader social environment, and additional factors all shape the onset of substance use in adolescence. “The adolescent brain is curious, primed to try new things, and not consistently good at assessing risks or controlling impulses,” says Shanahan. She adds that family substance use sets early norms, and peer influence is especially strong in adolescence: Teens take more risks in the presence of peers than when alone. Some adolescents also turn to substances as a form of self-medication to cope with stress or untreated mental-health problems.

Villa emphasizes the importance of socialization and connectedness, explaining that “for adolescents, belonging is extremely important,” and linking social media use to mental-health concerns. Both she and Shanahan highlight the role of parenting; Villa notes that “more permissiveness often leads to more consumption,” based

on the scarce evidence available. Shanahan observes that today’s more intensive parental supervision styles may delay early experimentation, and that delay itself can be protective.

Long-term consequences and the challenge of prevention

Shanahan emphasizes that long-term consequences reflect not only the substances themselves but also the broader context: “It’s difficult for us to say what the actual effect of the substance is versus the whole package of risk factors that adolescent substance use often comes with.” Even so, the evidence from z-proso shows that frequent and chronic cannabis use, for example, is associated with lower educational attainment, poorer professional outcomes, higher rates of delinquency, reduced well-being, and a greater likelihood of later problematic substance use. These associations hold even when THC (the main psychoactive component of cannabis) is measured objectively in hair. Villa highlights serious short-term (i.e., acute) harms of substance use, such as accidents and victimization.

When discussing prevention, Shanahan comments that “we don’t have the golden bullet yet,” noting that broad regulations, such as reducing product accessibility, limiting the appeal of flavored nicotine products, and restricting marketing, tend to have larger population-level effects than individual behavioral interventions. She highlights that delaying the onset of use, avoiding regular or daily use, and educating youth about dangerous patterns of use may also be key for harm reduction.

Loher stresses the importance of understanding motives, that is, asking whether youth use “to self-medicate or simply to experiment.” Villa argues for combining regulation with supportive environments, noting that “spaces for people to connect, through sports or arts, can support mental health and lower substance use.” Shanahan agrees: Such environments can help adolescents sustain a sense of belonging without substances as the medium.

The case for interdisciplinary research

The Jacobs Center fosters collaboration across disciplines, and all three researchers agree that substance-use research benefits from such a shared approach. Villa notes that psychology uncovers motivations and mechanisms that economists rely on to interpret policy effects. Shanahan, in turn, values the methodological rigor that economics brings. Quasi-experimental designs, often leveraging natural policy changes, can deliver causal evidence about what actually works. Economic cost-benefit analyses of prevention programs also deliver important information for policymakers, she notes.

Together, the different approaches clarify the “why” and “how” of adolescent substance use. All three interviewees note that understanding substance use requires insights from multiple fields, including law, criminology, forensics, chemistry, medicine, neuroscience, public health, and sociology. z-proso already collaborates across most of these fields, which is one of the project’s defining strengths.

A field that never stands still

Reflecting on the most striking aspects of their work, all three researchers return to the same theme: constant change. As Loher notes, “It’s a complex field, and it’s constantly changing.” Shanahan puts it vividly: Substance use patterns evolve “a little bit like a virus – always mutating, always presenting new challenges for researchers trying to keep up.” Villa observes that illegal drugs are closely linked to crime, with costly and uneven societal impacts. She adds that criminality issues are “highly concentrated among a small group, disproportionately affect teenagers, and have lasting consequences,” which underscores how vulnerable they are and why early prevention is so important.

What unites these perspectives is a shared recognition that understanding adolescent substance use demands more than tracking which substances are trending at a given moment. It requires sustained attention to the social norms that shape behavior, the motivations that drive experimentation, the institutional environments that can amplify or buffer risk, and the policy levers that, used thoughtfully, can shift outcomes at a population level. The substance landscape will continue to evolve. The research agenda must evolve with it.



New externally funded research projects

SNSF project

Assigned by Algorithms? Using Machine-Learning to Optimize Peer Group Allocation

This research project proposes a novel approach to improving student learning outcomes by optimizing how students are assigned to peer groups using machine learning (ML) techniques.

Despite decades of work on peer effects in education, research has not provided guidance for how we should group students to improve outcomes. Scholars are also reluctant to make concrete suggestions on how grouping can be improved. This leaves school principals and policymakers without reliable strategies for improving student outcomes through optimized group assignments.

We seek to overcome these limitations by combining student data with advanced ML algorithms to predict how different peer groupings affect individual academic performance and then putting improved assignment algorithms into practice.

If successful, our research will deliver a method for improving student outcomes at a very low cost and pioneer the use of ML algorithms for real-world student allocation problems in education.

PI: Ulf Zölitz | CHF 468,482

Eidgenössischen Büro für die Gleichstellung von Frau und Mann (EBG), Stiftung Mercator Schweiz, Schweizerische Kriminalprävention (SKP) Männer im Wandel (Understanding Masculinity)

The nationwide population survey “Understanding Masculinity” examines contemporary views on masculinity. The research team is particularly interested in understanding how gender perceptions are linked to behavior and health. The study thus makes an important contribution to health promotion and violence prevention.

The study is being conducted under the direction of Dr. Denis Ribeaud at the Jacobs Center at the University of Zurich. It is part of the “Masculinity in Transition” project, which is being carried out in collaboration with the umbrella organization of Swiss men’s and fathers’ organizations (männer.ch). The project is co-funded by the Federal Office for Gender Equality (FOGE), the Mercator Foundation Switzerland, and Swiss Crime Prevention (SKPPSC). The survey is conducted on the survey platform of the Decision Science Laboratory (DeSciL) at ETH Zurich.

PI: Denis Ribeaud | CHF 125,000

Jacobs Foundation Swiss EdLab

In 2024, the Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development (JCPYD) at the University of Zurich launched the Swiss Evidence in Education Lab (Swiss EdLab) in partnership with the Jacobs Foundation. Swiss EdLab advances evidence-based education by connecting scientific research with policy and practice across Switzerland. Centered on child development, it brings together key players and uses scientific evidence to improve child development and education, addressing learning variability, learning environments, and institutional structures. Its workshops, roundtables, training courses, and evidence-based formats are designed for experts from research, policy, and the education community.

In collaboration with partners including [DEEP](#), [ProEdu](#), and [Staatslabor](#), Swiss EdLab strengthens evidence literacy through platforms, visualizations, and trainings; facilitates exchange between researchers and policymakers; and supports the practical application of evidence in education. Linked to the [EU LEARN Project](#), it connects Switzerland to a broader European evidence ecosystem.

PI: Moritz Daum, Doris Hanappi | CHF 3,204,000

School for Transdisciplinary Studies (STS), UZH Mentale Gesundheit gemeinsam stärken: Gesund in Studium und Job

