

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS & POLITICS

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**Abstract:** This talk surveys insights from microbiology, psychology, and economics to examine the critical role of early childhood factors in shaping human development. Two dimensions are emphasized. First, the formation of human capital – through both cognitive and non-cognitive skills, such as social, motivational, and self-control abilities – and its implications for labour market outcomes, earnings inequality, and social mobility. Second, the long-term processes of ageing, including the onset of chronic diseases, disability, and mortality. The discussion integrates evidence from microbiology on developmental programming and the influence of genetic and epigenetic factors, often framed within the nature-nurture debate, as well as psychological perspectives such as the theory of mind. Empirical findings are drawn from my own research and collaborative work with Professor James Heckman, utilizing data from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS) and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY, 1979). Together, these perspectives highlight how early life conditions shape trajectories of health, human capital, and economic opportunity across the lifespan.

## SEMINAR

on

### “Early Childhood Factors, Health and Human Development”

by

**Dr. Lakshmi K. Raut**

Visiting Fellow  
University of Chicago



Venue: Seminar Hall,  
Department of Economics & Politics

Date: 27 January 2026

(Tuesday)

Time: 04:00 PM

Organized by  
Department of Economics & Politics  
Vidya-Bhavana  
Visva-Bharati