

University to study ups and downs of life

John Roberts

THE LIVES, loves, families and friends of 400 people are to be monitored as part of a new study by a Yorkshire university to see how relationships affect people's life.

The Timescapes study led by Leeds University will create a database about the lives of the volunteers looking at key experiences in their lives such as growing up, forming relationships, bringing up children and growing old.

The 400 volunteers will be selected from different ages, faiths and social groups from across the country.

The five-year research programme is being funded by a £4.5m grant from the Economic and Social Research Council.

Dr Bren Neale, from Leeds University's school of sociology and social policy, who is leading the research, said: "We will be exploring the important relationships by which people define themselves - how they live, for example, as sons or brothers, wives or grandmothers.

"We want to know how these relationships affect people's life chances and the major decisions they make. We will be tracking people to explore how these relationships are worked out over time and how things change through the process of growing up and growing old. It will be like walking alongside

people as their lives unfold."

Timescapes, which also involves researchers from London South Bank, Cardiff, Edinburgh and The Open University, is based on seven projects that span people's lifetimes: two on young lives, three on mid-life experiences, and two on older lives.

The research will feature in-depth interviews, video and audio diaries, and photographs which will all be used to capture changes in the subject's life and outlook.

The grant was awarded to allow academics to answer questions about modern life such as how do people build relationships, how do they react to world events and do their decisions and attitudes mirror changes in wider society?

All of the research will be compiled in a Timescapes archive which will be kept at Leeds University.

Dr Neale said: "Because this is about ordinary, everyday lives, it has an appeal and a relevance to everyone. The ups and downs of life, the challenges that people face, the choices they make, will be immediately understandable."

"This unique, specialist resource on the dynamic nature of personal lives and relationships will be of enduring value for future generations of researchers and social historians."