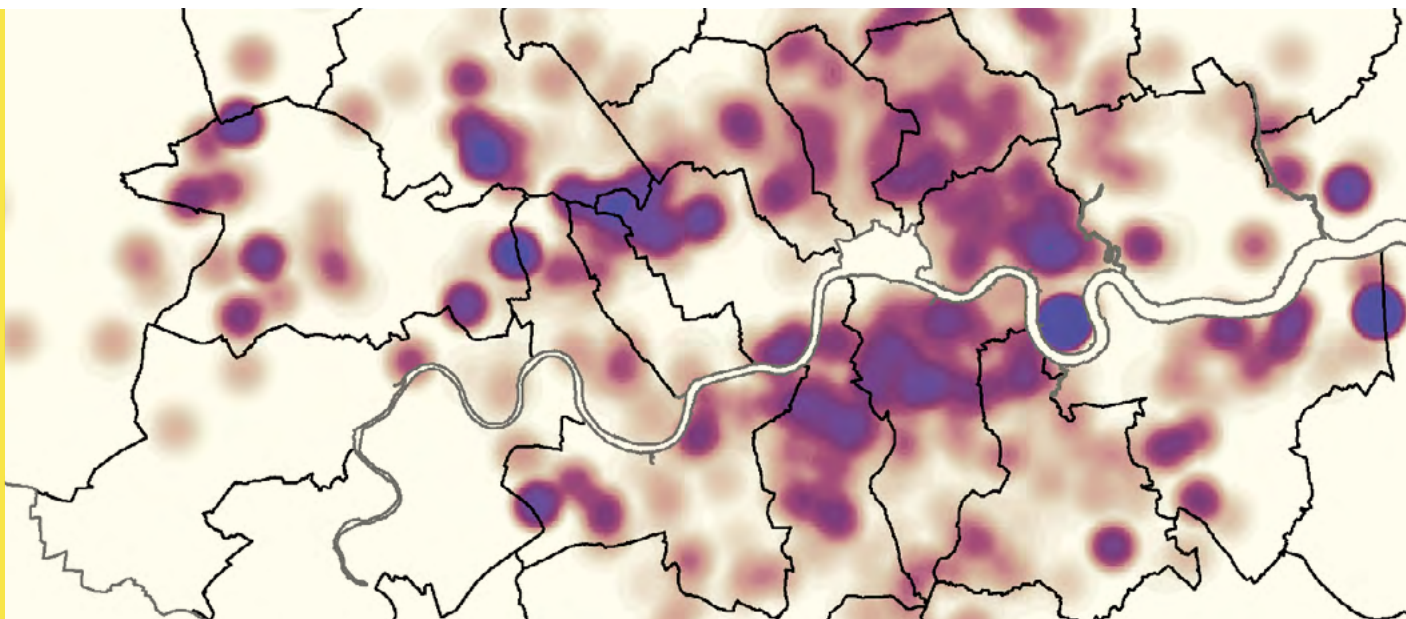
Students face many challenges during their studies and the transition to work. Since fall 2024, an interdisciplinary team from the Jacobs Center (Valentina Vylobkova, Lisa Wagner, Moritz Daum) and the Center for Salutogenesis (Anja Lehmann, Georg Bauer) has offered a semester-based interactive module, “Strengthening Mental Health Together: Long-Term Skill Acquisition for Studying and Working.” The module provides scientifically grounded knowledge and practical skills from psychology, medicine, theology, and sports science. Students learn to apply key mental-health strategies and strengthen personal resources in daily life, using a resource-oriented, positive health approach. For fall 2025/spring 2026, the module has again received funding from ULF UZH.

PI: Moritz Daum, Valentina Vylobkova | CHF 30,000

Welcoming Carmen Villa

We are excited to welcome Professor Carmen Villa as Assistant Professor in Economics of Child and Youth Development Age

Carmen Villa joined the Jacobs Center in September 2025 as Assistant Professor of the Economics of Child and Youth Development. Her research examines how public policies, from housing to education to alcohol regulation, shape youth trajectories.



Prof. Dr. Carmen Villa

Assistant Professor
of Economics of Child and
Youth Development

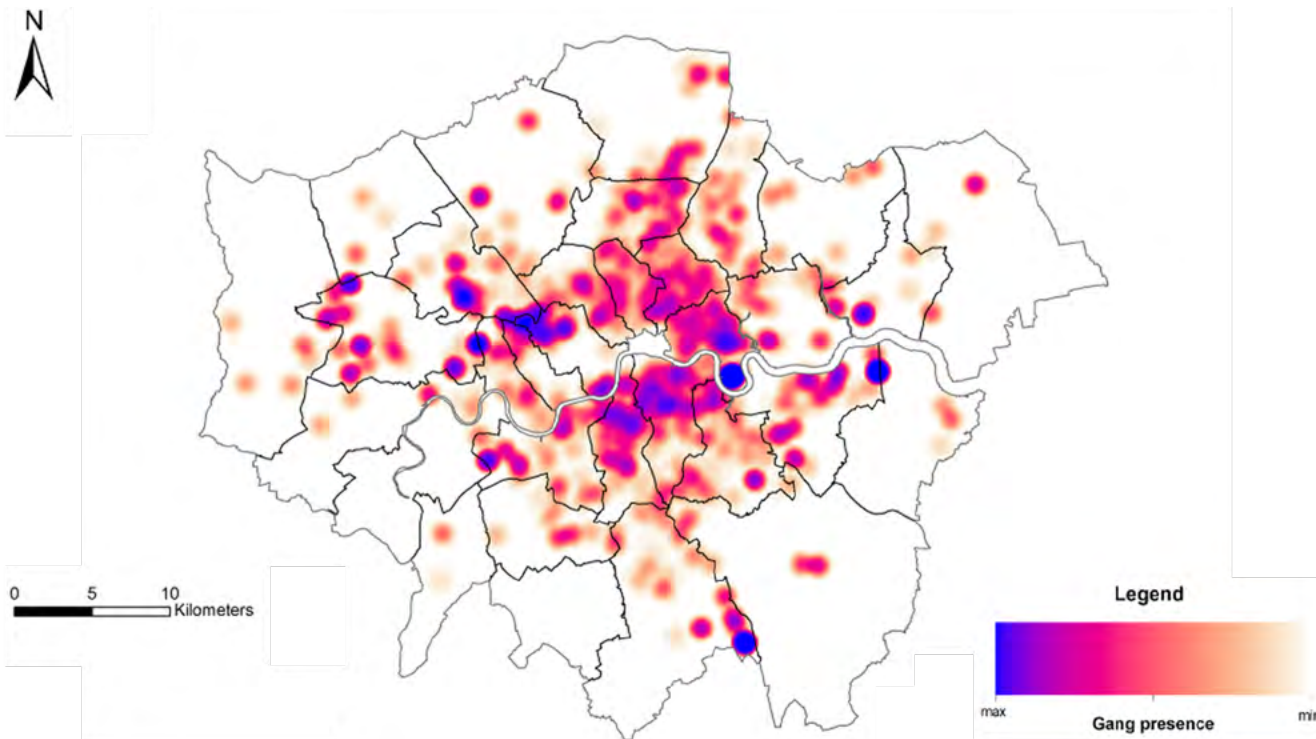
After completing her PhD at the University of Warwick, Villa arrived in Zurich drawn by the Jacobs Center's interdisciplinary mission. Villa's research tackles fundamental questions in policy evaluation: understanding not just whether policies work, but how they work and what unintended consequences they generate. Spanning topics related to education, crime, and risky behaviors, her work builds on insights from psychology, sociology, criminology, and neuroscience to provide policy-relevant answers to pressing questions about youth development.

Urban environments and youth outcomes

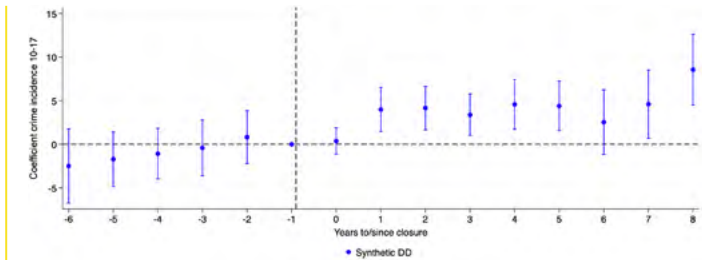
One of Villa's main research areas is how neighborhoods shape young people's lives, and what place-based urban policies can improve outcomes, particularly among the most disadvantaged. In a paper on gangs of London, she explores the link between public housing and local crime, examining how different attributes affect gang formation and territoriality. Does all public housing succeed in providing necessary social support, or can some initiatives foster negative interactions like crime? Answering this question is inherently difficult, as social housing is often built in areas that already have crime problems, making it difficult to separate the effects of housing from pre-existing neighborhood conditions.

To overcome this, Villa turned to an unusual historical experiment: the World War II Blitz bombing campaign. During 1940-41, German bombers caused widespread but highly uneven destruction across London. Because wartime technology lacked precision, whether a particular neighborhood was hit was effectively random at small geographic scales. After the war, heavily bombed areas received relaxed height restrictions from urban planners to facilitate rapid reconstruction, leading to the construction of high-rise council estates in these locations.

Areas with high-rise post-war council estates were far more likely to host gangs in later periods than areas with low-rise social housing or no social housing areas, with important implications for local communities. The bombings also predict higher incidence of youth crimes and knife crimes, even after controlling for other local area characteristics. The findings contribute to ongoing housing policy debates, providing evidence in favour of mixed-income developments and against concentrating low-income populations in high-rise structures – a pattern that has proven difficult to reverse.



Map of gang areas in London



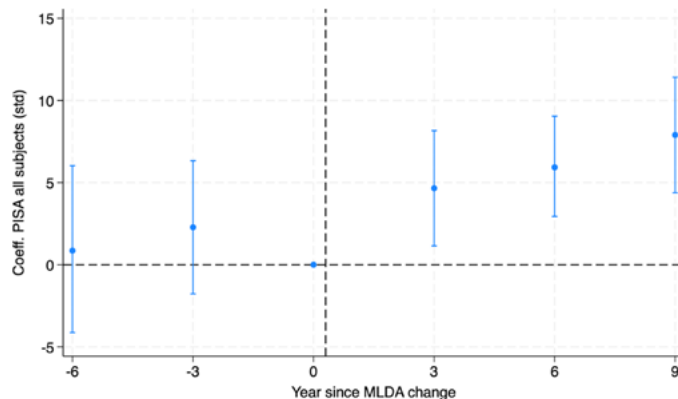
Effects of youth club closures on youth crime participation

Beyond social housing, place-based community initiatives can be key social support systems for youth. Using data from London, Villa provides the first causal estimates on the effects of youth clubs – public after-school services providing supervised activities, mentorship, and safe spaces, similar to Jugendtreffs in Switzerland – on youth outcomes. She studies this question by examining austerity-led youth club closures between 2010 and 2019.

The research compares young people who lost access to nearby youth clubs with similar individuals who retained access, using novel records from the London Metropolitan Police and administrative education data. After closures, teenagers performed worse in school and youth offending increased significantly. The cost-benefit analysis is stark: For every £1 saved in running costs of youth clubs, society bears costs of nearly £3 through reduced lifetime earnings and increased crime-related expenses. Renewed investment in these services could be particularly valuable in contexts of growing youth isolation and increased social media use.

From neighborhoods to regulation

Beyond neighborhood environments, public policies often attempt to curb risky behaviors among youth. In a recent paper, Villa has explored the effects of increasing the minimum legal drinking age from 16 to 18, a widespread initiative across many European countries, with the exception of Switzerland and other neighbouring nations. “Spain provides a particularly interesting setting to study, because different regions implemented drinking age changes at different times,” she notes. When it becomes more difficult to access alcohol, teenagers drink less, perform better in school, and have better mental health. The findings build on and complement existing neurological and medical evidence on brain development at young ages, demonstrating that restricting alcohol access during adolescence generates measurable improvements in youth outcomes. Importantly, this is an extremely low-cost policy to implement, requiring minimal public expenditure compared to the



Effects of youth club closures on youth crime participation

substantial returns in improved health and educational performance.

What works, and what doesn't

Just as important as identifying effective policies is understanding when interventions fall short of expectations. Her research on the Education Maintenance Allowance examined a conditional cash transfer program in England that provided weekly payments to 16-19 year-olds from low-income families who stayed in school. While the EMA did encourage some young people to continue their education, Villa's findings revealed that effects were more limited than policymakers had hoped, with modest long-term impacts on employment and earnings. The research highlighted that simply providing money isn't enough: The structure of educational options and the institutional support systems around young people matter enormously for determining whether financial incentives translate into lasting gains.

An interdisciplinary future

Villa's research agenda naturally crosses disciplinary boundaries. Understanding why youth clubs prevent crime requires insights from developmental psychology about adolescent social needs. Explaining gang formation in specific neighborhoods draws on sociological and criminology theories of territorial control and social interactions. Assessing alcohol policy effectiveness benefits from neuroscience evidence on brain development. At the Jacobs Center, she sees opportunities to deepen these connections and develop richer explanations for how and why policies work.

For Villa, the ultimate goal is research that genuinely informs policy and improves young people's lives. “Academic rigor and policy relevance aren't in tension – they're complementary,” she insists. “The better our causal identification, the more confidently we can say what policies will actually work. And the more grounded our research is in real policy questions, the more likely our work is to make a difference.”

She's optimistic about the potential for her work at the Jacobs Center to bridge the research-policy gap.

“Switzerland has excellent data infrastructure and strong relationships between researchers and policymakers,” she notes. “Combined with the Jacobs Center's interdisciplinary approach and commitment to youth development, there's real potential to do research that matters – both scientifically and for society.”

Peer mentoring project: R Group®



Organizing team

Dr. Christine Dworschak
Lukas Eggenberger
Dr. Clarissa Janousch
Michelle Loher

The R Group connects early-career researchers from different disciplines within the social sciences who share a common interest in complex, state-of-the-art data analysis using the open-source statistical program R. The R Group is a supportive community for methodologically interested empirical scientists at all levels who want to learn advanced analytical methods, expand their skills, and translate their application to future careers, both within academia and beyond. In 2025, the group had over 100 active members with backgrounds in Psychology, Sociology, Epidemiology, Education Science, and related social sciences. The group organized five events in 2025, with the final workshop scheduled for late December.

Overall, the R Group's 2025 program had a strong focus on hands-on workshops for complex data analysis. In the spring semester, we conducted two methods workshops, one on intensive longitudinal modeling with Fridtjof Petersen (University of Groningen) and one on

meta-analysis with Dr. Diego Campos (University of Oslo). Both workshops covered the theoretical foundations and assumptions underlying these types of analyses, as well as hands-on exercises and the opportunity to work with participants' own data.

We also continued our collaboration with our colleague Dr. Andrea Farnham from the PopStats group, which is part of the Population Research Center, and co-organized a workshop on interpretable machine learning with speakers Dr. Susanne Dandl (University of Zurich) and PD Dr. Rudolf Debelak (University of Zurich). Given that the workshop was advertised through both the R Group and the PRC's PopStats, people with diverse research backgrounds attended (e.g., Epidemiology, Biostatistics, Psychology), enabling interdisciplinary exchange. An inspiring newly established format in 2025 has been the transferable-skills workshops, which cover general skills and knowledge relevant to any kind of data analysis. Here, we are organizing a workshop on the future of large language models and agents in statistics by Ahmet Uluslu for late December to shed light on how AI agents, such as ChatGPT, may be used for coding. The R Group is a wonderful opportunity to connect with leading experts in cutting-edge statistical analyses and, of course, with peers in the group. There is significant value in connecting researchers with an interest in similar methods across disciplines and substantive research questions. We hope to continue this effort in the new year.

Peer mentoring group: Brainfood



Organizing team

Dr. Plamina Dimanova
Dr. Sarah Di Pietro
Herman Galioulline
Dr. Nina Raduner
Carmen Providoli
Dennis Saikkonen

The Brainfood Peer Mentoring Group was initiated in 2023 and we are proud to have continued its mission to connect early career researchers in Zurich interested in human neuroimaging again this year. We are very thankful for the continued support from Jacobs Center that has made it possible to sustain and grow this initiative. This platform has been valuable to many early career researchers, as it provides a space in which they can openly address their project, research, and career-related questions.

In 2025, we organized two workshops, two guest talks and four of the informal lunch meetings we call “Food for Thought” on soft skills for neuroimaging PhD students and postdocs. In total, 41 early career researchers joined the different sessions in 2025, contributing to a lively exchange of ideas, shared tips and strategies for beginning and advanced peers, and discussions of new methods or interesting findings.

In the engaging workshops and interesting talks, participants learned about the combination of EEG and DTI (Dr. Sendy Caraffa), multivariate EEG analyses (Dr. Nora Turoman), the basics of fNIRS (Anil Karabulut) and how one can investigate humor with EEG (Prof. Dr. Mirella Manfredi). These events on state-of-the-art methods were designed to expand the knowledge of the attendees, which is one of the peer mentoring group’s aims.

Through the “Food for Thought” lunch seminars, our peers had the opportunity to get to know each other and connect around topics such as AI in academia and writing and reviewing practices. The informal exchange and dialogue on such topics strengthens connections within the local neuroimaging early career researcher community, helps young scientists realize they are not alone in facing common challenges, and provides a platform for sharing solutions and personal experiences. The short input talks from experts in our “Food for Thought” events, which we introduced in 2025, also offered a platform for young researchers to pose their questions and engage directly with the experts. Taking the events of 2025 together, we are happy to call them a success and are proud to be part of such an enthusiastic group of young researchers.

Our new Mission Statement

(State as of 1 December 2025)



**JACOBS
CENTER**

1. Identity

The Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development (JCPYD) is a research center at the University of Zurich (UZH) dedicated to advancing scientific knowledge about child and youth development. It is co-funded by UZH and the Jacobs Foundation (JF).

2. Vision

“Every child deserves the chance to thrive”

The JCPYD advances knowledge about child and youth development as key stages within the human lifespan and applies the latest scientific insights to enhance children’s and youth’s lives and futures. Its research promotes the well-being of children and youth across individual, family, institutional, and societal levels, helping young people meaningfully shape their life paths and become socially engaged and active, contributing members of society.

3. Research

Thematic Focus

The JCPYD research spans the entire lifespan, from the prenatal stage to late adulthood, with a particular focus on early childhood through young adulthood. Our goal is to understand how children and youth can reach their full potential. We study the protective factors and risks that affect children's and youths' development from different perspectives, such as individual variation (e.g., how do individual traits and abilities influence development?), social bonds (e.g., how do relationships and interactions with caregivers support healthy development?), and education (e.g., how do schools and teaching approaches impact learning and well-being?).

Interdisciplinarity

The JCPYD is dedicated to conducting interdisciplinary, innovative, and collaborative research on how biological, psychological, social, and economic factors influence the development of children and youth. To encourage collaboration across disciplinary boundaries, it brings together researchers from the three main JCPYD disciplines: Sociology, Psychology, and Economics, while also working with affiliated researchers from other relevant areas such as (but not limited to) Education Science, Epidemiology, Gerontology, Immunology, Molecular Biology, Neuroscience, Pediatrics, Psychiatry, Demography, Statistics, and more. The JCPYD promotes open dialogue while respecting the unique commitments of each discipline.

Methodology

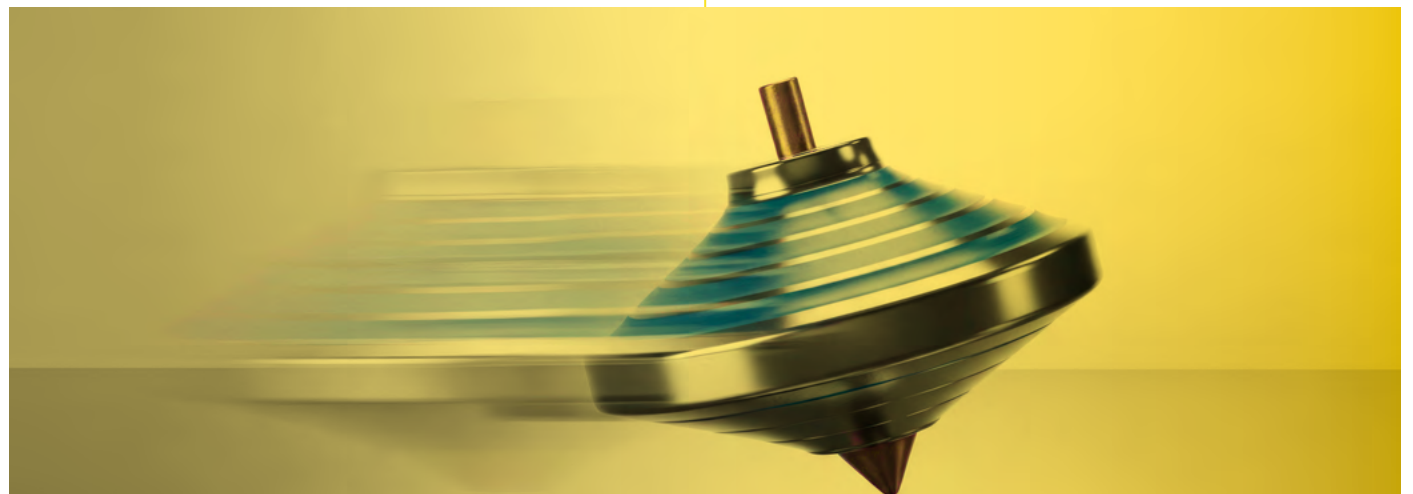
The JCPYD advances the application and development of cutting-edge research technology. It has developed a series of large-scale assessments and multimodal longitudinal studies to better understand sustainable and productive development. These studies will remain active over the coming years and will continue to expand with new research initiatives. To further utilize the wealth of this data, the JCPYD aims to lead in innovative methodologies for human development research. A key part of this vision is establishing a dedicated longitudinal data and methods infrastructure unit to develop new techniques and support researchers and students through workshops, analytical consultations, and collaborative problem-solving. Through these efforts, the JCPYD ensures sustainable methodological expertise, improving the quality of both planned and ongoing research.

Outreach and Translation

The JCPYD conducts research with practical relevance and policy impact. It transforms this research into meaningful solutions and initiatives such as

- 1 Translation and Communication:** Conveying scientific findings to policymakers and practitioners in clear, accessible language that tackles current policy issues.
- 2 Problem-Solution Alignment:** Identifying pressing societal challenges that JCPYD research groups can address by generating and synthesizing evidence.
- 3 Collaborative Innovation:** Developing and promoting policy-research partnerships that connect policymakers and scientists.

To realize this vision, the JCPYD envisions establishing a Policy Lab that connects its researchers with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in education, health, and mental health.



4. Core Values

Diversity / Gender Equality

The JCPYD is dedicated to promoting diversity and preventing discrimination. It opposes discrimination or exclusion of individuals or groups based on stereotypes. UZH has established Guidelines for Gender Equality, Diversity, and Protection against Sexual Harassment. The JCPYD adheres to UZH policies and uses all available means to remove barriers that could disadvantage employees, applicants, participants, or partners, with a focus on advancing women's careers. This includes creating a family-friendly work environment, protecting personal integrity, enhancing intercultural skills, and encouraging diverse career paths.

Support for Early Career Researchers

The JCPYD supports the development of researchers at every career stage through tailored, interdisciplinary opportunities. For B.Sc. and M.Sc. students, we offer hands-on research projects, specialized lectures, and internships across departments and disciplines, including partnerships with the Neuroscience Center Zürich (ZNZ) and the IMPRS LIFE. Ph.D. candidates benefit from rigorous doctoral programs, training in scientific integrity, reproducibility, and science communication, along with international workshops to expand their networks. Postdoctoral researchers have access to advanced career development (grant writing, mentoring) and interdisciplinary collaborations. At all levels, we

emphasize creativity, innovation, and methodological excellence. The JCPYD cultivates a dynamic environment where individual skills are nurtured within a supportive atmosphere, creating ideal conditions for cross-fertilization.

Transparency

The JCPYD fosters a culture of shared responsibility and self-management. It promotes the intellectual, professional, and personal development of its staff. Its governance is based on principles of participation, transparency, fairness, and balanced interests. Transparency guides our research from data collection to publication. We follow open science principles by publicly sharing methods, data, tools, and publications. By encouraging reproducibility and collaboration, we ensure that our work not only advances knowledge but also builds trust with the scientific community and society.

Sustainability

The UZH Mission Statement states that “sustainability in scholarship as well as in [...] operations [is] a core responsibility.” The UZH Sustainability Policy aims to codify this principle by establishing a clear goal for improving sustainability at UZH. UZH is dedicated to actively and systematically promoting sustainable development at all levels. UZH members contribute to this effort within the scope of their responsibilities. The JCPYD adheres to these principles and has developed a JCPYD Sustainability Concept.

5. Services

JCPYD researchers bring extensive knowledge and practical skills to address urgent questions for partners, including governments, public agencies, and foundations. The JCPYD uses these skills to empower these institutions by turning their questions into actionable solutions through evidence-based research. In doing so, we bridge the gap between data and real-world impact. The JCPYD applies this knowledge and these skills in advanced postgraduate education to empower professionals from various fields. Through partnerships with institutions such as UZH, we develop and contribute to programs (e.g., Master of Advanced Studies) that equip professionals from diverse backgrounds with the skills needed to address scientific and real-world challenges.

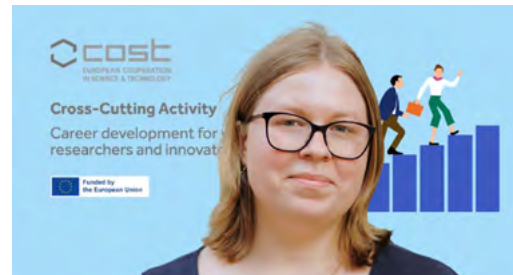


2025

Events, media, and news

January

Joanna Rutkowska is co-chairing the latest COST Association



European Cooperation in Science and Technology Cross-Cutting Activity on career development of young researchers. Launched in December 2024, this new Cross-Cutting Activity dives into the need to improve career development conditions to attract and retain the best researchers in Europe. It will run until December 2026.

A unique network, consisting of (young) researchers, career advisory experts, and key stakeholder organisations, will work together towards achieving a more balanced brain circulation and improved career development of young researchers. This CCA will be guided by the Council Recommendation on a European Framework to attract and retain research, innovation, and entrepreneurial talents in Europe (2023) and by the European Charter for Researchers (2023).

JC Research Day 2025



The third annual Research Day took place on Friday, January 24, bringing together PhD students, postdocs, and research assistants to present their work and showcase their research skills. This event fosters interdisciplinary exchange, encouraging collaboration and peer support within our scientific community. Once again, it was inspiring to learn more about the exciting research at the JC and the talented individuals driving it forward.

In the media

Kids – Die Rolle der Vorbilder

mit Beiträgen von Moritz Daum u. a., Arte, 19.1.2025

[LINK ↗](#)

“Kontrolle ist gut, Vertrauen ist besser”

Interview mit Moritz Daum, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 22.1.2025

[PDF \(608KB\) ↗](#)

February

Talk im Turm: “Growing up happy. What does it take?”

Prof. Dr. Nora Raschle and Prof. Dr. med. Oskar Jenni



The foundations for a good life are laid in childhood. However, children and young people today are confronted with many challenges and expectations. What does it take to successfully master these and grow up healthy and happy? Developmental paediatrician Oskar Jenni and neuropsychologist Nora M. Raschle discussed his on Feb 4 in Talk im Turm.

[You can hear the talk here \(in German\) ↗](#)

Congratulations to Dr. Kevin Schönholzer!



Kevin Schönholzer successfully defended his doctoral dissertation, “Educational stratification in comparative perspective, the role of welfare policies, normative beliefs, and educational expansion.”

In the media

“Ein Kind funktioniert ohnehin schon viele Stunden am Tag”

Interview mit Moritz Daum, Zeit, 3.2.2025

[PDF \(4 MB\) ↗](#)

March

Talk by Dr. Guangyu Tong

The Jacobs Center Research Seminar Series

Dr. Guangyu Tong

Yale School of Medicine, USA



Investigating the intergenerational transmission of maladaptive family environments: Identifying developmental pathways and prevention strategies

Propensity score weighting is a common method for estimating treatment effects with survey data, minimizing confounding through measured covariates. Existing literature lacks consensus on the optimal use of survey weights for population-level inference. Under the balancing weights framework, we provide a unified solution for incorporating survey weights into propensity score estimation and outcome regression modeling. We derive estimators for multiple target populations – combined, treated, controlled, and overlap – and present a unified sandwich variance estimator shown to be asymptotically normal via M-estimator theory. Simulation studies evaluate our estimators against alternatives, and two case studies illustrate their application. We conclude with practical guidelines for propensity score weighting of observational data from complex surveys.

Talk by Prof. Dr. Manuel Bohn

The Jacobs Center Research Seminar Series

Prof. Dr. Manuel Bohn

Leuphana University Lüneburg, Germany



Grounding socio-communicative development in everyday experience: An individual differences perspective

Social cognition and communication are defining aspects of what it means to be human. In this talk, I want to present our research program that studies the driving forces behind socio-communicative development. Our goal is to understand how everyday social interactions influence development. To get there, we will have to overcome numerous theoretical and methodological hurdles. I will present the steps we have taken in recent years towards this goal, which include computational models of the cognitive processes underlying aspects of socio-communicative development, tasks to measure cognitive abilities on an individual level, methods to capture and quantify everyday experiences, and international collaborations to probe the generalisability of findings. Much of our work is still in the early phases, so I am very much looking forward to feedback.

In the media

Jedes dritte Opfer von sexueller Gewalt ist ein Teenager.

Denis Ribeaud, ZYS, NZZ am Sonntag, 30.3.2025

[PDF \(104 KB\) ↗](#)

Warum wir unsere frühe Kindheit vergessen

Moritz Daum, St. Galler Tagblatt, 28.3.2025

[PDF \(132 KB\) ↗](#)

Ihre Kinder haben zweifelhafte Idole? Wie Sie als Eltern damit umgehen können

Moritz Daum, Tagesanzeiger, 14.3.2025)

[PDF \(821 KB\) ↗](#)

April

TV documentary series “Wir werden groß” with the participation of Moritz Daum



Since 2017, 12 adolescents have been taking part in the TV documentary series “Wir werden groß.” Professor Sabina Pauen from the University of Heidelberg and Professor Moritz Daum from the University of Zurich have been following this TV series from the very beginning. Two episodes will be broadcast this month on VOX and RTL+. Weitere Informationen auf VOX:

[WEBLINK ↗](#)

In the media

“Gleichstellung? Vielleicht in der Theorie!” 13 Argumente für und gegen eine Elternzeit im Check

Moritz Daum, Tagesanzeiger, 6.4.2025

[PDF \(1 MB\) ↗](#)

Wie Eltern unbewusst Selbstzweifel säen

Moritz Daum, Blick, 3.4.2025

[PDF \(1 MB\) ↗](#)

May

Talk by Prof. Dr. Amy Nivette

The Jacobs Center Research Seminar Series

Prof. Dr. Amy Nivette

Department of Sociology, Utrecht University
z-proso International Research Network (zIReN)



Change in legal attitudes during adolescence and into young adulthood

What drives changes in attitudes towards police and the law, and how stable are they? Legal socialization research shows attitudes develop early through authority interactions and moral development yet remain relatively stable. This raises a key question: when can meaningful change be observed? Traditional longitudinal studies explain change via self-reported predictors over 2–5+ year intervals, typically yielding small effects. This paper first reviews longitudinal research on the (in)stability of legal attitudes during adolescence and young adulthood. Second, using z-proso data, it compares methods – latent growth, continuous time, and hidden Markov models – to assess changes in legal cynicism and police legitimacy. The goal is to reflect critically on how stability and change are measured in developmental research and what claims such analyses can support.

2025 LIFE Spring Academy at the University of Michigan



At this year’s LIFE Spring Academy, held May 13–16, 2025, and hosted by the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, the Jacobs Center was represented by two LIFE faculty members and six fellows.

Congratulations to Dr. Laura Bechtiger



from the Risk & Resilience research area at the Jacobs Center on receiving a Swiss National Science Foundation Postdoc.Mobility grant for her project “Documenting and Understanding Homo- and Heterotypic Patterns of Mental-Health Problems Across Generations.” Starting June 1, 2025, she will begin her research in the Department of Psychiatry at the University Medical Center Groningen, Netherlands. Dr. Bechtiger’s project aims to deepen our understanding of the intergenerational transmission of mental-health issues and uncover the mechanisms that drive these patterns.

As part of her research, she will collaborate with the Dutch Population Registers, the LifeLines Cohort Study, and the Tracking Adolescents' Individual Lives Survey (TRAILS). This is an exciting opportunity to learn about and contribute to new research on mental health across generations, and we extend our best wishes to Dr. Bechtiger on this important endeavor!

Talk by Prof. Dr. Fabio Sticca

The Jacobs Center Research Seminar Series

Prof. Dr. Fabio Sticca

University of Teacher Education in Special Needs (HfH), Zurich



Childhood Served on a Digital Tablet? On the Relationship Between Media Use and Development in Early Childhood

Since their introduction, digital media – especially screen-based media – have been at the center of critical social and scientific debates. The media consumption of preschool-aged children is discussed with particular intensity. This presentation explores how children aged 0–5 in Switzerland use digital media and what developmental implications can be drawn from this. Initial empirical findings on media use in this age group, as well as selected results from various studies, will be presented. These findings are placed within the context of international research to enable well-founded conclusions for both further scientific work and educational practice. The goal is to paint a nuanced picture that moves beyond common polarizations and to enrich the discussion about the opportunities and challenges of digital media in early childhood.

In the media

“Die Macht der Fantasie”

Moritz Daum, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 12.5.2025

[PDF \(195 KB\) ↗](#)

Your Best Friend's Personality Can Shape Your Own

Ulf Zöllitz, UZH News, 27.5.2025

[WEBLINK ↗](#)

“Unsere Persönlichkeit wandelt sich ein Leben lang”

Ulf Zöllitz, “Wissenschaftsmagazin” SRF 2, 31.5.2025

[AUDIO ↗](#)

June

Congratulations to Prof. Dr. Nora M. Raschle



As of June 1, 2025, Nora M. Raschle has been promoted to Professor of Developmental Neuroscience. Congratulations on this outstanding milestone!

You can find more about Prof. Raschle's research here:

[WEBLINK ↗](#)

2025 JCPYD Summer Event



On Thursday, June 26, the Jacobs Center team came together for a summer outing. We took a guided tour of Zurich's Old Town – one group in English and the other in German – and got to see the city from a new perspective. Afterwards, we went to Cucina Itameshi at Neumarkt for dinner and enjoyed amazing Italian-Japanese fusion dishes (it's as good as it sounds!).

In the media

Kinder mit Tablets am Esstisch? “Grosser Fehler”

Moritz Daum, Nau.ch, 7.6.2025

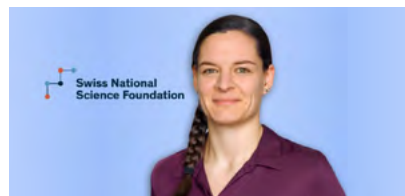
[WEBLINK ↗](#)

July

Meeting of the European Society for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (ESCAP)

Prof. Lilly Shanahan organized an international symposium for the recent meeting of the European Society for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (ESCAP), which took place in Strasbourg, France.

The symposium was titled “Family and social dynamics across the early lifespan and generations,” and featured presentations based on long-term cohort studies by researchers from Duke University, the University of Groningen, and the University of Vermont.

Postdoc.Mobility fellowship from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).

Dr. Clarissa Janousch, a researcher in the “Risk & Resilience” team at the Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development, has been awarded a Postdoc. Mobility fellowship from the SNSF.

We warmly congratulate her on her new research project, “Uncovering heterogeneous patterns, temporal dynamics, and processes of comorbidity between substance use disorders and other psychiatric disorders in adolescents and young adults.”

Starting in fall 2025, Dr. Janousch will continue her research at the Department of Global Public Health within the working group “Epidemiology of Psychiatric Conditions, Substance Use and Social Environment” at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden. The aim of her project is to conduct a detailed analysis of patterns, temporal dynamics, and developmental processes of comorbidity between substance use disorders and other psychiatric conditions in adolescence and young adulthood. The insights gained will contribute to the development of evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies. The research will be conducted with a unique Swedish registry dataset.

In the media**Preterm Infants More Likely to Experience Delayed Language Development**

UZH News, 23.7.2025

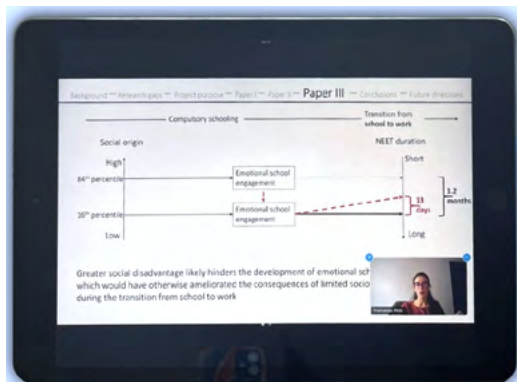
[WEBLINK ↗](#)

August

7th z-proso International Research Network (zIReN) Meeting. University of Cambridge, UK

The 7th annual meeting of the z-proso International Research Network (zIReN) took place at the University of Cambridge from August 28th to 30th, 2025. Researchers from eight universities and several countries came together to present and discuss new findings from the Zurich Project on the Social Development from Childhood to Adulthood (z-proso). Sessions addressed a wide spectrum of topics, including aggression, violent ideations and psychopathy, substance use, and developmental trajectories, with a particular focus on how childhood experiences shape outcomes across the life course. The program was further enriched by contributions from two other major longitudinal studies, underscoring the breadth and international scope of research in this field. Beyond the academic program, the meeting offered valuable opportunities for exchange and networking. Highlights included a guided Criminal Cambridge Tour, punting on the River Cam, and a festive reception dinner at Christ’s College, all of which fostered collegiality and strengthened international ties within the network.

Congratulations to Dr. Francesca Mele



We're happy to share that our former doctoral student Francesca Mele successfully defended her dissertation on August 25. Her thesis, "Individual Characteristics Underlying Social Stratification Processes: Evidence from Three Large-Scale Panel Studies," represents an impressive achievement.

In the media

Spillover aus Frankreich: Wie geht es in Lausanne weiter?

Denis Ribeaud, 20 Minuten, 25.8.2025

[WEBLINK ↗](#)

September

Welcome Professor Carmen Villa to the Jacobs Center!



We are excited to welcome Professor Carmen Villa as Assistant Professor in Economics of Child and Youth Development Age!

Prof. Villa joined the University of Zurich on 1 September 2025. She completed her PhD in Economics at the University of Warwick in May 2025. In 2023, she was a Fulbright US-UK scholar at the University of Chicago. The following year, she received the British Spanish Society scholarship, and most recently, she was selected for the EALE Tour 2025. We are thrilled to have Prof. Villa on board and look forward to the expertise and energy she brings to our academic community.

In the media

“Autonom erzogene Kinder machen später nicht jeden Blödsinn mit”

Interview mit Moritz Daum, Zeit, 16.9.2025

[WEBLINK ↗](#) NUR MIT ABO

Nur zweite Wahl?

Moritz Daum, WirEltern Magazin, September 2025

[WEBLINK ↗](#)

The TV documentary series “Wir werden groß” (We're Growing Up) has been nominated for the 2025 German Television Award



Professor Sabina Pauen from Heidelberg University and Professor Moritz Daum from the University of Zurich have been involved in this TV series from the very beginning. For eight years, “Wir werden groß!” (We're growing up!) has been following twelve children on their journey into adulthood – from their first day at school to the challenges of being a teenager to coming of age. Authentic and sensitive, the documentary series paints an extraordinary long-term portrait of the magic and impositions of a mental and physical rollercoaster ride called puberty. The series has been nominated for the 2025 German Television Award in the category “Best Factual Entertainment.”

Deutscher Fernsehpreis 2025

[WEBLINK ↗](#)

2025 Annual Conference of the Society for Longitudinal and Lifecourse Studies (SLLS) with contribution by Doris Hanappi



On September 9, 2025, the 2025 annual conference of the Society for Longitudinal and Lifecourse Studies (SLLS) took place at the University of Fribourg. Doris Hanappi participated in the panel discussion on the topic of science-policy transfer.

Speakers

- **Susan Morton (University of Technology Sydney)**
Policy translation in Growing Up in New Zealand: Co-designing strategies to reduce impacts of disadvantage
- **Doris Hanappi (Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development)**
Translating research into policy: Switzerland Policy exchange
- **Aisling Murray (Department of Children, Disability and Equality)**
Policy exchange in Growing Up in Ireland

Talk by Dr. Yikang Zhang

The Jacobs Center Research Seminar Series

Dr. Yikang Zhang

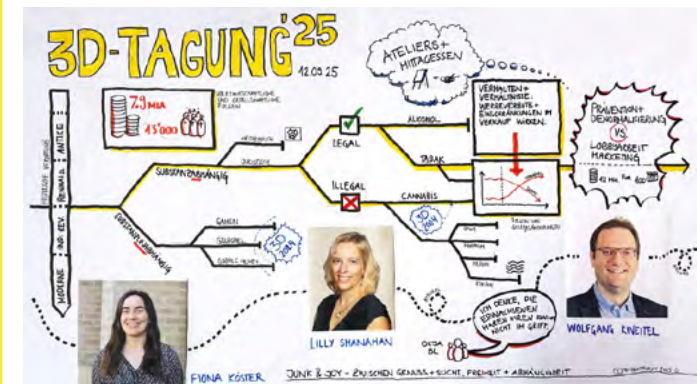
Department of Criminology,
Max Planck Institute for the Study of Crime,
Security and Law, Freiburg, Germany



Examine Peer Selection and Influence Process in the Context of Cheating Behavior

Peer effects remain a central topic in criminological research. While prior experiments show that deviant peer exposure increases delinquent behavior, less is known about how selection and influence intersect and the beyond-the-situation consequences of such associations. In two online experiments (N1 = 292; N2 = 299), participants played an investment game allowing cheating alongside an honest or dishonest peer. Participants cheated more with a dishonest peer, especially when encouraged. Individuals aligned with peers mirroring their own dispositions, even without material incentives. Brief exposure to dishonest peers had lingering effects on subsequent behavior. These findings highlight the interplay of peer influence and selection, underscoring the need to consider dispositions, social influence, and context jointly.

Prof. Dr. Lilly Shanahan Delivers Keynote at Youth Substance Use Conference in Basel-Landschaft



Lilly Shanahan was a keynote speaker at a recent conference focused on substance use and addiction among young people.

The conference brought together approximately 250 professional working with youth in the canton Basel-Landschaft, and also featured workshops around youth substance use. Key questions discussed included:

How can we as professionals help young people develop safe and healthy approaches to substance-related situations? What challenges do emerging products and consumption patterns bring?

[To learn more about this conference, see here. ↗](#)

October

Talk by Dr. Jessica Daikeler

The Jacobs Center Research Seminar Series

Dr. Jessica Daikeler

GESIS - Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, Mannheim, Germany



From Data Quality to Publication Bias: Challenges for Trustworthy Social Science

How can we ensure trustworthy knowledge in the social sciences? Two central challenges are data quality and publication bias: the former determines whether evidence is reliable and valid, the latter threatens the scientific record by privileging significant findings over null results. This talk connects both. I introduce core dimensions of data quality and the KODAS initiative, which supports researchers across surveys and digital data sources. Drawing on the PubBias project, I present evidence from 178 studies in the SOEP-IS and GESIS Panel.pop, showing that many proposals never reach publication, most hypotheses are not preregistered, and supported hypotheses remain overrepresented. Trustworthy social science requires quality assurance in both data collection and publication practices.

Successful EU Horizon project LEARN Workshop in Zurich

The LEARN workshop at the University of Zurich, chaired by Doris Hanappi and Moritz Daum, brought together partners from the LEARN network for a full day of exchange on how research outcomes can inform education policy and practice. Doris Hanappi moderated the workshop and presented the LEARN Work Package, guiding participants through the day's discussion and key themes.

Andreas Edel, Executive Secretary of Population Europe, shared valuable perspectives on how scientists can engage effectively with policy-making and the science-policy interface.

Additional insightful talks were given by Lee Bentley, Paula Sergeant, Juliette Torabian, and Felix Bittman, along with engaging contributions from the participants.

The workshop, supported and organized by the wider team at the University of Zurich, encouraged lively discussions and exchange among LEARN partners, contributing to strengthen the links between scientific evidence, communication, and education policy.



Longitudinal Educational Achievements: Reducing iNequalities (LEARN)

[WEBLINK](#) ↗

Jacobs Center 10th Anniversary Symposium



We celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Jacobs Center at the Jacobs Foundation in Zurich. The event opened with a warm welcome from Prof. Dr. Moritz Daum, followed by an inspiring keynote address by Prof. Dr. Gary Pollock. In the afternoon, young researchers from our team – Michelle Loher, Sofia Scatolin, Alberth Thieme, Tabea Braun, and Miriam Löffler – gave engaging short presentations showcasing their current work. Dr. Doris Hanappi then shared insights from Swiss EdLab, leading into a lively roundtable discussion on how research can inform policy and practice. The discussion featured Dr. Sibille Bayard (Zurich Department of Education), Dr. Andreas Edel (Population Europe), Prof. Dr. Nora Raschle (JC), Prof. Dr. Ulf Zöllitz (JC) and was led by Prof. Dr. Moritz Daum (JC). The symposium concluded with a delightful flying dinner, offering an excellent opportunity to reflect on a decade of research, exchange, and collaboration.

LIFE Fall Academy 2025 – 13 to 16 October in Zurich



Over four intensive days, around 70 fellows and faculty from Germany, the US, and Switzerland shared and discussed their research in a spirit of openness, curiosity, and collaboration, with 5 faculty lectures, 15 fellow talks, and 24 fellow posters highlighting the breadth and depth of developmental research within LIFE.

The International Max Planck Research School on the Life Course (LIFE) is an international PhD program run by the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Freie Universität Berlin, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, TU Berlin, the Universities of Michigan and Virginia, and UZH. LIFE advances understanding of human development from infancy to old age, examining behavior within physical, social, and cultural contexts through an integrative, interdisciplinary lens on the mechanisms, institutions, and conditions shaping human lives.

In the media

Learning from Children

Ulf Zöllitz, UZH News, 01.10.2025

[WEBLINK ↗](#)

Mensch ärgere dich

Moritz Daum, Coop Zeitung, 06.10.2025

[PDF \(548 KB\) ↗](#)

Finanzielle Risiken für Mütter unterschätzt

Michaela Slotwinski, SRF, 24.10.2025

[WEBLINK ↗](#)

Warum uns andere Menschen so gut tun

Moritz Daum, Beobachter, 31.10.2025

[WEBLINK ↗](#) [NUR MIT ABO](#)

So wichtig sind gesunde Beziehungen für Kinder

Laura Bechtiger, Plamina Dimanova

Das Schweizer ElternMagazin Fritz+Fränzi, 10.2025

[WEBLINK ↗](#)

November

Jacobs Foundation and Jacobs Center Symposium “Impactful Science: From Research to Policy and Practice in Child Development and Learning”



On the occasion of the presentation of the 2025 Klaus J. Jacobs Research Prize and in honor of the laureate, Hirokazu Yoshikawa, the Jacobs Foundation is pleased to invite you to the symposium “Impactful Science.”

National Future Day 2025 at the Jacobs Center



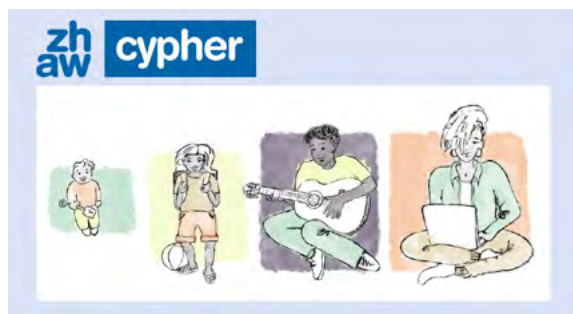
On November 13, the Jacobs Center welcomed young visitors for an inspiring National Future Day.

The Jacobs Center offered three exciting workshops filled with hands-on science experiences:

- **Superpowers exist in real life too**
Lisa Wagner and Valentina Vylobkova helped kids discover their personal strengths and introduced them to psychological research in a playful way.
- **Junior Researcher Escape Room**
Joanna Rutkowska, Larissa Erchinger, and Agnese D’Angelo guided participants through a puzzle-based journey of collecting data, analyzing results, and solving scientific challenges.
- **Research with Brain**
Elena Federici and the NMR Kidslab team brought neuroscience to life through experiments, brain facts, and insights into research careers.

Thanks to the dedication and enthusiasm of the Jacobs Center researchers, the young participants got a real taste of research and their curiosity was sparked.

Keynote address by Lily Shanahan at the CIPHER Symposium 2025



Lily Shanahan's keynote address at the CIPHER Symposium 2025 brought together researchers as well as public health and psychology professionals from the community. The symposium was organized as part of the Network on Child and Youth Public Health Research at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences.

Prof. Shanahan's talk was entitled "Sex and gender differences in mental health from childhood to young adulthood." The symposium as a whole focused on the theme "Gender Matters" and addressed a central question: Does Child and Youth Public Health Need More Gender Sensitivity? CYPHER Kompetenznetzwerk Child and Youth Public Health Research

Congratulations to Dr. Jens Heumann



We are excited to share that our former doctoral student Jens Heumann successfully defended his dissertation on 24 November. His thesis is titled "Social Regulation of the Human Stress Response: Adolescent Peer Vicimization and Young Adults' Health."

Lukas Eggenberger receives data-viz award at SchreibXplosion 2025



Lukas Eggenberger, PhD student in the teams of Professors Lilly Shanahan (Jacobs Center) and Boris Quednow (Psychiatric University Hospital Zurich), was awarded a shared third place in the SchreibXplosion 2025 Data Visualization Competition of the University of Zurich. His interactive visualization, titled "Prevalence of Psychiatric Medications in a Large Cohort of 24-Year-Olds," was recognized for its methodological rigor, excellent data processing, and innovative approach to enabling a concise yet analytically rich depiction of prevalence patterns. SchreibXplosion celebrates excellence in scientific communication and data visualization. The top entries, including Lukas's work, will be exhibited in the public spaces of the University Library Zurich.

Congratulations to Prof. Dr. Lilly Shanahan, who was named a 2025 Highly Cited Researcher by Clarivate



Among scientists worldwide, 1 in 1,000 are Highly Cited Researchers. Clarivate recognizes the 0.1% of researchers who are most frequently cited globally.

The list honors researchers who have demonstrated significant and broad influence in their fields and beyond over the past decade. The ranking is based on data from the Web of Science Core Collection and incorporates not only citation and quantitative metrics but also qualitative analysis and expert judgment.

Talk by Prof. Fernanda Marquez-Padilla

The Jacobs Center Research Seminar Series

Prof. Dr. Fernanda Marquez-Padilla

El Colegio de México
Mexico City, Mexico



Rolling Back Progres: School and Work After the End of a Landmark Anti-Poverty Program

Mexico's conditional cash transfer program Progres served as a model for evidence-based development policy for over two decades. We estimate the school and work impacts of its sudden rollback. Comparing high- and low-penetration areas before and after rollback, we find that the loss of

benefits decreased school enrollment, particularly for boys. In high-penetration areas, rollback reduced enrollment and raised employment in high-school-aged boys by 12 and 8 percentage points, respectively. Employment was concentrated in industries offering good wages for recent dropouts but relatively poor wages at older ages, consistent with rollback-induced dropout being costly for boys over their lifetimes.

In the media

Warum brauchen wir Vorbilder?

Moritz Daum, MDR Podcast, 5.11.2025

[PODCAST ↗](#)

KI-Spielzeug im Kinderzimmer: Wie gefährlich ist das?

Moritz Daum, SRF, 19.11.2025

[WEBLINK ↗](#)

Helikoptereltern machen Kinder weniger widerstandsfähig und schaden ihnen so

Lilly Shanahan, Q by Schweizer Monat, 24.11.2025

[WEBLINK ↗](#)

December

Talk by Prof. Izumi Matsudaira

The Jacobs Center Research Seminar Series

Prof. Dr. Izumi Matsudaira

Frontier Research Institute for
Interdisciplinary Sciences
Tohoku University, Japan



From Parents to Offspring: Unlocking Brain Development Through the “TRIO Study”

Intergenerational transmission describes how parental traits shape offspring via genetic and non-genetic pathways. To address fathers' underrepresentation in prior research, we launched the TRIO (Transmit Radiant Individuality to Offspring) study on Japanese biological parent-offspring trios. As of August 2025, we collected genomic, environmental, cognitive, and neuroimaging data from 289 trios. We examined two angles: parent-offspring brain similarity and intergenerational trauma effects. Brain structural similarities differ by parent-offspring sex combination, and paternal vs. maternal maltreatment shows distinct links to offspring brain structure. These insights may inform interventions disrupting maladaptive cycles and promoting resilience. In this talk, I present the TRIO project and recent findings and invite future collaboration.

JCPYD 2025 New Year's Event



Apéro riche at the UniTurm restaurant on top of the university on Thursday December 11.

In the media

Wir sind jugendlich bis Anfang 30 – zumindest im Gehirn

mit Kommentaren von Nora Raschle, SRF, 1.12.2025

[WEBLINK ↗](#)

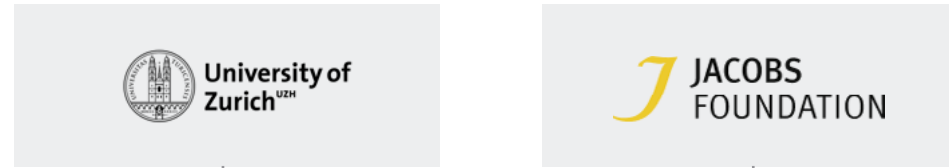
Bringen KI-Spielzeuge Kindern künftig Fremdsprachen und Mathe bei?

mit Stephanie Wermelinger, NZZ, 19.12.2025

[WEBLINK ↗](#) [NUR MIT ABO](#)

Organizational chart

Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development (JCPYD)



Steering Committee

UZH Elisabeth Stark (Vice President Research)
 Katharina Michaelowa (Dean, Faculty of Arts and Sciences)
 Harald Gall (Dean, Faculty of Business, Economics and Informatics)

Jacobs Foundation Gelgia Fetz Fernandes (Co-Lead, Learning Minds)
 Simon Sommer (CO-CEO)
 Olaf von Maydell (Member, Board of Trustees)

Scientific Advisory Board

Ronald Dahl
 Kenneth A. Dodge
 Alexander Grob
 Yvonne Kelly
 Jens O. Ludwig
 Ulrich Trautwein

Governing Board

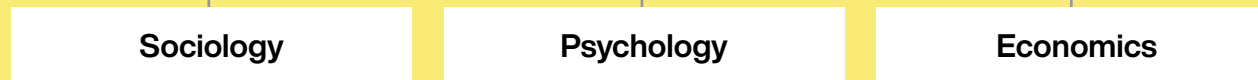
Executive Director: Moritz Daum

Ana Costa-Ramón (Economics) | Moritz Daum (Psychology) | Michael Shanahan (Sociology)

Office
 Stephanie Kernich

Management Committee

Director = Chair of the Management Committee | all chairs of the three departments at JCPYD: sociology/psychology/economics | representation of passive members (advisory function)





Publishing information

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